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Rhythms of life

By Gabriel Singh (Sunday, April 26, 2009)

Reggae seldom sits still despite its knockers saying it is one-dimensional in its hypnotic grip.

That evolution is in part sparked by the number of cover tunes.

That has resulted in reggae artists going outside the box to experiment with sounds and then incorporating what they like into an identity.

One of the biggest changes is the evolution of dancehall, which has faster beats, rougher lyrics and an electronic sound that is far removed from the original one-drop of Bob Marley and Burning Spear.

The result is that the original roots reggae sound of the singer-songwriter is a dying breed.

But the music of Mishka -- born Mishka Frith -- brings back that roots reggae sound.

He is definitely worth checking out.

His soulful singing and slow, deep lyrics capture a familiar spirituality that warms the heart. His songs of ancestry, personal empowerment, unity, and peace and love remind us of the simple themes in life that bind us together.

Add a smooth, almost hypnotic quality in the music and the Mishka experience will give you the feeling that you are relaxing on a beach watching waves crash on the shore.

Mishka's laid-back style of music may come from his upbringing, growing up in Bermuda on a boat built by his parents.

"Living on the water, there is a constant rhythm to your life, constantly rocking and rolling, and bobbing up and down," he told the Colorado Vail Daily.

From Bermuda, Mishka would travel from place to place with his family for months on end, immersing himself in island culture and music at a very young age.

"The Caribbean is definitely saturated with reggae: from the sea, to the sky, to the land, to everything ... reggae has a pulse," he said. Mishka has been working at music since 1992 and his most recent album took two years to debut.

"I would love the music to flourish and people to catch on to it so we can keep doing what we are doing.

"I love to write a lot of songs and I love to play music," Mishka said.

It is most likely that casual attitude about life and music that draws people to him. In 1999, Matthew McConaughey heard Mishka perform in Jamaica and enjoyed his music so much, he searched for him for four years until finally connecting and developing a relationship over the phone with him. Then, one day Mishka invited the famous actor down to Nevis, an island in the Caribbean, where he was living with his family.

The 10-day visit ended with new record label, J K Living Records, started by McConaughey with Mishka as the first artist.

"We get along real well," Mishka said. "He is very encouraging about what I do. We got to know each other as friends first before we started working together on a professional level. It is a blessing to know someone like him who has the means to get the music out and really love it."

The result of that collaboration is Above the Bones, which debuted in February at No. 1 on the Billboard Reggae charts, a feat to which Mishka refers to as "kinda cool" in his modest way.

The album features the songs Higher Heights, Long Road and Train Again that roll over with lyrical truth and a soulful melody the way Marley's music does when hearing it for the first time. The music has a romantic and tranquil quality about it that crosses over to many audiences.

"It seems like I am able to connect to all the different crowds," Mishka reflects.

Jah live.

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