



The Words and Music of Bob Marley

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THE PRAEGER SINGER-SONGWRITER COLLECTION

The Words and Music of Bob Marley

David Moskowitz

James E. Perone, Series Editor

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Series Foreword

Singer-songwriters. While the term might most frequently be associated with a cadre of musicians of the early 1970s such as Paul Simon, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens, and Carole King, the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection defines singer-songwriters more broadly, both in terms of style and in terms of time period. The series includes volumes on musicians who have been active from approximately the 1960s through the present. Musicians who write and record in folk, rock, soul, hip-hop, country, and various hybrids of these styles will be represented. Oh yes, and so will some of the early 1970s introspective singer-songwriters named above.

And, what do the individuals included in this series have in common? Although some have never collaborated as writers, while some have, all have written and recorded commercially successful and/or historically important music and lyrics. And, all the musicians included in this series have been active not only as singers but also as instrumentalists to some degree.

The authors who contribute to the series also exhibit diversity. Some are scholars who are trained primarily as musicians, while others have such areas of specialization as American studies, history, sociology, popular culture studies, literature, and rhetoric. The authors share a high level of scholarship, accessibility in their writing, and a true insight into the work of the artist(s) they study. The authors are also focused on the output of their subjects and how it relates to their subject's biography and the society around them—biography in and of itself is not a major focus of the authors of books in this series.

Given the diversity of the musicians who are the subject of books in this series, and given the diversity of viewpoint of the authors, volumes in the series will differ somewhat from book to book. All, however, will primarily

be organized chronologically around the compositions and recorded performances of their subjects. All of the books in the series should also serve as listeners' guides to the music of their subjects, making them companions to the artists' recorded output.

James E. Perone
Series Editor

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Introduction

Bob Marley's overall importance to Jamaica, Caribbean popular music, and pan-Africanism is difficult to overstate. While he is generally heralded as the first third-world superstar, the contemporary conventional wisdom is that he is also the only such star of his caliber. Marley's influence, both during and after his life, is staggering. It is known that during his life, his music was listened to by groups of people as diverse as the Hopi Indians living in America's Grand Canyon and the Maori people of New Zealand. Even twenty-five years after his death, Marley's name is known internationally, and he is heralded as a prophet, a peacemaker and peacekeeper, a mystic, and a universal symbol of brotherly/sisterly love.

Musically, Marley was able to achieve more in his abbreviated life than most long-lived singer-songwriters. He was not only prolific but imaginative in his music and lyrics, which cling with amazing cohesion. The sound of Bob Marley and the Wailers was the sound of roots reggae. His rhythm section's characteristic one-drop style, coupled with his penchant for high vocal harmonies, made Marley's music unique and attractive. Marley's own vocal presentation was difficult to match. He seemed to draw the meaning and the emotion out of each word as he swung his thick dreadlocks around the stage. Further, his lyrics speak at once of his own life and of the shared existence of all disenfranchised black people. Much of his universal appeal is based on the fact that, as he spoke for himself, he simultaneously spoke for all down-trodden people everywhere. One might think that this was achieved through some distinctive and new songwriting approach, but most of Marley's songs are in standard verse-and-chorus form, with extra weight often afforded to the chorus material.

Marley's place in history has already begun to be established. Although he is memorialized in countless international shrines, his actual gravesite (in St. Ann's Parish, Jamaica) is a place of pilgrimage for all who are struck by his message of "one love." His house at 56 Hope Road, Kingston, Jamaica, has been converted into a museum where an international audience visits annually to learn more of the man. The upstairs bedrooms have been converted into gallery space that contains a world map with all of his concert tour destinations marked with pushpins. Another upstairs room houses a small library and archive, along with the business office. Also on the second floor is the bedroom that Marley once used. It is preserved in the condition in which he left it and allows viewers a glimpse into the private life of a very public person. The main floor of the house contains the remnants of Tuff Gong recording studios (the official location of the studios is now 220 Marcus Garvey Drive). There are now many additional outbuildings that house things such as the Queen of Sheba Restaurant, the Bob Marley Theatre, and the Things from Africa Boutique. Both the house at 56 Hope Road and Marley's ancestral home in St. Ann's Parish remain destinations for an international host of visitors.

