A close-up photograph of Bob Marley performing on stage. He has his eyes closed and a joyful expression, holding a microphone in his right hand. He is wearing a red and blue patterned shirt. The background is dark, with red and blue stage lights illuminating his dreadlocks and face.


**BOB
MARLEY
AND
THE
WAILERS**

**THE
ULTIMATE
ILLUSTRATED
HISTORY**

RICHIE UNTERBERGER

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with

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Introduction

Pop music stars usually fade from public consciousness when two generations have passed since the end of their careers. Yet thirty-five years after Bob Marley's death, the reggae pioneer is bigger than ever.

His music is widely played all over the world—not just in the North American and European nations responsible for the bulk of sales by English-speaking performers, but in every continent. His songs are performed by artists of all age groups and dozens of nationalities and ethnicities. His record sales—impressive, but not among the top echelon of superstars during his lifetime—now number in the hundreds of millions, even without counting the many pirated cassettes and CDs of his work that have circulated for decades, especially in Third-World countries. His best-selling disc, *Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers*, has sold about twenty-five million copies, and as of this writing has spent more than four hundred consecutive weeks on the *Billboard* album chart.

Marley is everywhere, especially if you take into account the massive numbers of T-shirts, handbags, and other paraphernalia bearing his image. His most important legacy, however, is not in the massive merchandise he generates, but in his status as a symbol of empowerment for the underprivileged. Especially in Africa, he's revered as a spokesperson for the rights of the oppressed. He gained this position not only through the messages of his many songs, but also through the courageous stances he often took in his public life.

Even without these considerations, Marley's purely musical accomplishments were remarkable. With the Wailers—especially Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer, who were nearly as important to

the group as Marley in the band's first decade—he was crucial to developing and popularizing reggae, the music that remains Jamaica's most renowned export. He and the Wailers were the first reggae act to make albums as unified statements rather than more or less random collections of tracks. Those albums, in turn, were among the first reggae records to gain a wide listenership among rock fans outside of Jamaica, with reggae going on to influence countless musicians, rock and otherwise.

Marley has often been deified as a saint or even a Christ-like figure. But while his achievements were in some respects miraculous, he was, like any idolized artist, a very human and flawed figure. He was not an ideal husband or father, and did not always practice the peace and love extolled in many of his songs.

And despite his enormous fame and legacy, many of the details of his life remain surprisingly mysterious, especially for the years before his rise to international fame in the mid-1970s. Even some of the most prominent Marley biographies report events in different sequences, or give different months or even years for the same pivotal moment. One source, for instance, will report a Wailers single becoming a hit in Jamaica half a year before the month in which another source states it was recorded in the studio. Different close associates of Marley will have substantially different memories of what happened when or where, or why it happened.

It's virtually certain, however, that Marley was born on February 6, 1945, in the village of Nine Mile, Jamaica. It's even more certain that before leaving his teens, he helped spearhead a musical revolution that still echoes around the globe.



Staffordshire, England, June 22, 1978. TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTOS



JUDGE NOT
(B. Marley)
BOB MARLEY



BEGINNINGS 1945–1962

1

When Bob Marley was born, no one would have predicted that a boy of his background could become a musical revolutionary. His race, nationality, and modest family assets all seemed to work against the likelihood of his even rising out of poverty. Yet those same factors may well have fueled his burning desire to better not just himself, but the lot of millions of others with similar disadvantages.

One of those disadvantages was his color. Economic and political power in Jamaica was almost exclusively concentrated in a small white minority, often descendants of the British, who were still running Jamaica as a colony in which the gap between the ruling elite and a large black underclass was huge. Although his father was white, Marley was considered part of that underclass. It had been part of Jamaican life since slaves were forced to move to the country from their African homes starting in the early sixteenth century, though Jamaica finally abolished slavery in 1838.

Marley's mother, Cedella Malcolm, was reasonably well off by the standards of rural black Jamaicans. In the village of Nine Mile in the parish of Saint Ann, her father ran small businesses and owned

A group of Jamaican musicians plays a small local dance in 1946, the year after Marley's birth. MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

INSET: "Judge Not" was credited to Marley when it was issued as his debut single. He was just sixteen.

some property. Her family became known to Norval Marley, a Jamaican of British descent who was, by most accounts, an overseer of land administered by the government in the area, though it's been suggested that his position was more modest than that.

