

Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae

adam Nayman
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Director: Stascha Bader

Classification: STC

Rating: ***

Those who think that the history of Jamaican music begins (and ends) with Bob Marley would do well to check out Rocksteady: Stascha Bader's documentary frames its titular song-style as the bridge between more widely recognized movements like ska and reggae.

Rocksteady sounds very much like its name suggests — a sturdy, easy beat tailor-made for swaying — but it came out of a tumultuous period in Jamaican history.

Through a combination of interviews and archival footage, Bader illustrates how the island nation's official independence from Britain in the early 1960s and the subsequent rise of Rastafarianism gave rise to a new rhythmic form.

It also reunites a number of the genre's original practitioners and gives them a chance to strut their stuff.

Bader could not have made the film without the participation of several dozen singers legends gathered for a concert in Kingston; in addition to offering their reflections on the past, these performers show that they're still very potent in the present.

The songs are in some cases more familiar than the performers, but it's doubtful that anyone will be thinking of Boney M when they hear Rivers of Babylon as interpreted by the venerable Hopeton Lewis (Marcia Griffith's rendition of The Tide is High wrestles Blondie to a draw).

Rocksteady does meander at times (as in a compelling but superfluous sequence featuring Bob Marley's wife, Rita), but it serves as a valuable introduction to a valuable musical genre.



Many musicians participate in the documentary Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae.

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