

Train To Zion

Born Huford Brown on the 25th November 1956 in Western Kingston, U-Brown's first exposure to music came when accompanying his father to the local bars: *"I usually love music, because my dad always love 'ave 'im one an' two drink, an' 'im always go to the bar. And in the bar _ there is no bar or top bar without a juke box. An' while they talkin' an' drinkin, the only thing for me was to listen to the juke box."*

U-Brown's family was a large one; his father had four children with his first wife, and the future deejay was the eldest of seven more from his father's second marriage _ five boys and two girls who lived in White Street. In such crowded conditions, U-Brown spent a lot of time on the street: *"I grew up in Bond Street, just a few doors away from Treasure Isle Studio _ Western Kingston, original West. I started out at Halfway Tree Primary (school), then I move on to Torrance Secondary. I did one term there, then I was transferred to Tivoli Garden Comprehensive High an' that's where I graduate from."*

As a youth, U-Brown began cutting school and attending dances: *"I started at a tender age... I started between the age of eleven and thirteen, yunno, that's where I really start get serious. In those days the big deejays was like Lord Comic, King Stitt, an' U-Roy. U-Roy was the man weh really my influence still, ca' I could more respond to 'im style."*

U-Roy, already a veteran of sound systems like Dickie's Dynamic and Sir George the Atomic had come to prominence in 1969 on the Home Town Hi-Fi operated by Osbourne 'Tubby' Ruddock. He made his first records in 1969 for producers Keith Hudson, Lee Perry and Bunny Lee, but when he recorded for Duke Reid in early 1970 he soon held the top three positions on the Jamaican charts. In the process he laid the foundation for the modern Jamaican deejay style. His influence has been enormous and he has had many imitators. Until Big Youth came along with his chanting-based style a couple of years later, U-Roy and his followers dominated Jamaican dancehalls. With his stage name from his love of U-Roy and his light skin, U-Brown began his deejaying career as the 1970s dawned; *"The first sound I started to deejay is a sound name Silver Bullet from Tower Hill, an avenue name Phillip Avenue, off Tower Avenue in Tower Hill. After I started to deejay that sound, one of my friend (was) keepin' a dance an' the sound that he was usin' didn't 'ave a deejay at the time, the deejay who suppose to deejay the sound, 'im name was Winston Scotland. The sound name Sounds Of Music, owned by a guy name Phillip Monroe. My friend ask the owner fi the sound if he could use me, an' I gladly accept the job fi the night. I was about 15."*

Over the next couple of years he gained more experience; he recorded his first tunes _ "Wet Up Your Pants Foot", "Jamaica Tobacco" and "Jah Jah Whip Them" for producer Winston Edwards around this time, although these weren't released until 1975, and then only in the UK. More importantly in 1975, U-Brown began working with the Greenwich Farm based producer Bunny Lee: *"Well I record a lot of songs with Bunny Lee. (He) did a great thing for my career, because he was the first major producer who started to record a lot of songs with me, who even recorded my first album."*

That first album was called "Satta Dread" and was released by Larry Sevitt of Klik Records, again only in the UK, the major market for reggae at the time. From that long-unavailable album we have included seven tracks. Over the next couple of years U-Brown would record three further albums for Bunny _ "London Rock", "Revelation Time" and "Starsky & Hutch", as well as numerous 45s and unreleased tracks.

Late in 1975, he got a chance to deejay in place of U-Roy on King Tubby's Hi-Fi: *"After U-Roy met an accident, I was asked to carry on the job _ U-Roy wasn't available. Dillinger was around, a hit deejay at the time with song like "CB 200", but the Dillinger style didn't fit Tubby's. Dillinger style more fit sound like Emperor Faith an' Black Harmony, an' all those sounds. So I was called on, as a young deejay who had a sound like U-Roy, to do the duty."*