In addition to his musical prowess, much has been made of Bob Marley's personality. He has been alternately described as open and welcoming to all, quiz-zical, and even harsh. The fact is that Marley was all of these things and more. Although he was a private person, he understood his role as a public figure. Thus, when in public, he could be often open and effusive. However, when he grew tired of an interview or conversation, he was able to quickly adopt a serious look (or screwface) and sink into an unintelligible Jamaican patois that was impenetrable to anyone who was not a longtime island dweller. These various personality facets also were manifested on stage, where Marley would alternately strike a prophetic pose, fall into a deep trancelike state, or bound around with reckless abandon, legs and locks flying wildly through the air.

The combination of all of these elements has kept people's attention rapt since Marley came on the scene. An indication of his impact and his legacy is the sheer number of records sold. Since 1991, Bob Marley and the Wailers have sold in excess of 21 million records (these statistics did not begin to be collected until 10 years after his death). Further, Marley has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he has received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and he was awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit. Regardless of these (and many other awards), the true test of Marley's worth is time. Twenty-five years after his death, the music of Bob Marley and the Wailers is as popular, important, and pertinent as it was the day it was released.

THE SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Like its companion volumes in this series, this book focuses on the life of Robert Nesta Marley as told through an in-depth exploration of his music,

lyrics, and major recordings. The content is heavily weighted toward the recordings, and many of Bob's lyrics are often autobiographical. Of note, Bob frequently wrote his lyrics in a manner that left the meaning veiled. Here the attempt is to uncover these veiled meanings and apply them to his biography. Further, he often functioned as the spokesperson for black people in Jamaica and around the world; as a result, many of his songs are about the suffering of a group, not just his own pain.

The biography of his life is discussed as it relates to his music, and additional details are supplied as a framework in which to place his musical output. Because we do not have documentation of Bob as a commercial singer until his teenage years, the material at the beginning of this volume is straightforward biography. However, once the early singles are issued and Bob is ultimately picked up by the Island Records label, the discussion focuses more directly on the music itself.

During Bob's 36-year life, he issued several hundred songs. Many he wrote alone. However, Bob's first group was a vocal trio that shared the writing duties. Also, during his mature career, much of Bob's music was written with the assistance of various members of his band, the Wailers. The year 1973 was a watershed for the young singer. It was marked by his signing onto the Island Records roster and by the beginning of the release of his 11 most significant albums. There are now 16 Island/Tuff Gong releases (plus the deluxe editions) as the result of several posthumous greatest-hits and remastered releases. This study focuses on the 11 Island/Tuff Gong albums released during Bob's life and the circumstances that surrounded their creation and release and Bob's subsequent tours. Also included is discussion of early singles, several early non-Island releases, and various posthumous collections. However, the emphasis remains on the Island/Tuff Gong material.

Inconsistency is a feature of much of Bob's biographical material. There is little documentation of his life from his birth, in 1945, until his rise to stardom, in the early 1970s. Christopher Farley's book *Before the Legend* has now done much to fill in the large gaps. Regardless, much of what is believed about him is conjecture, and there are numerous published accounts that conflict. Additionally, there are disputes (most recently involving Aston "Family Man" Barrett) about the credits for some songs. This study attempts to counter the informational inconsistency by relying on contemporary accounts, interviews, and the most accurate and up-to-date publications. Even with this effort, there remains information that is simply unknown or impossible to verify.

Like its companions in the singer-songwriter series, this volume is meant to be a guide to the recordings it discusses. As a result, I have included a selected discography and an index of the songs discussed. The song index includes all of the songs mentioned in the text, specifically those written, cowritten, or recorded by Marley.

