

Dub Gone Crazy

'He was the one who everybody look up to as the original for the DUB, this drum and bass, y'know ? he was one of the outstanding _gures - as you know they call him King Tubby's. The version side of it, the drum an' bass, was the outstandin' feature in Jamaica at the time. All songs came out with a version, and if the version not sayin' anything then the vocal side not goin' to say much either...'cause everybody wanted to play the singin' and a CRUCIAL version, and that's what King Tubby's could produce'.

Pat Kelly, singer and engineer

'A dub sof' wax, we just used to call (it). In a dem days deh 'im seh 'im cut a wax - a man say boy, I cut six wax today, six soft wax. Till the man dem just change an' say dub. The dub name now catch on in a the music, an' me say 'Dub it'.

Bunny Lee, record producer

Today the remix and dub version are commonplace in popular music; less widely appreciated is the fact that these techniques were pioneered in a tiny studio at 18 Dromilly Avenue in the Kingston district called Waterhouse. That pioneer of dub was an electronics engineer and sound system operator named Osbourne Ruddock, but to the crowds who flocked to his dances, and the countless singers and record producers who utilised his skills, he was known as King Tubby.

Tubby was born in Kingston in 1941; by 1968 he was running his own sound system, the Home Town Hi-Fi. As always, rivalry between sound systems was _erce, with operators seeking to gain a competitive edge via the exclusivity of their music. One of the biggest systems at the time was owned by Rudolph Redwood from Spanish Town, the former Jamaican capital situated some 10 miles from Kingston. His set was imposingly named Ruddy's Supreme Ruler of Sound. According to veteran deejay Dennis Alcapone, Ruddy would come to Coxsone's Studio each week and buy everything that had been recorded. He would then cut this music on acetate discs which were played on his sound system exclusively. This was an effective way of previewing music; tunes which went down well with the dance hall crowd could then be released after sufficient demand had been built up; the sound system which played exclusives would naturally attract patrons who wanted to hear the latest music. Ruddy's began making new versions of well-known songs with engineer Byron Smith at Duke Reid's Treasure Isle Studio. As producer Bunny Lee relates: 'Yeah...it was really VERSION those days - it wasn't dub yet, beca' it was jus' the riddim. One day a incident: Ruddy's was cutting a dub, an' when it start, Smithy look like 'im start bring on the voice and Ruddy's say: no, mek it run and 'im take the whole backing track off it. 'Im say, alright, run it again, and put in the voice. 'Im didn't do no more like that yet. 'Im carry it, go Spanish Town and 'im play it an gi' 'im deejay - 'im have a deejay name Wax I tink - and when Wax put it on, 'im put on the singing then say 'im gonna play part two. And 'im put on - everybody know the rhythm now, and everybody a listen to the voice, an 'dem don' hear no voice and then everybody start sing along. So they say BRAN' NEW ! and then dem play it about twenty times. The next day now, 'im start it and just bring in the riddim. Or...down in the tune, bring in a little voice and drop it out again...yes; Ruddy use to handle that part himself, drop in the voice and drop it out. All Smithy do was cut the dub. Actually me an' Tubbs go Spanish Town, 'im hear Ruddy's sound play it and then, me, 'im an' Ruddy up there one evening now, and me a run off...I tink it was 'Everybody Needs Love' with Slim Smith. Ruddy's play that along, 'bout six months or a year before it come out...and Tubbs hear the idea and like it an' 'im do it in a town now, got popular sound in a town now, catch on, beca' Ruddy use to...rule Spanish Town, 'im an' a guy name Stereo. Ca' Stereo was a good electronics man too, use to build ampli_er. Yeah, beca' dem even say he build better ampli_er than Tubby yunno, yes. Probably I'd believe so too...when it come 'pon bass'.

Taking his lead from the aforementioned Spanishtonian sound men, like Ruddy and Seymour Williams (aka 'Stereo'), Tubby soon established his supremacy. When Tubby played versions of old Rock Steady tunes on his set he also had the great foundation deejay U Roy toasting on his rhythms, a precursor of today's rappers. By the early 'seventies he had acquired a disc-cutter and was busily mastering dub for other sounds. By 1972 he had a two-track tape machine and a home made mixer and began working more closely with producers like Bunny Lee and Lee Perry. With the latter he made the stereo dub album 'Blackboard Jungle' in 1973. He also worked with less proli_c (but equally innovative) producers including Glen Brown, Augustus Pablo, Winston Riley, Roy Cousins and Carlton Patterson. Bunny Lee linked Tubby with Dynamic Studio, who sold him their four-track mixing board. With his background in electronics he was able to construct specially-customised equipment, including faders which enabled him to slide tracks in or out of the mix smoothly. This gave Tubby an edge over engineer Errol Thompson at Randy's Studio 17, who punched tracks in more abruptly, via buttons, and who was putting rhythm versions on b-sides of singles and calling them 'dub'. Tubby even made his own echo delay unit by passing a loop of

tape over the heads of an old two-track machine. 1974 saw Tubby's stepping up the pace; Bunny Lee became the studio's foremost client, supplying hundreds of rhythms, and voicing all his hit artists, including Johnnie Clarke and Cornell Campbell, in the tiny studio. Bunny remembers those days fondly: '(With) Tubby's, right, with all the drum and bass ting now, dem ting just start by accident, a man sing off key, an' when you reach a dat you drop out everyting an' leave the drum, an' lick in the bass, an' cause a confusion an' people like it. People start actually mix dem tune dat way, but most of my ting dem was when a man sing straight, when 'im reach all a bridge, 'an 'im gone leave the riddim, jus' do something, bring 'im back 'pon the riddim. Sometime you just 'ave to drop out drums an' everything, because they don't know which direction 'im a go, an' when you drop out the drum, you jus' lick in the guitar - 'ching ching ching ching' - an' by the time that come in, you lick in the bass and put in the drum in a delay, like a whole heap a noise, an' by that time 'im catch back 'im direction, an' you just put in back the riddim so'.

