

■ ARTS ... ETCETERA ■

Rocksteady's Jazz connection

By Christopher Olson
The Suburban

Among a stew of new and emerging musicians at this year's Montreal International Jazz Festival is a reunion of aging artists and crooners from the Rocksteady era.

Rocksteady, the 1960s genre which gave birth to reggae and later jazz, was known for its buoyant rhythms, prominent bass lines and soulful lyrics.

"It was a very short era in music history, but an era that music experts consider the golden age of Jamaican music," said Betty Palik from Muse Entertainment Enterprises Inc., which

co-produced the documentary *Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae* with HesseGreutert Film. The Swiss-Canadian co-production will be screened at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal starting July 4 and will be accompanied by a live concert reunion of artists

such as Judy Mowatt, Hopeton Lewis, Leroy Sibbles and Stranger Cole at the Montreal JazzFest.

At the height of its popularity, says Palik, Rocksteady artists were "writing in the morning and in the afternoon they were recording and there'd be a record out the next day."

Palik and Swiss director Stascha Bader felt a sense of urgency in reuniting the inventors of Rocksteady while they were still afforded the chance.

The film features new recording sessions with some of the artists' biggest hits, which will be released as part of the film's official soundtrack. Among its highlights is an interview with Rita Marley, the widow of reggae icon Bob Marley, as well as a scene with songstress Judy Mowatt. Lynn Taitt, a reggae artist from Trinidad who relocated to Terrebonne, Quebec, in the 1970s, was a pivotal factor in bringing the Swiss production to Montreal. The film was intended to centre around a reunion concert headlined by Taitt. Within weeks of the start of production, however, Taitt was diagnosed with cancer and could no longer take part.

"We spent a whole day filming [with him], and then finally when it came to the editing room we thought, 'we can't [use this], it's not right to him,'" recalled



Musician Stranger Cole is featured in the film and at the Jazz Fest.

Palik.

The filmmakers scrambled to find another band leader, and eventually found jazz artist Ernest Ranglin, a Rocksteady legend in his own right.

Jazz Fest organizers were keen on having the film's stars reunite at the festival for a free concert.

"They see this as the Rocksteady event of [the past] 40 years," said Palik.

The film will be screened at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal July 4-12 twice a day in English and with French subtitles. The stars of Rocksteady will be appearing at the Festival International de Jazz de Montreal on July 7 at 9 p.m. at Scène General Motors. The concert is free. ■

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