Indeed, considerable mystery surrounds Norval's origins. He was known as Captain Marley, but doesn't seem to have attained that rank in his travels and various occupations in Jamaica, Britain, and Nigeria. When he first crossed paths with Cedella, he was aged anywhere from his late forties to his early sixties, depending

Marley's mother, Cedella Malcolm, was from the village of Nine Mile, where her father ran small businesses and owned some property. Marley's boyhood home there is now a museum. A MEDIA PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



on the account. Certainly the middle-aged man was quite a bit older than the teenaged girl, who was seventeen when she became pregnant by him. Conferring legitimacy on the child they were expecting, Captain Marley married Cedella in June 1944.

Although Norval moved to Kingston shortly afterward, he did name the son that Cedella gave birth to on February 6, 1945, Nesta Robert Marley. For much of his early youth, the future Bob Marley would be known as Nesta. He seldom saw his father, and when the youngster was sent to live with Norval at around the age of five, Captain Marley ended up arranging for his boy to live with a woman not even related to his parents. Cedella Marley ended up taking her son back to Nine Mile about a year later. He'd see little of his father before Norval Marley died in the mid-1950s.

“Captain did not prove himself a good father,” Cedella understated in her book, *Bob Marley, My Son* (written with Anthony C. Winkler). “Mostly, he stayed away from his son, writing the occasional letter but visiting only rarely. He seemed to take little or no interest in Nesta’s upbringing.”

If his mixed racial background was an embarrassment to his father’s family, and the possible source of some teasing from his peers as he grew up in black Jamaican society, Marley never let it hold him back. “My father’s white, my mother’s black,” he acknowledged in *Melody Maker* in 1975. “You know what them call me, half caste or wh’ever. Well, me don’t dip on nobody’s side, me don’t dip on the black man’s side nor the white man’s side, me dip on God’s side, the man who create me, who cause me to come from black and white, who give me this talent.”

FORMING THE WAILERS

As a single mother in a small town, Cedella found it hard to support herself and her son, taking domestic work in Kingston and leaving Bob in the care of relatives in Nine Mile for spells. Shortly before Bob’s teens, the two moved to Kingston, by far the largest city in Jamaica. There she took up with Toddy Livingston, who ran a bar and often visited her and Bob in Trench Town, a large ghetto even more impoverished than its counterparts in the United States.

Here Bob became reacquainted with Livingston’s slightly younger son, Neville, known as Bunny since his birth on April 10, 1947. The pair had first become friends when Bunny and his father lived in Nine Mile several



Marley’s father Norval was a white Jamaican of British descent and, by most accounts, a government land administrator.



Marley's former home on First Street in Trench Town as seen in 2000. COLLIN REID/AP PHOTO

years earlier. Their friendship grew as they discovered a mutual interest in music and as their parents' affair intensified, resulting in a daughter, Pearl, born in 1962. With a half-sister in common, Bob and Bunny were not just friends; they were family, cementing a bond that would help in the formation of their own singing group.

Even for bright boys like Bob—a name, rather confusingly, that he was increasingly being called, along with Robert, Robbie, and Nesta—educational opportunities for the overwhelmingly black and poor population of Trench Town were limited. Around the age of fifteen, he left school with no qualifications and, apparently, little to expect in terms of economic advancement. He at least had plenty of time to sing and play rudimentary guitar with Bunny.

Their chief inspirations were not the calypso music popular in Jamaica and throughout much of the Caribbean, nor mento, its somewhat similar Jamaican variation. Their real passion was for American rock 'n' roll and rhythm and blues, which made their way into the poorest neighborhoods of Jamaica via radio and records. As Bob confirmed in interview footage used in *Rebel Music: The Bob Marley Story*, “We couldn't afford to buy records, so we listened to the radio.”

In particular, they were inspired by the young, black American harmonizing vocal groups—sometimes called doo-wop acts, in honor of the frequent nonsense syllables they employed—that were merging pop and R & B into a style that would lay a foundation for 1960s soul music. Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers had been one of the first such groups to score a big rock 'n' roll hit in the mid-1950s with “Why Do Fools Fall in Love.” The more polished Platters updated the kind of smooth arrangements used by pre-rock acts like the Ink Spots. And the Drifters, with ever-shifting members, added more elaborate, sometimes orchestrated production as the 1950s turned into the 1960s. All were cited by Bunny Livingston (in the *Marley* documentary) as key early influences on the group that, with the addition of a third member, evolved into the Wailers.