Improvisation was the order of the day; most of Tubby's dubs were mixed live, with the engineer playing his board like a great jazzman blowing solos on his horn, deconstructing and reinventing the music. Each time Tubby mixed a dub, it was different. Producer Lee would be on hand to give his vibes as well: 'How we do dat, again ? Tings - yu can't catch it back so again ! Even if Tubby's was to come back alive an' mix it, it's a different vibes again...beca', you see, the spur a the moment - sometime me an' 'im a talk an' me say 'drop out now, Tubby's !' an' 'im get confuse, an' me just draw down the whole a the lever thru' me know it, an' just push up, an' you hear 'pluck', an' jus' start play the _lter, an' it gi' yu a funny sound. Tubbs say: 'A pure distortion'. Me say, 'Yes Tubbs, MADNESS - the people dem like it !', an' just push it back, right. An' 'im just stan' up, surprise too, an' I say, 'Wha' 'appen Tubbs, jus' go on'. So me jus' do a nex' mad ting again, same way Lee Perry stay too. When 'im done me say 'lissen dat Tubbs'. 'An 'im siddung in a 'im chair an' lissen back in amazement an' say: 'Rahtid...!' 'Im say, 'We can't do dis again'. Me seh: no; but...'im start play 'pon 'im sound alone. So 'im sound become overnight sensation, an' all the sound men RUN to 'im now, _ get the dub. Beca' is 'is own, Tubby's alone, all the big studio dem, don't know who is a walk with that sound deh now, When the ting hit _rst, a no Johnnie Clarke..(It was) the hi-hat, through the foreign tune dem, an' the tweeter thing did jus' come in, an' a 'siss, siss' (imitates hi-hat cymbal sound), an' Tubby's studio did 'ave a ting weh yu could a thin it, an' do all different kinda ting with it,right, - it's not even really equalisation, the ting 'ave four push-up ting, when you push the one in the middle and 'ave it up and down, with the ting, it create some mad sound, like you hear all some knife a cut thru'.'

Tubby would also physically hit the spring reverb unit to create a thunderclap sound, or put a brief frequency test tone on deep echo; later he would use sound effects like sirens and gunshots. The impact was sensational; dub albums like the Lee-produced sets 'Dub From The Roots' and 'The Roots Of Dub' sold by the cartload.

By the mid-seventies Tubby was training other engineers in the intricacies of dub; early assistant 'Prince' Phillip Smart went to the States (today he runs the top Reggae Studio HCF on Long Island) and was replaced by Lloyd James, better known as 'Prince' (later 'King') Jammy, who had returned from Canada in 1976. Jammy, born 26th October 1947 in Montego Bay, had originally introduced Bunny Lee and Tubby when he ran his sound system in Waterhouse in the late 'sixties with deejay Lizzy. Jammy mixed hundreds of dubs for Bunny Lee, including many on this present compilation. In 1978 Jammy started his own label Imprint with a storming instrumental version of 'Shank I Shek' which another Tubby's patron, producer / vocalist Vivian 'Yabby You' Jackson had given him. By 1985 Jammy had become the dominant Jamaican producer, responsible himself for bringing a whole new generation of musicians and mixers into the music. As the 'seventies came to a close, Overton 'Scientist' Brown became the leading Tubby's engineer. Every man who mixed at Tubby's got his own sound, yet no matter which mixmaster was at the board, the resultant music always bore the authentic stamp of King Tubby's. On our present compilation, Tubby mixed 'Satta Dread Dub', 'Real Gone Crazy Dub' and the previously unreleased 'Dub Fi Gwan'. Prince Phillip mixed 'Exalted Dub' and possibly 'No Love Version', whilst Scientist mixed 'Step It Up In Dub' and possibly 'Dub With A View'. Jammy mixed most of the remaining tracks.

During the early 'eighties King Tubby devoted himself to building his new studio; completed in 1985, it soon produced its first hit, Anthony Red Rose's 'Temper'; Tubby looked set to become a leading producer in Jamaican music, building tough rhythms with the excellent Firehouse Crew.

But tragedy struck on the early morning of 6th February 1989: after leaving the studio in Waterhouse, King Tubby was murdered by a lone gunman outside his home at 85 Sherlock Crescent in nearby Duhaney Park, and Jamaican music lost one of its most influential talents. The gunman has never been identified, let alone brought to justice. Nevertheless, Tubby's innovations continue to resonate to this day; the dub remixes he pioneered constitute his living legacy to popular music culture world-wide and changed the way we listen to it. He was the dub organiser.

Steve Barrow, February 1994

Respect due to these sources:

King Tubby In Fine Style by Dave Hendley and Ray Hurford
(in 'More Axe' published by Black Star, Helsinki Finland 1987)

I Remember King Tubby by Martin 'Mandingo' Williams
(in 'Tubbzine' published by Tribulation Rocker Posse, Caernarfon Wales 1989)

Thanks and respect also to Lloyd 'King Jammy' James, Dennis Alcapone, Ranking Joe Jackson and Paul 'Jah Screw' Love for their information over the years.

Also: Bunny Lee interviewed by Lol Bell- Brown & Steve Barrow, London, October 1993.

Published in Dubcatcher magazine No:8, Feb/ March 1994, NY, USA.

Pat Kelly interviewed by Steve Barrow, Meadowbrook, Kingston 10th October 1991