

BAFCD / LP 048

artist: Willi Williams / title: Messenger Man

01. Messenger Man [4:46]
02. Slave [5:16]
03. Give Jah Praise [3:21]
04. Dungeon [4:49]
05. Zion Town [3:58]
06. I Man [4:49]
07. No Hiding Place [3:56]
08. Valley Of Jehosephat [extended version] [6:58]
09. Rocking Universally [Armagedeon Style] [3:06]
10. Messenger Man Version [5:04]
11. Slave Dub [2:35]
12. Give Jah Praise Version [3:21]
13. Dungeon Dub [3:55]
14. Zion Town Dub [4:26]
15. I Man version [4:46]
16. No Hiding Place version [3:01]
17. Universal Dub [2:59]

Produced by Willi Williams

Reissue co-ordinated by Steve Barrow

Booklet notes by Carter van Pelt

Design by Smith Smith

Mastered by Kevin Metcalfe at The Soundmasters London

Thanks to Carter van Pelt, Ray Hurford, Colin Moore,

Peter Ravheden, Jeremy Collingwood, Clive Plummer

Musicians:

Bass: Lloyd Parks, George 'Fully' Fullwood , Jah Les

Drums: Carlton 'Santa' Davis, Benbow, Derrick

Lead guitar: Carl Harvey, Bingy Bunny

Rhythm guitar: Tony Chin, Tony Dread

Piano: Jackie Mittoo, Bobby Kalphat, Willi Williams, Tony White

Organ: Bobby Kalphat, Tony White

Horns: Demo Cates, Fitty

Percussions: Bongo Gene, Bongo Herman, Willi Williams

Recorded at Channel One Studio, Joe Gibbs Studio [Kingston]

and Summer Sound Studio [Toronto]

Engineers: Maxie & Bunny, Errol ET Thompson & Ruddy Thomas, Jerry Lion

Dubs mixed at Channel One, King Tubby's and Summer Sound

Willi Williams is most often associated with his anthemic "Armagedeon Time", a 1979 hit that is now a permanent part of the reggae canon. The Clash's cover that same year initially ensured the song's cult status, but its appearance in the films *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* and *Grosse Pointe Blank*, and more recently in the massively popular video game, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* have crystallized its legacy. While "Armagedeon Time" secures Willi

Williams' name recognition, measuring him by one song belies the significance of a career spanning nearly 40 years.

The present album, *Messenger Man*, was Williams' first full length LP, a cohesive work that shows reggae's maturity as it made the transition from the singles format to the international album format. "It might not be technically the best album I've done, in the sense of technical quality of production, but it's one of the best in terms of overall work," says Williams in reflection. "When you put something on the market, it's not the artist who determines if it's good enough or palatable, but over the years this is one of the albums that I've always had letters from people telling me how it's positive in their life. There was a psychiatrist, a doctor who I met in Jamaica who used this album in music therapy. The music speaks for itself, although I didn't know it would reach that far."

Messenger Man was originally issued on Williams' Inland label in 1980. The recordings were made in 1978 and 1979 in Kingston and Toronto. The Blood and Fire release of *Messenger Man* is augmented by previously unreleased dubs mixed by Solgie Hamilton, Scientist and Errol Thompson in Kingston, and Jerry Lion at Summer Sounds in Toronto.

Wilbert Williams, who was born in Higginstown, St. Ann's parish, can trace his music career to the late 60s, when he first recorded "Calling" at Studio One for Coxsone Dodd. "At the time I used to check for foreign artists like Stevie Wonder and James Brown. Locally my vocal influences were Bob Andy, Delroy Wilson. Bob Andy was the first person I actually went to the studio with.

"I used to attend Trenchtown Comprehensive High School. Sly Dunbar and myself, we were in the same class together. So we would imitate those Studio One sounds, because we had jukeboxes in the bars and along the street near the school, so we'd hear all these songs everyday."

As Williams told Ray Hurford in an early interview, "I always loved music and growing up in an environment where you have a lot of sound systems and thing. I started out owning a sound-system when I was a teenager . . . The name of it was Tripletone. It was based in Duhaney Park -- the northern part of Kingston going the Spanish Town

end."

In addition to voicing a few singles for Dodd, Williams established his Soul Sounds label in 1969 with the "Prisoner of Loneliness" single. He built a reputation by producing artists including Delroy Wilson (one of Williams' main stylistic influences), The Versatiles (after Jr. Byles left the lineup), and The Wailers (under the name Rhythm Force). Many of these early productions are collected on the first volume of *From Studio One To Drum Street*.

While Williams specifically remembers Tippertone Hi-Fi as an early supporter of his independent productions, he recalls the challenges he faced by attempting to work independently from the major Jamaican producers. "It was very hard securing airplay for your stuff or getting it promoted the proper way, because the music business is a very expensive business in any phase. At the time, our music was just like an underground music, because it was played by the regular sound systems, but it wasn't a top ten hit."