Although unmistakably influenced by U-Roy's jive-saturated talkover style, U-Brown's hyped-up version sounded great over the heavy dubs mixed by King Tubby, Prince Phillip Smart and Prince Jammy at the Waterhouse studio. U-Brown recognises his stylistic debt to the deejay Godfather: *"We all follow U-Roy steps. I was one of the first student _ me, Ranking Trevor, Ranking Joe _ then come Charlie Chaplin an' Josey Wales, an' even the great Brigadier Jerry, though 'im never come out of the school like we. But Brigadier get some of the influence from the teacher as well. We never only jus' listen to U-Roy _ we was in the dancehall, round the sound system, workin' shoulder to shoulder with U-Roy _ so we definitely in the class. We're not only tutored by listenin' to the music, we in a the school room, doin' the practical amongst U-Roy. "*

It was while he was working Tubby's set that U-Brown linked up with another producer who he rates very highly, the late Lawrence Lindo, better known as Jack Ruby: *"(He) is a very brilliant person, especially when it come to music. Jack Ruby can spot talent from afar; not only talent but conscious talent. Jack Ruby hear me deejay Tubby's one night at Anotto Bay, about 1975. His sound was playin' in Anotto Bay as well, but because my sound Tubby's reach earlier, my dance really 'ave some more crowd. But when Jack Ruby*

a string up an' start play, an' start draw some Burnin' Spear, my dance really get pull down! Those days was better sound clash days, because in those days people never throw so much abusive word. Jack still respect me regardless 'im pull down my sound, flop my dance in other words. 'Im still respect me as a deejay. Then Tubby's sound did get shot up out a St. Thomas by some police guy, an' Tubby's park. I start deejay King Attorney till the owner sell it to Tony Welch, an' Tony buy the sound an' call it Socialist Roots, an' me start deejay Socialist Roots now."

While deejaying Socialist Roots, U-Brown cut "Train To Zion", released on 12" single in a combination with Linval Thompson, another singer who had been brought to prominence by Bunny Lee: *"It happened that Tony Welch, the guy who owned Socialist Roots, he came in the production business; he wanted to record a song with Linval Thompson an' me. We come together an' record the song "Train To Zion" which came out to be a hit, an' not only a hit, that was one of the Peace songs in 1976. What did 'appen, you 'ave Rema an' Jungle _ like the top part a Trenchtown an' the bottom part a Trenchtown, an' the bottom part say dem a Labourite, an' the top side say dem a PNP. It was a political conflic' between the two. Well it so 'appen at the time dem decide to come fi peace, beca' people start get tired with war a gwan. It did never look really right. Dem decide fi keep a dance with the same sound, Socialist Roots. That song was one of the song that was playin' in the dance that mek the people come together more."*

However, before that, the vicious internecine politics of Kingston's ghettos had already contributed to U-Brown's decision to move away from Kingston: *"That time the politics business start get so prevalent to the gun-firin' an' ting, an' people start get shot up a dance. The police a lock off the dance dem, an' seh dance a fi stop play fi a while, especially in Kingston. Through the politics, one night dem shoot up a dance up a Barbican, fire shot an' kill some people. Dem lock down the dance an' say my sound get some problem with police. Jack Ruby send call me, an' tek me down to Ocho Rios, an' that's where I start work with Jack Ruby sound, that was 1976. He was the first person tek me to the USA."*

Although he cut a couple of titles for Jack Ruby including an excellent version of Delroy Wilson's "Things In The Dark" called "Gully College" with lyrics about the PNP-sponsored JAMAL literacy programme in 1976, by 1977 U-Brown had started his own label, Hit Sound. The label name proved prophetic; his first production "Please Mr Deejay" by Carlton Livingston was a hit and it was soon followed by U-Brown's own massive success "Weather Balloon". He continued working for many other producers over the next few years, including Ossie Hibbert, Gussie Clarke, Carlton Patterson, Bim Sherman, Leggo, Douglas Boothe, Winston Riley, Linval Thompson, and of course Bunny Lee. On his own label he has issued work by artists like Delroy Wilson, Al Campbell, the Revealers, and early work by deejays Peter Metro and Dickie Ranking (better known these days as dancehall deejay Snagga Puss. He continued appearing on sound systems as an in-demand deejay: *"I work with sounds like Antone the Killer, I deejay sound like Emperor Lord Faith the Dubmaster, I deejay Black Harmony, I deejay Killermanjaro even before Super Cat all the deejays dem, I been there before. Stur-Mars was the last sound that I really work with as a resident deejay."*

By the mid-1980s he was working in Miami with producer Kenneth 'Skengdon' Black, owner of the aforementioned Stur-Mars sound; U-Brown proving his continuing ability to rock the dance hall with hits like "Ready When You Ready". Following a period spent out of the music business, U-Brown returned to Jamaica in 1990.

