

Artist Prince Far I
Title Silver & Gold 1973–1979

This 19-track compilation focuses on the career of legendary deejay /chanter Prince Far I, aka the 'Voice of Thunder', and covers the period 1973–1979, featuring hard to find yet artistically brilliant sides drawn mainly – though not all – from Far I's own Cry Tuff label. Included are such gems as the super-rare version of "Johnny Too Bad" ("Johnny Get Worse"), and later deejay pieces long sought after by fans – the title track and "354 Skank" being just two examples.

Track listing & Booklet Notes

01. Johnny Get Worse [3:01]
02. Yes Joshua [3:19]
03. Let Jah Arise [3:09]
04. Jah Dub Version [3:13]
05. Silver & Gold [3:03]
06. Silver & Gold Version [3:05]
07. 354 Skank [4:01]
08. 354 Version [3:57]
09. Things Nuh Bright [3:12]
10. Equality Version [3:10]
11. Who have Eyes To See / Errol Holt [3:21]
12. Ears To Hear Version [3:31]
13. Talking Rights [2:32]
14. Talking Rights Version [2:29]
15. No More War [3:37]
16. War Is Over [3:39]
17. Gimme / Errol Holt [2:44]
18. Gimme Version [2:51]

19. Yes Yes Yes / Errol Holt 12" mix [7:41]

Total Time 65:43

All tracks produced by Prince Far I

except

1 by Syd Bucknor

2 by Pete Weston

3 & 4 by Enos McCleod

Compilation / booklet notes: Steve Barrow

Digital restoration by Paul Alexander at CEDAR Audio, Cambridge

Mastered by Kevin Metcalfe at The Soundmasters, London

Artwork by Smith & Smith

Photography by Dick Jewell, Beth Lesser

Blood & Fire would like to thank Mrs Pauline Williams, Roydel Johnson,

Adrian Sherwood, Dick Jewell, Noel Hawks, Dave Hendley, Ray Hurford,

Colin Moore, Steve Barker, Enos Mcleod, Pete Weston, Bob Harding and Beth Lesser for their invaluable help in this project.

Dick Jewell is currently teaching printmaking at the Royal College of Art, London. His limited edition book "Hysteric Glamour", from which the photographs of Prince Far I used in this booklet were taken, was published by the renowned Japanese punk fashion house Hysteric Glamour in 2001.

Look up 'rockstone voice' in the dictionary and you'll find Prince Far I's name listed there; not true of course, but it should be – not for nothing was he called the "Voice of Thunder". Prince Far I was born Michael James Williams in Spanish Town in 1945;

thence moving to Kingston in the Waterhouse ghetto where he grew up around sound system culture and was encouraged by the legendary but unrecorded deejay Prince Ruff. By the mid-1960s he was deejaying under the name King Cry Cry for Sir Mike the Musical Dragon, a set he stayed with for three years until it was sold, before moving on a couple of years after to El Toro Hi-Fi.

As Far I told reggae archivist Ray Hurford in a 1978 interview, "When you know you can play a sound, that means you can talk on record" and accordingly, in the late 1960s, he first recorded, for Bunny Lee. This recording – a version of Lester Sterling's instrumental of the standard "Spring Fever" – titled "[The]Great Booga Wooga" appears never to have been released officially.

[The producer told this writer that the tune had been voiced late in 1968 or early in 1969, around the same time that Bunny also recorded U-Roy live in the studio with saxophonist Lennox Brown on "King Of The Road". In an interview with reggae writer/photographer Dave Hendley, Far I cited another tune of same title, again recorded for Bunny Lee, with the difference that it is said to be a version of John Holt's "Just Out Of Reach", recorded in 1970 or later].

Following this early Lee session, King Cry Cry made a handful of recordings under that nom-de-disque for Studio One, apparently when King Stitt failed to turn up for a session, including "I Had A Talk" [released in the UK on the Banana label in 1971], "Cain & Abel", and a version of "Queen Of The Minstrels", utilising the same title as the original Eternals song. Reputedly disappointed with the remuneration he received for these discs, he found work as a security guard at the docks, and later as a car-sprayer. He returned to recording in 1973, recording "Simpleton Skank" as the b-side of the vocal group the Cordells' "Simpleton" [released on the Dynamic subsidiary label Lion]. Around the same time he also voiced a version of the Slickers' immortal "Johnny Too Bad" for producer/engineer Syd Bucknor, released on blank label and entitled "Johnny Get Worse". Early in 1974, he recorded a version of the country standard "Deck Of Cards" for producer Winston Riley; this track was first released on an instrumental LP featuring Bobby Ellis and Tommy Mcook, and is currently available on "If Deejay was Your Trade" [BAFCD 001], under the title "Shuffle & Deal", which was the title written on the original tape box. The same year saw him voice two sets of lyrics over a recut 'Foggy Road', released by Enos McLeod on the Soul Beat label; it is Enos who is responsible for changing his name from King Cry Cry to Prince For I [later amended to Prince Far I]. A further brace of titles followed early in 1975 for producer Pete Weston, namely "Yes Joshua" and "Moses", both of which were released on the Micron label. This year also saw the release of Far I's best effort for Studio One, the brilliant "Natty Farmyard". Later that year further titles appeared on Micron, but now credited to Prince Far I as producer, including "Silver & Gold" and a chanting / singing track by deejay Lloyd Young.