Origins: The Trench Town Years, 1945–1960

BOB MARLEY: THE ROOTS OF A REBEL

Although Bob Marley became known as an international superstar and the voice of the underprivileged and oppressed around the world, he came from quite meager beginnings. As Marley's musical popularity grew, so did his influence, first in Jamaica and then internationally. To better understand the musical and cultural importance of the first third-world superstar, one must trace Bob's life back to its roots.

Nesta Robert Marley was born at 2:30 P.M. on February 6, 1945, in the rural Jamaican parish of St. Ann. Bob's mother was an 18-year-old Jamaican named Cedella Malcolm, and his father was Captain Norval Sinclair (or St. Claire) Marley, a white Jamaican, "born in the parish of Clarendon, enlisted in the British army."¹ The child was named Robert after Marley's brother and was given the name Nesta by his father but without any explanation as to its origin.² According to Bob's mom, Nesta meant "messenger." As an adult, Bob described his father as a "ship's captain, an adventurer, and a rebel."³

Bob began life on his maternal grandfather's farm. Bob's grandfather's name was Omeriah (also spelled Omariah) Malcolm, and he was a land-owning black man who lived in a one-story house known as the "Big House," in the village of Nine Miles. The Malcolm family lived on a farm in the style of a colonial English planter's residence. This area of Jamaica was home to several prominent families, including the Malcolms, Lemoniouses, Lewises, Davises, and a dozen other closely related families who had "been farming in the region since two-hundred years before the abolition of slavery in 1838."⁴

Bob's mother and father met and began their relationship on the family farm. They were married on Omeriah's farm on June 9, 1944. On the register, Cedella was listed as 20 years old, although she was 18, and Norval was listed as 50, although he was actually 63.⁵ Rather than being a happy occasion, however, the wedding day brought the news that Captain Marley was to leave the next day for Kingston and that he had no intention of returning. He had decided to take a different government job, as a foreman on a bridge-building project in Kingston, that required less work. This also paid a smaller salary. In addition, when Captain Marley informed his family that he and Cedella had been married, they reacted by "denouncing and disinheriting him."⁶ As a result, the Captain was barely able to support himself and could do very little for Cedella and his then-unborn son. When Captain Marley left his pregnant wife the next morning, he promised to visit every weekend until the baby arrived; yet, "during the course of her pregnancy he paid only two brief visits."⁷ Bob was born at 2:30, Wednesday morning, February 6, 1945, weighing six-and-a-half pounds. After Bob's birth, Captain Marley visited for one week, after which his correspondence dwindled and eventually stopped.⁸

Cedella continued to try to contact Bob's father, but soon letters were being returned unopened because the Captain had moved and not supplied a forwarding address. These developments left Cedella with little means to care for her son. With Omeriah's help, Cedella opened a small grocery store, where she sold produce from the family farm.

In Stephen Davis's book on Marley's life, Cedella is quoted as saying that Captain Marley visited every month or so after Bob was born. Further, he gave Omeriah money to dole out to Cedella as she needed it for various household staples. Davis states that "he gave Omeriah the money to build a tiny cabin for Cedella and the baby, and eventually set Cedella up in a little grocery shop of her own."⁹

Cedella and Captain Marley's relationship was suffering by virtue of distance and the pressure brought by the Captain's transient lifestyle. However, Captain Marley did not want to leave Bob behind. While Bob was still a baby, Captain Marley came to Cedella and said that he wanted her to release Bob to allow him to be adopted by the Captain's nephew. Cedella reacted with horror to this idea, even though it was very difficult for her to raise Bob without the Captain's assistance. The subject was dropped and the Captain returned to Kingston, but this attempt to separate Bob from his mother foreshadowed events to come.

