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Tamlins and Stranger Cole perform in the music doc *Rocksteady*

ROCKSTEADY: THE ROOTS OF REGGAE (Stascha Bader). 90 minutes. Opens Friday (July 24). [For venues and times, see Movies.](#)

Movie Reviews

Rocksteady: The Roots Of Reggae

Rastas' roots

By Radheyen Simonpillai

A Rasta priest and his congregation sing in broken, unharmonious voices while native drums beat inconsistently. Their rendition of Rivers Of Babylon wouldn't sell any records, but it has much more soul than German outfit Boney M.'s bubbly disco version.

That's the strength of a solid musical doc like *Rocksteady: The Roots Of Reggae*. Give a song back its heritage and let it groove. Like Babylon, many Rocksteady-era hits have travelled far and lost their flavour. The Tide Is High was covered by Blondie and Atomic Kitten before Kardinal Offishall sampled it on this year's hip-pop track Numba 1. And Dawn Penn's You Don't Love Me (No, No, No) remains a wailing club anthem.

The original talents behind these songs – Hopeton Lewis, Penn and Marcia Griffiths among others – reminisce about the music that took them from ska to reggae and the cultural context it came from.

There's a contagious delight in seeing them let loose, and a sense of fond nostalgia at seeing archival footage.

But the film also feels contrived. Supposed “long-time coming” reunions between these talents feel laughably staged, and musician Stranger Cole's ongoing narration is so strained and artificial, it hurts your ears. He talks when he should really just be singing.

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NOW | July 22-29, 2009 | VOL 28 NO 47