

## Music

# From the Caribbean to the Hill: Reggae hits it big in the Triangle

By **BILLY STOCKARD**  
Staff Writer

We've all heard of reggae. That's a style of Caribbean music usually made up of lots of syncopated rhythm, a great beat and lyrics with a meaningful message

thrown in. Well, some of it has moved north of the Caribbean and taken root right here in the Triangle. Various clubs and record stores have kept up with this insurgence of Caribbean culture and have featured reggae music

in their live entertainment or their music selections.

You can find reggae at places like Record Bar or Schoolkids Records, or you can hear the music performed live at places right here in Chapel Hill. The Skylight Exchange,

La Terazza, Down Under, and even the ArtsCenter have all featured reggae entertainment at its best. From the way some of the people at these places talk, reggae is definitely on the move in this area.

Nightclubs have felt the reggae touch as of late. At the Skylight Exchange, employee Tom Jankins named Trinidad North, the Reggae Rebels, Wilton Dubois and the Invictors as some of the recurring reggae performers. According to Jankins, reggae is very popular, and he added that the Skylight Exchange will have its own "Reggae and Dance Music Night" on Saturday April 29.

"We try to encourage all kinds of music here," said Jankins. "We are a pro-reggae establishment." When asked about the growth of reggae in the Triangle, Jankins responded, "More people are becoming interested in the cultural background and not just in the music itself."

Down Under has featured performers like Mickey Mills, but the club's manager, Kamal Mansour, says that a reggae act once a month would be enough. "Chapel Hill is very affluent," says Mansour. "Our club is on the upscale side of Chapel Hill and caters to a different audience from some of our competitors."

Mansour said his customers like reggae but they also "wanna hear Top 40 stuff, songs they can sing to, words they can understand, songs they can dance to." Like Jankins, Mansour explained that Down Under is "open to all ideas in entertainment." And that entertainment can take the form of blues, jazz, and reggae as well.

Cat's Cradle Manager Frank Heath said his club has been successful with reggae in the past. "We've done really well with reggae groups on weeknights or weekends. Just from talking to the booking agents and the bands, it's pretty good for reggae," he said.

The club had two of the most popular reggae concerts during the same week this semester with Yellowman performing March 29 and Burning Spear appearing April 1. The Burning Spear concert was sold out because of his popularity. "Among reggae aficionados, he's one of the most respected names going," he said.

Heath said the Yellowman concert did not do as well as expected, but this was due to the concert's being postponed from its originally scheduled March 18 date. "A lot of people had planned to come into town but the word got around that he was not coming. They were reluctant to try again," he said.

The base of support for live concerts is evenly divided between students and others who live off campus, Heath said, with student crowds usually coming to see groups like I-TAL. At the Burning Spear concert, the crowd was half students and half adults, and a large part of the crowd was made up of people that had not come to the club, he said.

Other clubs in Chapel Hill and Carrboro have done well with reggae acts. The ArtsCenter has had good concerts with Awareness Art Ensemble performing there on a regular basis, he said. But Heath said the ArtsCenter faces greater difficulty in attracting a larger crowd because it is not within walking distance of campus like clubs in Chapel Hill.

The reggae sound has not historically done well on commercial radio stations, but on campus station WXYC, reggae takes its place on the airwaves with other types of music.

WXYC Station Manager Todd Morman said he planned to play two new reggae albums from musicians Mutabaruka and Culture in the coming weeks.

But the base of support for reggae in Chapel Hill was definitely

off campus and for live performances, Morman said. In terms of live performances, the Triangle is "probably the best part of the state for reggae," he said.

"I think that those who like it are really into it; they're really diehard fans. Some just like it and others who say they don't like it probably just haven't listened to it," he said. Reggae concerts in Chapel Hill clubs have drawn consistently large crowds, Morman said, and the support that live concerts have received help make the Triangle the best part of the state for live performances.

Reggae has been selling at a fairly steady pace according to Matthew Steigerwald at Schoolkids. While he hasn't noticed many incredible jumps in sales, he finds that Chapel Hill is an excellent place for this type of music to grab an audience. "This being a college town," he says, "people tend to discover it."

While Steigerwald named Ziggy Marley as a popular choice of customers, he was quick to point out that Ziggy is more of a pop artist. He mentioned Bob Marley, Yellowman (a "toasting rap") and Steel Pulse, among others, as some of the biggest-selling artists in honest-to-goodness reggae.

Gail Murrell of the Franklin Street Record Bar said the store did not sell much reggae. When asked how much reggae it sold, she replied, "Not much. It does well in clubs."

People will go to live shows regardless of whether or not they have heard reggae music before, but more people go to the show than buy it, she said. The only acts that sell well in Record Bar include Bob and Ziggy Marley, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff, Murrell said. As of late, artists like Toots Hibbert and Shinehead, who displays a style of rap-reggae fusion have been selling well, Murrell said.



Groups like the Wailers (above), Rolly Gray and Sunfire and I-TAL have helped make reggae popular in Triangle clubs



The Awareness Art Ensemble, a band that performs regularly at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro, has a very popular following



Reggae act Burning Spear was popular enough to sell out an April 1 concert at the Cat's Cradle.