Through much of his career, Williams split time between Kingston, Jamaica and Toronto, Canada, where he began residing in the mid-1970s. Through the Jamaican music community in Toronto, he maintained a close association with Jamaican keyboard legend Jackie Mittoo. Mittoo, who was arguably the most influential session musician in Jamaican history, recorded frequently with Williams through the 1970s and played a key role in the creation of "Armagideon Time" as well as the cuts on *Messenger Man*.

Williams refers to Mittoo as a "head cook and bottle washer" for his extensive role in Jamaican recording history. "Not just him alone, but he was one of the foremost person who was instrumental in shaping the sound of Studio One and the sound of reggae from the transition stage of ska until it came to reggae. It was a full compliment and honor to work with someone like that, because I haven't seen anyone or heard anyone who has replaced Jackie Mittoo's importance in the music."

"'Messenger Man' was written with Jackie Mittoo and myself, a progression we used to work with for a long time. I used to work with Jackie and his band here, with Lord Tanamo and Joe Isaacs. 'Messenger Man' was kind of a stage for 'Armagideon Time,' which I hadn't written as yet."

"'Armagedeon Time' came together during 1979. Jackie Mittoo and myself were working on some projects, and we went to New York and met up with Dodd. "Messenger Man" at the time was getting good coverage. Dodd heard the song, and he wanted to do a project. He mentioned that when we started out in the early days, he didn't have enough time and ammunition to work with me how he wanted. So he wanted me to go back into the studio and to do some work with him." Williams and Mittoo revisited "Armagedeon Time" several weeks later in Toronto, resulting in "Rocking Universally," included on Messenger Man.

Williams explains the inspiration behind the Messenger Man album as a simple function of life experience. "My outlook at the time was from that rootical angle. I wanted an album that was really rootsy. Looking at the world, I thought that we could find a solution. I wanted to play my part . . . most of these tracks I had personal experiences with them. Like 'Dungeon' is from an experience where I was arrested for herb, although I wasn't guilty and the charges were dropped, I was locked up for a couple weeks. This was just about the whole idea of herb smoking.

"'Give Jah Praise' is something I penned to try to pass on to people that giving praise is a good way to live and it assures you of longevity.

"'Zion Town' . . . I was just assuring my brethren and sistren who were in the faith of Rasta and trying to bring people together. There is a punchline in that song copied by Men Without Hats in a song "Land Down Under."

"'Valley of Jehosephat' in Jamaica in the 70s you have a lot of political violence. I used to be around the areas where Channel One and King Tubby's were located. Yabby You and myself, it felt like we were trodding through the valley, because anything could happen at any time. As musicians, we were the only ones who were allowed to travel certain places at certain times".

Through the years, Williams has collaborated with artists Yabby You, Augustus Pablo, Bobby Kalphat, and England's great soundman/producer Jah Shaka. In recent years, in addition to the retrospectives From Studio One To Drum Street (released in two volumes), Williams has used the Drum Street imprint to reissue his Unity album, as well as the newer studio projects, Thanks & Devotion, and Jah Will. Nocturne Records in France released Williams' most

recent album, *Full Time Love*, in the fall of 2002.

The spiritual content of Williams' work (see "I Man" and "Valley of Jehosephat") and his association with Yabby You, who is known as the "Jesus Dread," have led some to the conclusion that Williams is a Christian. He explains his spiritual outlook in broader terms.

"All these religions originated way back in Africa . . . all the religions. My whole outlook is that I adhere and give praises to the Most High, which is that power that created everyone . . . When we give thanks, we give thanks to the Father . . . When I say this, I don't look at a special person, cause no one has ever seen the Creator, but we know the power . . . We are all created as equals and we are all brothers and sisters. It's just a oneness.

"I pay homage to the one they call Christ, just like how we pay homage to the other prophets. I see Haile Selassie just like the one they call Jesus . . . these people come from a higher level, where they enlighten people. The way we can reach that higher level is to help each other . . . When you read one of Haile Selassie's speeches, the words transcend color, nationality, and all boundaries. The livity is when you start to live those words . . ."

Though Williams' style of reggae is no longer at the cutting edge, he continues to build a legacy and contribute to the story of Jamaican music. "I think from day one, when I started out, I had an idea of what I wanted to do with music, or in music. And that is to appeal to . . . people who were really checking for life in reality . . . I remember the days in the 60s and the 70s when the music was innocent. And I wanted to be a part of the network that really put some conscious music out there to appeal to people internationally. I think that through my period with the music . . . it has given me the chance to do that. I'm very proud that I can keep that torch burning."

--Carter Van Pelt, May 2005

Sources:

"Willy Williams," Ray Hurford & Colin Moore. *The Small Axe Files*.
<http://www.rayx.freeseve.co.uk/>

"Willi Williams: The Armagideon Man," *The Beat*, Vol 22, No. 5, 2003.

"Willi Williams," Full Watts, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001.

<http://www.willwilliams.com>

see also:

"No Supper Tonight; an interview with Willi Williams" by Peter I on website www.reggaevibes.com