The third teenager was Peter Tosh, born Winston Hubert McIntosh on October 19, 1944. Peter spent his early years in the coastal town of Savanna-la-Mar before moving at a young age to Kingston, living with an uncle in Trench Town when he entered his teens. A more accomplished instrumentalist, Tosh ran into the pair while playing and singing in Trench Town. By the early 1960s, they formed a trio, naming themselves the Teenagers, in honor of Frankie Lymon’s group. After briefly working as a welder, Bob’s resolve to make music his living was stiffened when a piece of metal flew into his eye at work. Although the debris was removed without complications, Marley quit welding to focus on music. The accident gave Tosh an excuse to give up his welding job as well.

Giving up a trade to sing, in a town with high unemployment among black youth, must have seemed foolhardy to much of their family and friends, especially considering there wasn’t



As teens in Trench Town, Marley and Bunny Livingston were inspired not by the local calypso music, but by black American vocal groups like (from top) Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Platters, and the Drifters.

yet much of a Jamaican music industry. Yet at precisely this time, opportunities to make a living at music—and even to make records—were opening up for young Jamaicans.

Even back in the 1950s, the zeal for American rock and R & B was such that some Jamaicans began bringing back large quantities of 78s and 45s to play in their homeland. Perhaps the fervor was greased by the lack of a language barrier, Kingston being the largest English-speaking city south of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. The new sounds could also be heard, if erratically and with static, on US radio stations, if conditions permitted the reception of signals from cities such as Miami and New Orleans. For the most part, this music was not available on behind-the-times Jamaican radio; some poor households couldn't even afford a radio set.

To meet the demand, some entrepreneurs started playing their precious American discs on the loudest sound equipment available at the time, presenting public events at which revelers could pay a small admission to dance to the records. Often staged in outdoor settings, the apparatus the organizers traveled with became known as sound systems, sidestepping the usual channels to bring the music to the people. Such was the cutthroat competition between sound systems that DJs often scratched out the labels on records so the performers and songs couldn't be identified, giving them “exclusives” of a sort.

The hunger for “exclusives” among DJs and audiences grew so intense that it became difficult for the supply to keep up with the demand. Some sound system operators realized that one way to keep one jump ahead was to make their own records with Jamaican artists. The sound-system-guys-turned-record-producers were quick to realize that the discs could be played at dances *and* on the radio, and sold to stores and jukeboxes, opening a much more lucrative stream of revenue.

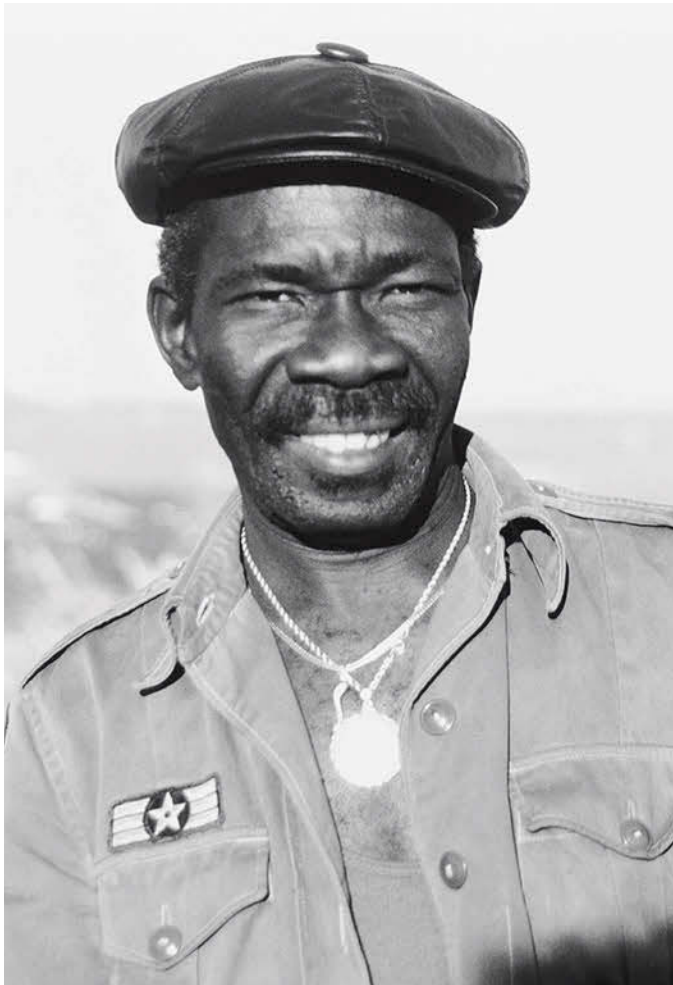
The artists, however, couldn't quite replicate the American R & B they craved. Instead, what came out was something of a hybrid of American rock/R & B and indigenous Jamaican sounds. The rhythm accentuated insistent, jerking offbeats; the brass and guitar, often played by musicians older than the singers, betrayed their backgrounds in jazzier pre-rock; and the vocals, though approximating the feel of American soul singers, couldn't help but be infused with Jamaican dialect.