At age four, Bob began attending a rural Jamaican school called the Stepney School. Here, according to Cedella, Bob led the class in reciting numbers and letters. His teacher, "Mrs. Isaacs, praised him so much . . . she always used to tell us [Cedella and her family] how bright he was and how helpful he was to her."¹⁰ When Bob was six, his father reappeared in St. Ann's parish with another plan to remove him from his mother. This time, Captain Marley wanted Bob to move to Kingston in order to receive a better education in the

city's school system. Cedella discussed this with Omeriah and then decided that it would be in Bob's best interest to attend a school in Kingston. His teacher, Mrs. Isaacs, was opposed to the change, saying that, although Bob was bright, he might already be behind the other children his age who had always had the benefit of the city's schools. There were also financial issues that troubled Cedella. According to Bob himself, "I find my mother works for fifty shillings a week and on this she has to send me to school, buy me shoes and lunches."¹¹

MOVE TO KINGSTON

Still just six years old, Bob relocated to Kingston to live with his father and attend public school. For months his mother sent him letters, since she felt that she could not visit given that the Captain's family did not accept her and she had little money. She would periodically receive word from the Captain saying that Bob was doing well and that he was advancing in school. After being separated for six months, Cedella planned a trip to Kingston to visit her son; however, when she told the Captain of her plans, he responded that Bob was on vacation with his teacher in St. Thomas Parish. Discouraged, Cedella delayed her plans and waited for a better time to visit her son.

Cedella received no further word from the Captain for a year and became increasingly worried about Bob. She continued to write, but now her letters went unanswered, and she grew nervous about the wellbeing of her boy. Cedella eventually got a report concerning her son from a friend who had just returned from Kingston. She learned that Bob was not living with the Captain's family at all; instead, he had been living with an elderly woman named Mrs. Grey in an arrangement set up by the Captain. Further, the friend reported that Bob did not like the arrangement and wanted his mother to come to his assistance.

The news shocked Cedella, and she was soon on her way to find her lost son. In early 1952, Cedella arrived in Kingston with the daunting task of finding Bob. While her friend had told her that she had seen Bob, she was unable to provide an address, just the street name, Heywood Street. Once on Heywood Street, Cedella began asking people if they knew of her boy. She quickly learned that he had just been playing in the area. "Then suddenly, running from around the corner, was Robert!"¹² Bob took Cedella to meet Mrs. Grey, the woman who had been caring for him. During this visit, Cedella learned that after the Captain had brought Bob here, he had never returned. The Captain's idea was that Mrs. Grey would adopt Bob and that when she died, all that was hers would be passed on to the youngest Marley. This was an important issue because the Captain knew that he would never have anything to give Bob himself. Reunited, Cedella and Bob returned home to their rural parish.

It took some time, but Bob gradually readjusted to rural life and the Stepney School. He returned to Mrs. Isaacs's class and a job in his mother's grocery store. In an interview, Cedella reported that it was at his job in the grocery store that Bob began to sing. He would frequently sing to customers as they came to inspect the produce available that day. There are numerous classic Jamaican vendor songs, and Bob had apparently learned them in the market district adjacent to Kingston.

At age 10, Bob learned that his father had died in Kingston, in 1955. It was also in this year that Bob was again separated from his mother. Rural life in Jamaica was (and is) extremely hard and, despite emancipation (which took place on August 1, 1834), still has undertones of slavery. Because of this, when Cedella was offered the opportunity to move to Kingston herself and work as a housekeeper for a time, she decided to move to the city in pursuit of greater financial security. Leaving Bob in the care of Omeriah, Cedella took the bus to the city, where she had previously spent very little time.

While his mother was away, Bob worked on his grandfather's farm, where his main duty was tending a large herd of goats, in addition to collecting firewood and cooking. At age 11, Bob and his cousin (and constant companion) Sledger were moved "fourteen miles down the road to live with Cedella's older sister Amy in the village of Alberton."¹³ Without much adult supervision, Bob and Sledger were mischievous and invariably caused some trouble. As a result, the pair was returned to live with Omeriah on the family farm. Meanwhile, Cedella was still trying to earn enough money to allow Bob to come to Kingston. Finally, after two years, Cedella was able to afford a big enough apartment to allow her to send for Bob, in 1957.