By 1991 he was recording again, scoring a local hit with a version of the Trini Lopez standard "If I Had A Hammer" for the Ocho Rios-based producer Courtney Cole's Roof International label, in combination with the fine singer Mickey Simpson, tragically gunned down in December 1993.

U-Brown has continued to deejay and produce, making appearances on the roots-oriented Conquering Lion set in Jamaica, alongside such cultural deejays as Charlie Chaplin, Josey Wales, Brigadier Jerry, Mama Nancy and his former protege the gifted Prezident Brown. He also records for the talented producer Barry O'Hare at Grove Studios in Ocho Rios; "Stand Up Strong" on O'Hare's X-Rated label was strongly featured on Irie-FM during last summer. U-Brown himself lives in quiet seclusion just outside the Jamaican north coast town. Although he has deejayed many of the top sounds in Jamaica from 1970 to 1985, he has no plans to give up deejaying: *"Well, U-Brown see himself a continue to do the work, ca' U-Brown cyaan stop deejay. The only way U-Brown stop deejay unless Jah tek weh me voice. An' me know seh me nah do nuthin' fi Jah do that, yunno ? Old as me is, me can stay 'pon the riddim same way, an' tings always in the mind, an' the mind always think constructively."*

Here it comes again, with U-Brown on the microphone attack !
Steve Barrow, July 1997

On the track as I would play:

- 1. Watch This People.** From the album Satta Dread, this is a version of Bongo Natty, a big hit for Owen Gray in 1974 and itself a version of Alton Ellis' Girl I've Got A Date
- 2. The Big Licking Stick.** Released as a Jackpot 45, Cornell Campbell's version of Ernest Wilson's

immortal Undying Love is the backing here

3. Natty Hold The Handle. Rhythm track is I Hold The Handle by Lee's leading hitmaker Johnnie Clarke, originally done by the Heptones at Studio One.

4. Let Love Shine Along The Way. Johnnie Clarke again, this time on a recut of the Uniques' Give Me A Love

5. Watch What Is Going On. Watch That Sound, Cornell's take on the Buffalo Springfield, again first covered in reggae by the Uniques.

6. News To The Nation. Called Strictly Rockers on the Satta Dread album, this is a version of No Tribal War by Johnnie Clarke.

7. Stop Them Jah. A Bunny Lee version of the rhythm best known as King Tubby Meets The Rockers Uptown

8. Live As One. A version of Mr Smart, this was produced by Yabby U. A Dub version appears on Dub Gone Crazy (BAFCD 002)

9. Too Much. Version of Do Good by Johnnie Clarke

10. Satta Dread Style. Titled Satta Dread on U-Brown's 1976 Klik album, this is a version of Beware of a Smiling Face by Horace Andy

11. Jah Give Me Strength. Version of Give Me Strength Oh Jah by Cornell Campbell.

12. Train To Zion. The discomix version with Linval Thompson as released on Socialist Roots 12". The rhythm is a version of Death in The Arena, based on the Studio One adaptation of Bernard Purdie's Funky Donkey of 1968.

13. Bits Of Paper. This is an extended cut of the Hit Sound 45. The first of the many versions of Real Rock in the late 1970s, this cut was also used for the vocal Can't Stop Natty Dread by Linval Thompson. Mixed by Jammy.

14. Nuh Kill Fi Dunza. A version of Blood Dunza by Johnnie Clarke.

15. Hard Times. Johnnie Clarke's steppers Age Is Growing provides the rhythm track, with U-Brown trying out the Trinity/Big Youth vocal pattern.