

# Rocksteady brings reggae roots to Montreal jazz fest

BY JOHN GRIFFIN AND MARK LEPAGE, THE GAZETTE JULY 8, 2009



The Tamlins' *Stop That Train* materialized at the Rocksteady Roots of Reggae tribute concert utterly intact from history during the Montreal International Jazz Festival on July 7, 2009.

**Photograph by:** Allen McInnis, The Gazette

MONTREAL - If you build the groove, they will come. Tuesday night, Hopeton Lewis, Ken Boothe, Leroy Sibbles, Stranger Cole, the Tamlins, Marcia Griffiths and Judy Mowatt, and Bongo Herman brought it all the way from Zion. They brought the film and history to life.

Call it Rocksteady: the Roots of Reggae, and call it tribute paid.

Mainly cloudless skies, a full-ish moon and cool weather called for musical warmth. And when bassist Clifton Jackie Jackson and drummer Paul Douglas laid down the People Rocksteady groove for Leroy Sibbles, life suddenly seemed that much simpler.

As stated, this had begun as a doc project to reassemble Rocksteady's progenitors and capture a musical source while it was still possible. Monday night at the Rocksteady film launch in the MAC, Swiss director Stascha Bader beamed as Marcia Griffiths et al. emerged from the screening room. It was, he confirmed, more than a film project, or even a labour of love. It was a mission.

"I felt a duty to document the beginnings of this," he said. "That it wasn't some angel named Bob Marley who descended from the heavens. It was music that rose from the people."

And here it was descending back upon them: another huge crowd packed into the Place des Festivals in defiance of another bogus weather forecast (or the same one, on an endless meteo rain-loop).

Because this truly was once-in-a-lifetime.

"I can't manufacture quotes on demand," said Jamaican country boy and longtime Montrealer Dr. Sul. "It has to be the right time and the right place."

He then proceeded to give great quote. "Where I grew up, we had radio but no electricity. We listened to colonial British music, American, Latin and African all mixed together. It's what makes Jamaica Jamaica."

This was Montreal being Montreal: a UN-diverse crowd bobbing along, ganja perfume wafting as resplendent showman Stranger Cole, delivered Love Me This Evening. He passed the syncopation baton on to the Tamlins, whose Stop That Train materialized utterly intact from history.

Staging was appropriately minimal: red-golden-green lighting as the Tamlins leaned deep into rasta roots and melded harmonies for a gorgeous Baltimore.

Contemporary, and ageless.

Introduced as "a princess, a queen," Marcia Griffiths owned the first undeniable hit in The Tide Is High, in her Hollywood/Carmen Miranda gown, with sweet keyboards from Robbie Lynn.

Now bring it down in No No No before she welcomes "another bird," Judy Mowatt, and the crowd gushes applause as they recreate their days as Bob Marley's gals in No Woman No Cry. The vibe was effortlessly tidal: and cue another wave of cheers for Could You Be Loved. "Montreal, stay alive!"

Griffiths cheered back. As sax, trumpet and trombone bounced off the chunking beat, that appeared likely.

As Mowatt worked the stage in Many Are Called, one wondered how these artists had managed to remain so well-preserved.

Oh yeah: As the rhythm pulses, time stands still.

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