The west Kingston ghetto where Bob and Cedella lived was not a good place to raise a child. Although Kingston is the capital of Jamaica, its west side was a testament to the difficulties of the third world. Oppressed members of Jamaica's lowest class inhabit crowded back roads filled with wood and tin shacks. This was where Bob grew into an adult, living in "smoky and reeking ghetto conditions of destitution, malnourished children, typhus, polio and the violence of caged people."¹⁴

Before Jamaica achieved independence from England, in 1962, there was a time when it was much more a Caribbean paradise than a third-world ghetto. Prior to 1938, the island country maintained a fairly equitable and peaceful tenor throughout, with active banana and sugarcane industries. However, the cane cutters' strike in 1938 forever changed the Jamaican working-class climate. At that time, the first Jamaican trade unions were formed, and from these two unions sprang the two dominant political parties. They were called the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP). The JLP was founded by the right-wing labor organizer Alexander Bustamante and represented the white British and Anglo-Jamaican colonial class, the mercantile middle class composed of Chinese and Lebanese businessmen and storeowners, and the elite black Jamaicans

who worked for them.¹⁵ Conversely, the PNP, begun by the socialist Norman Washington Manley, represented the rest of the island's population, including both rural and urban peasants. These two parties have run the Jamaican government since the 1940s. Unfortunately, violent protests over the extreme disparity in wealth between the few at the top and the great masses of the poor mark each election year.

As a result of the Jamaican political system, Cedella had a difficult time finding a good-paying job that did not involve manual labor. However, like Cedella, rural Jamaicans considered, and still do to this day, the city to be the land of opportunity where one can rise out of the backward rural communities. Those who came to the city but were unable to find work rarely returned to the country. Instead, they created enormous squatters' camps where violence was the only means of survival. Bob and his mother were spared the harshest of Jamaica's realities by living in the public housing projects referred to as the "government yard." The Jamaican government had built many of these low concrete units in west Kingston after a hurricane destroyed this area in 1951 (commonly called Trench Town).

At the time of Bob's arrival in Kingston, he and Cedella shared a room on Nelson Street. However, a few months later, they relocated to the back room of a friend's house on Regent Street. In 1959, Cedella's older brother Solomon informed her that he planned to immigrate to England and offered her his apartment at 19 Second Street. Cedella had a job as a housekeeper and was just able to afford the rent and Bob's necessities for school. During this time in Trench Town, Bob attended several different schools. They included Ebenezer, Wesley, and St. Aloysius schools. However, Bob was becoming increasingly disinterested in school, so at age 14 he terminated his formal education. At this age, Bob was more interested in playing soccer and spending time with his fellow "ghetto youths." According to Cedella, Bob's friends were "older, and most were on the edge of juvenile delinquency and incipient rude-boy-ism." According to Rebekah Mulvaney, the term "rude-boy" "refers to rough and rebellious youths who reacted to Jamaica's negative political and economic situation in the 1950s and 1960s by emulating Hollywood gangster characters."¹⁶ The core of a rude-boy was a Jamaican youth who was a criminal or a tough guy.

Living on Second Street in Trench Town, Bob began to make musical connections that would affect the rest of his life. Another family that shared Bob's tenement yard was the Livingstons. One of their children, Bunny (born Neville O'Riley Livingston on April 23, 1947), quickly became Bob's closest friend.¹⁷ Together the boys would handcraft makeshift musical instruments out of anything they could find. They fashioned a guitar out of copper wire, a sardine can, and a piece of bamboo and began to sing together. In 1960, Bob and Bunny took the first step toward what would become their singing group.

Jamaican culture was about to begin to carve out its own identity. Four hundred and fifty years of colonial control were coming to an end, and a new