With Jamaican radio behind the times, entrepreneurs found ways to bring the hottest sounds to the masses, giving rise to Jamaica's competitive sound system and DJ culture.

On top of everything was the fervor of a post–World War II generation boasting a new pride and self-determination after Jamaica declared independence from the United Kingdom on August 6, 1962. The result was ska, the direct predecessor of the reggae with which Bob Marley and his group would become so strongly associated. After changing their name first to the Wailing Rudeboys and then to the Wailing Wailers, they settled on the Wailers (though perhaps unbeknownst to them, a Tacoma, Washington, rock band with the same name had already scored an American instrumental hit with “Tall Cool One” in 1959).

Marley, Livingston, and Tosh were not among the very first wave of ska artists to make records, however. They were still in their midteens and in need of some refinement and experience, even as they were already beginning to toy with writing their own material. Before they changed their name to the Wailers, they began rehearsing under the tutelage of Joe Higgs. Already a national star in the pre-reggae style, Higgs had been recording since the late 1950s and would, for a brief time, sing with the Wailers onstage more than a decade later, when they were on the cusp of international stardom.



The Wailers, Higgs told Roger Steffens in *Option* magazine in 1986, “weren’t even conscious of sound when I started to deal with them. To hear that ‘Joe assisted with the Wailers’—this is foolishness. The Wailers weren’t singers until I taught them. . . . It took me years to teach the Wailers.” Additionally, Higgs asserted, “They would be going to make a record and I would go with them and there is somebody making constant mistakes. I would just have to take his part in order to get the record finished in time.” Marley, noted Higgs in Stephen Davis’s *Bob Marley*, “was the leader of the group, but the lead *singer* of the group in those days was Junior Braithwaite,” who joined the Wailers before they made their first record. “But person to person, they were each capable of leading at any given time because I wanted each person to be a leader in his own right, able to lead anyone, or to be able to wail.”

The young Wailers fell under the tutelage of Joe Higgs, often called the “Father of Reggae,” who had begun recording in the 1950s. Seen here circa 1980, he would join the Wailers for a time in the 1970s.

LEE JAFFE/GETTY IMAGES

However large Higgs's role in shaping their harmonies, the Wailers were, with his help, hitting on a distinctive and effective blend. Tosh, who at six foot five towered over the others, had the grittiest and deepest voice; Livingston had the sweetest and highest. Marley combined qualities of both, as if he were the earthy mix of Tosh's toughness and Livingston's airiness. Many feel their vocal differences reflected differences in their personalities and, a few years down the line, their songwriting, Peter affecting the most militant tone, Bunny the most spiritual, and Marley something of a more commercial midpoint.

There were exceptions to these categorizations, of course, but even at this early stage, it was clear that they had more of an impact together than as soloists. "Me and Bunny together had a kind of voice that could decorate Bob's music and make it beautiful," declared Tosh in the documentary *Rebel Music*. "So we just did that wholeheartedly."

RECORDING DEBUT

It was as a soloist, however, that Marley would make his recording debut. Around early 1962, he was recommended to budding producer Leslie Kong, who'd started his Beverley's label as an outgrowth of his combination restaurant/ice cream parlor—itself an indication of how primitive the Jamaican music business was at ska's inception. Two early ska stars, Desmond Dekker (who'd have one of the first big international reggae hits in the late 1960s with "The Israelites") and Derrick Morgan (who was also a talent scout for Kong), have been credited with making Marley aware of an opportunity to cut a single with Kong.

