



# REGGAETOWN BRISTOL: THE ROOTS

While London has long been the financial and business centre of England, the trading ships of the London merchants operated from the port city of Bristol in the southwest of England. During the 18th century, Bristol grew into a large city full of trading houses that grew wealthy on the back of the transatlantic trade of sugar and tobacco, and the slavery system.

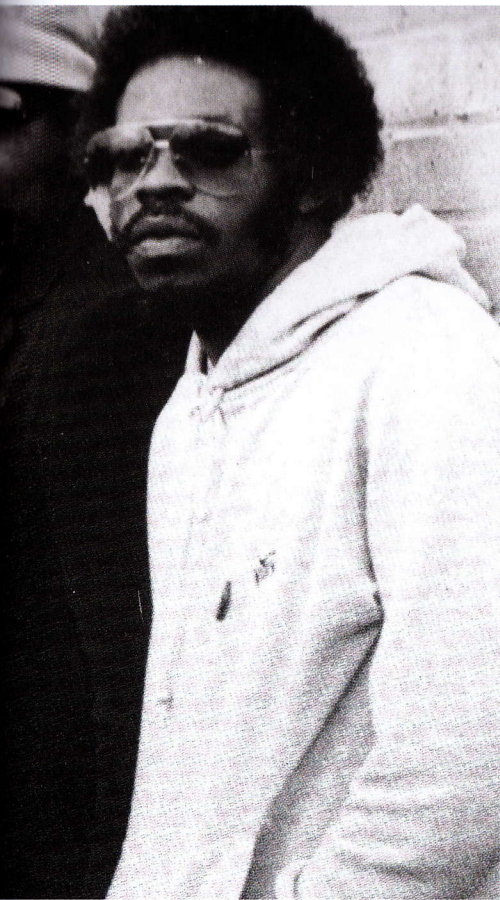
**F**OLLOWING THE SECOND world war, the British government – like many other European countries – invited people from the British colonies to immigrate to work in England. The 1948 British Nationality Act gave British citizenship to all people in the Commonwealth and laid the way for many Jamaicans to move to Britain to work, until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 once again restricted movement to Britain. By that time, a generation of Jamaicans and Afro-Caribbean people had moved to the UK.

In Bristol, the first Jamaican and Caribbean immigrants moved to the Easton, bringing their musical culture to the city. They introduced Bristol to blues parties, and the

Caribbean style of carnival, starting the St Paul's Carnival in 1967, and during the 1970s and 1980s, Jamaican musical culture moved from blues parties into the community halls and places like the Bamboó Club and Blue Lagoon.

The acclaimed UK reggae artists of the 1970s and 1980s are Steel Pulse, Aswad, Linton Kwesi Johnson and UB40, but Bristol had its share of reggae bands who ranked up there with the best of British reggae.

The Black Roots band members came to England at a young age, settling with their families in the St. Paul area of Bristol. The eight-piece band, most of whom were born in Jamaica and had grown up in England,



of Bristol with singles like 'Dole Age'. The multi-ethnic band had some crossover success and played support to Burning Spear and the Rolling Stones although – like the Black Roots – they never managed to get a deal from the major UK labels. It's worth noting that at the time, UK labels such as Virgin's 'Front Line' imprint, were searching out the most militant singers in Jamaica and releasing music from Prince Far I and Tappa Zukie.

Also on the scene in this time, the band Restriction featured a young Rob Smith on guitar – Smith went on to be one of the most influential producers in the Bristol scene, first becoming first one half of the production team Smith and Mighty. Smith continues to deliver fresh music, now often producing dubstep mixes under the name RSD (Robert Smith Dubs).

There's a sublimely rootical track featured on the Reggae Explosion from Joshua Moses, who wrote 'Africa Is Our Land', a UK roots tune that many reggae fans may recognise as one of those one-way gems of authentic roots reggae. Produced by Dennis Bovell, the original vinyl is a much-sought after collectors tune, selling for top dollar online.

As they were coming from different areas of town, Bristol's top reggae bands of that era – Talisman and Black Roots – were rivals and Mike Darby of Bristol Archive Records said that his dream was to get both bands on the same record. Now it seems that the revival of interest in these bands has sparked a wider revival and has propelled some of them back into the studio, onto vinyl and into the live scene.

Black Roots have recently agreed a new album deal with the Bristol label and will launch a new album in September with a gig in Bristol, while Talisman are about to play their first gig in more than 20 years.

Joshua Moses, now called Jashwha Moses, is returning from a slightly longer break of thirty years. The single 'Distant Guns' is the first release from forthcoming album *No War* which has been produced and co-written by Black Roots keyboard player Mike 'E' Hall. Another re-release on Bristol Archive Records will be a double A-side 7" release that leans towards the lovers vibe, once again featuring Joshua Moses' 'Pretty Girl' with Sharon Bengamin's 'Mr Guy'. It's a reminder that UK roots may have had it's militant side, but the lovers genre properly belongs to the UK.

but their roots were firmly in Bristol – the song 'Bristol Rock' relates the experience of the modern day immigrants from Jamaica to the ghost of an African slave who died in 1720, and whose grave is in Bristol. The band formed their own record labelel, raising money from concerts, and released 10 albums during the 1980s and 1990s, selling the music themselves at gigs and through their shop in Bristol. The Black Roots never signed with the major labels, who considered the music too radical, and 'hard to sell' – even though the band were able to sell their music.

Bristol Archive Records have recently released 'The Bristol Reggae Explosion 1979-1983', featuring the Black Roots and also the band Talisman, who emerged from the Easton area

