

B/N

Marley

Bob

National Library of Jamaica

In Bob Marley's Jamaica

(NOTE: Two Thursday ago was Bob Marley's birthday though nobody seemed to remember...except a few rastafarians and tourists and one or two disc jockeys. The Marley Museum on Hope Road was a busy place May 11, with many young people who would not even have known Marley following their parents into the Museum, outside of which were dozens of cars and buses that had brought local Marley lovers and tour groups. The Jamaica Reggae King still draws interest overseas. One of the latest pieces on him appeared in the "Miami Herald's" Travel Section, April 23, under the headline "In search of Bob Marley's Jamaica. STEVE COHEN came to Jamaica and wrote the following article for the "Miami Herald")

NINE MILES, Jamaica

— Bob Marley, the international reggae star, died of cancer in 1981 at the age of 36, yet today, in Jamaica, and the rest of the world, Marley's music

and fame continue to grow beyond history, into legend.

A visit to Marley's Jamaica can provide a stimulating cultural adjunct or alternative to resort Jamaica, as well as insights into the man, his music and his country, which considers him a national hero.

The best place to start looking for Bob Marley's Jamaica is at Tuff Gong, his Kingston home and recording studio at 56 Hope Rd., rechristened the Bob Marley Museum in May 1986.

International visitors wander through the landscaped grounds where Marley played soccer. Inside the house Marley's music is played continuously. Walls are papered in news clippings with banner headlines trumpeting Marley's triumphs. Framed gold records fill Marley's small upstairs bedroom and adjacent kitchen. Records, tapes and reggae T-shirts are sold downstairs.

Paul Kelly, who manages the museum for Marley's widow, Rita, talked

in the garden about the influence of Bob Marley and the role of reggae in Jamaican culture. Foreign music has always been popular in Jamaica and today's "dancehall" music, similar to American disco, reflect the chasm between the "roots" reggae of Marley and the "pop" styles.

"People go crazy over reggae artists abroad," said Kelly, nodding toward an arriving bus full of Japanese tourists "and the love of it brings them here. The reggae music breaks down all barriers, all cultural barriers, all racial barriers and it is spreading a message.

"The real struggle is freedom for all. They (the Jamaicans) are not slaves physically still, but mentally and materially we're still living in poverty, so we still don't have much freedom."

Reggae was started by poor people, partly to express the frustration of slavery to poverty and repression, and came out of the ghetto, Kelly said, not out of a music studio.

"Bob Marley, he's just a ghetto man, a Trench Town man who sings about the life that they live. And sings about the freedom for his people," Kelly said.

"The heartbeat, they say (reggae's) the heartbeat of a type of people."

Thanks to Bob Marley, most people have now most certainly heard about the heartbeat of Jamaica.

"Bob Marley was Rastaman. Bob Marley was a philosopher. Bob Marley was a prophet. And he was a musician. Bob Marley's music is more popular every day. Can't stop playing Bob Marley music," Kelly said.

Leaving Tuff Gong, passing through Kingston's Caribbean palette of urban poverty and excess, you tour a modern Third World capital displaying sophistication and squalor, sometimes in the same instant, as you move from the cultural heart of Jamaica to its spiritual centre in the countryside.

Into the forested interior of Bob Marley's Jamaica, it is easy to see why St. Ann, where the musician was born, is called the garden parish. Narrow roads bear little traffic as they wind over limestone ridges cloaked in dense greenery. The landscape of rolling hills with rock outcrops looks like green dreadlocks. "Locks" are the tight long curls of uncut hair favoured by "dreads," the Rastafarian sect of believers.

The hills also look like buds of the Rastafarians' holy herb "ganja," or marijuana, which they consume in large quantities as a sacrament. The road drops into a gravel. Goats scrambling through ruts make a car wait in a cloud of red dust.

In Marley's hometown of Nine Miles a birthday party is held each year outside the tiny chapel where he is entombed. Candles flickering inside a highlight stained glass windows of Lion of Judah, a rasta symbol, and "three little birds upon my doorstep," from a particularly bright Marley song. Cigar-size "spliffs" rolled out of the St. Ann hills bounty of marijuana, which is an important, although illegal, cash crop in Jamaica, send a smoky haze over the gathering crowd of Jamaican and international visitors.

Daily Gleaner

May 21, 1989