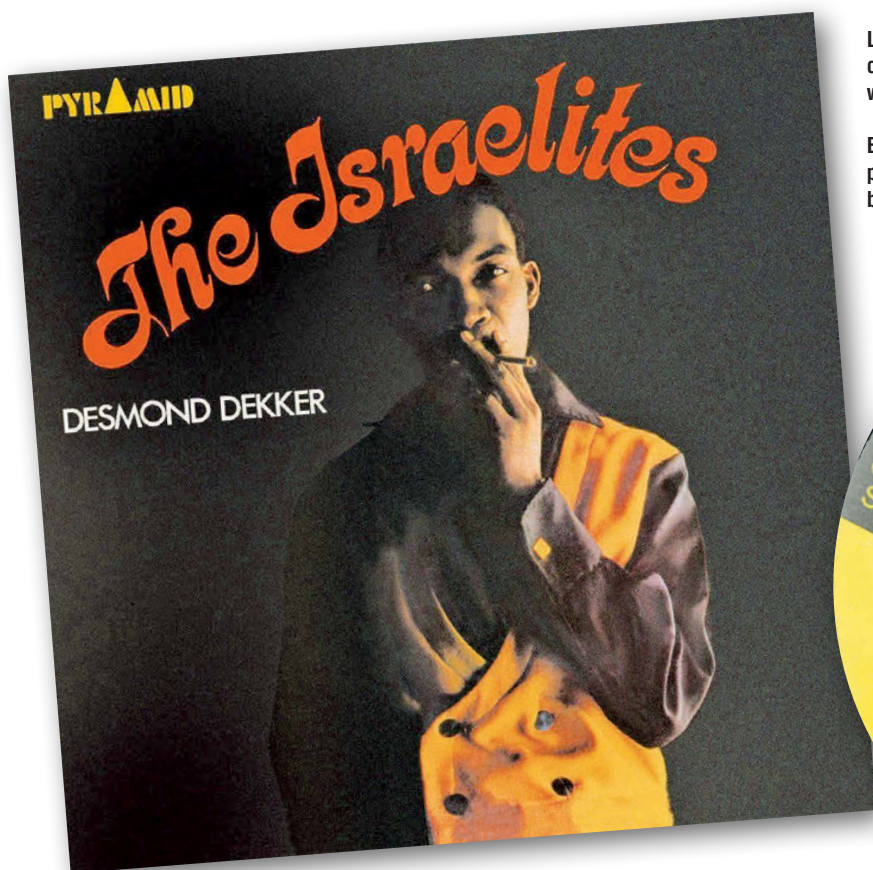
Also on the scene was a teenage Jimmy Cliff, later to become one of reggae's most popular singers. As Cliff later remarked to the Experience Music Project, "Desmond Dekker went back to Bob and said, 'I've found this guy, Jimmy Cliff, and I got my songs passed, and I'm going to record, so you should go and see him.'" When Marley met Cliff, Cliff added, Marley "sang some of his songs, and among the songs that he sang, three of them I chose, and then when Derrick [Morgan] come, he liked those as well, which was 'One Cup of Coffee,' 'Judge Not,' and 'Terror.' And at Leslie Kong's next session, he recorded those three songs. And that was the start of Bob Marley."

Released when Bob was just sixteen, "Judge Not" was credited to Robert Marley when it was issued as his debut single. A quite respectably infectious and catchy slice of early-1960s ska, with a wheezing flute, it also bore a trace of the moral compass that would feature in many of his later compositions, urging others not to judge him before they judged themselves. As Cliff observed in the documentary *Marley* (2012), "Judge Not" was "[an] evolutionary song defending his rights as an individual. It occurred to me, well, this guy's really a good poet."

It sold little at the time, however, and nor did its follow-up, “One Cup of Coffee” (on which Bob was billed as “Bobby Martell”), based on a recent American country hit by Claude Gray.

Marley was likely more comfortable as part of the Wailers and also likely realized that his prospects were greater as part of a group with two talented friends. Not long after his pair of singles with Kong, however, came a turn of events that could have short-circuited the band’s career almost as soon as it had started. Her relationship with Toddy Livingston (who’d been married to another woman during their affair) having soured, Bob’s mother, Cedella, went to stay with relatives in Delaware. Intending to move to the US permanently if she could, she likely would have wanted her son to come with her. But Bob remained behind in Jamaica, determined to make it with the group even though he lacked a permanent residence and slept for a while on a kitchen table in a friend’s place.

Bob would eventually join his mother in Delaware. In the three years or so before that extended visit, however, the Wailers—sometimes embellished by one, two, or even three other members—became one of the biggest acts in Jamaica.



LEFT: Ska star Desmond Dekker, sporting classic rude boy garb on this sleeve of his late-1960s hit, “The Israelites,” is credited with steering the young Marley to producer Leslie Kong.

BELOW: Marley’s debut single, “Judge Not” (see page 10) fared poorly at the time, as did its follow-up, “One Cup of Coffee,” based on a recent American country hit.



Famous promotional photo of the Wailing Wailers depicts, from left, Livingston, Marley, and Tosh.

