

DO THE ROCKSTEADY

New doc reunites Jamaica's classic rocksteady hit makers

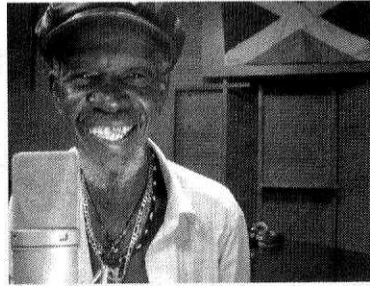
review Richard Burnett

The outsized musical legacy of Jamaica – a country of barely three million people, most of them descendants of slaves and indentured labourers – has for decades inspired and uplifted millions of people around the globe. We can thank the island nation for ska, rocksteady, reggae, dancehall and arguably the biggest and most important songwriter of the 20th century, Bob Marley.

But rocksteady, rooted in Jamaica's 1966–69 golden age of music, is an often-forgotten musical link. Without rocksteady there would be no reggae. The genre's greatest ambassador was the late Alton Ellis, whose 1967 hit *Come Do the Rocksteady* was the first song to use the term, and even Bob Marley recorded a rocksteady song at the tail end of the phenomenon.

In this beautifully shot doc from director Stascha Bader, a who's who of rocksteady reunite in the days preceding their big reunion concert last year. The film focuses on the Tuff Gong studio reunions of performers Hopeton Lewis, Leroy Sibbles, Derrick Morgan, Marcia Griffiths and Judy Mowatt of I-Three (Bob Marley and The Wailers' back-up singers), U-Roy the "Originator," Dawn Penn, narrator Stranger Cole (so-named because he didn't look like anybody else in his family) and Mr. Rocksteady himself, Ken Boothe. There is also a "special" appearance by Rita Marley who, like Yoko Ono, clearly seems to think she is as important as her husband.

The film's new studio recordings of such old rocksteady hits like *You Don't Love Me Anymore*, *No No No*, *Tide Is High* and *Rivers of Babylon* – produced by Montrealer Mos "Mossman" Raxlen and featuring the



JAMAICAN MUSIC LEGEND STRANGER COLE NARRATES *ROCKSTEADY: THE ROOTS OF REGGAE*

photo Courtesy Muse Entertainment

sweet backup vocals of the harmonizing trio The Tamlins – are interspersed with poignant and insightful interviews leading up to the reunion concert.

"The times were great in the rocksteady era," Stranger Cole narrates. "There was so much love and unity. There was no jealousy or envy among singers and musicians. The rocksteady days were the real love days of Jamaican music."

That love saturates every single frame of *Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae*, one of the best docs about Jamaican music ever filmed. (→)

Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae

At the Musée d'Art Contemporain, July
4–12

See Hour's Music section for info on
the outdoor Rocksteady concert July
7, featuring most of the film's
performers