Shortly after this, Prince Far I started his own label, Cry Tuff; as he told Ray Hurford: "The label's name came from a tune by Alton Ellis, 'Cry Tough'. Also after my own sound system name, King Cry Cry".

Initial releases on Cry Tuff, which found their way to London reggae shops in early / mid 1976, included the first release "354 Skank", rapidly followed by Errol Holt's vocal on "Who Have Eyes To See" and its deejay counterpart "Talking Rights", Holt's "Gimme" and corresponding deejay version by Far I entitled "Zion Call". The year before Far I had actually recorded his first album for producer Ivanhoe 'Lloydie Slim' Smith, a longtime associate of producer Bunny Lee, and entitled "Psalms For I". This excellent set featured the deejay flexing his vocal muscle on various Psalms, all chanted over well-known Bunny Lee and Lee Perry rhythms. The set didn't get released on vinyl until 1977; it has been most recently reissued by Pressure Sounds [PSCD 35, 2002] and is recommended unreservedly.

Then, in the summer of 1976, Far I began working for Joe Gibbs, who released the brilliant tribute to cricketer Michael Holding, then mashing up the English team with his "Heavy Bowling". This single was followed quickly by further titles for Gibbs, including a new version of the "Deck Of Cards" lyric and the massive selling "Heavy Discipline", which rode a version of Naggo Morris' sound system favourite "Su Su Pon Rasta". These latter records really cemented Prince Far I's reputation, and the resultant LP, also entitled "Under Heavy Manners" sold very well on import in early 1977. Releases on Cry Tuff continued, though at some point during this same period Far I also found time to voice a superb version of "Satta Massa Gana" entitled "Wisdom" for Abyssinians' lead vocalist Bernard Collins [currently available on "Tree Of Satta", BAFCD 045]. Toward the end of 1977, "Things Nuh Bright" appeared on Cry Tuff, followed by the version of Litle Roy's "Tribal War" called "No More War", and issued at the time of the so-called 'Peace Treaty' between Kingtson warring political gangs. As Far told Ray Hurford: "Well, it was we that had preached the war. And we had to show the people how to get together again."

These recordings brought Prince Far I to the attention of Virgin Records, who signed the deejay to a five-year deal, two albums per year, although in the event, Virgin only issued three sets by the deejay, all currently available through EMI. Far I also began a long and fruitful association with UK-based producer / engineer Adrian Sherwood; Pressure Sounds has reissued four sets from this association in addition to the aforementioned "Psalms For I"; "Health & Strength" [PSCD 18] and three dub sets - "Cry Tuff Dub Encounter, (Chapter One)" [PSCD 13], "Cry Tuff Dub Encounter, (Chapter Three)" [PSCD 07] and "Dub To Africa" [PSCD 02], all still available and again, thoroughly recommended by this writer.

At the same time, the deejay's other productions were released through the London-based label Hit Run label, for whom Adrian Sherwood was working. These included songs by the superb Black Skin, the likewise excellent Reggae George [Daley], and more vocals from Errol Holt, George Calstock, Bobby Melody and Carol Kalphat. He also issued deejay sides from U.Black and Trinity's brother Clint Eastwood. In 1979, he signed an album to Trojan Records ["Free From Sin"], following it up with "Jamaican Heroes" in 1980, and in 1981 the Charisma subsidiary label "Pre" released a couple of albums, including "Liverty" and the various artist set "Showcase In a Suitcase"; Far I had been brought to the label by the photographer Dick Jewell, some of whose fine pictures have been used in this booklet. By this time Far I was using an amalgamation of musicians from the UK-based Creation Rebel alongside veterans from his original Jamaican backing band The Arabs, who featured Fish Clarke on drums and Errol "Flabba" Holt on bass. Blood & Fire label co-founder Bob Harding remembers seeing Prince Far I with the original Arabs in Manchester on Far I's first ever UK dates; "He played two nights at the now-defunct Mayflower Ballroom in Belle Vue, and me and Elliot (Rashman) went to both shows. We were just gobsmacked by the sound of his voice, even though we knew it from the records. His stage presence was majestic, heavily decked in robes and head-dress, all the while chanting into what appeared to be a customised white microphone. When he introduced "Heavy Bowling" with something along the lines of 'Dis yah one 'bout the nex' time West Indies come a mash up Inglan,' the place went wild. On the second night some kind of disagreement arose between Far I and Fish Clarke which

ended with the drummer throwing his sticks high into the air and storming offstage. So the band carried on with no drummer for about three numbers until Fish eventually returned and settled back on to his drumstool. It was magnificent!"

The beginning of 1983, everything seemed to be going fine for Prince Far I; Trojan had recently issued his "Musical History " album, as well as Reggae George's set called "Mix Up", produced by the Prince and utilising the Roots Radics as backing musicians. But it was not to last; on September 15th 1983, gunmen entered Prince Far I's home in Portmore and shot him dead and seriously wounded his wife Pauline. The Voice of Thunder had been brutally silenced; to date, no culprits have ever been brought to justice, and no motive has ever been established for this senseless crime.

Blood & Fire are honoured to present these previously uncollected works on CD and LP as testament to the enduring talents of the late and great Prince Far I.

Steve Barrow August 2005

Sources:

Ray Hurford: article & interview in "More Axe" (Muzik Tree/Black Star, 1987)]

Harry Hawke; booklet notes for Pressure Sounds CDs as mentioned in the text

Dave Hendley: article & interview in Blues & Soul magazine, published in 1978.

Track Listing for Vinyl LP

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Side 3

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Side 4

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