



BUNNY LEE & FRIENDS - GOOD NEWS -

"Me never remember dis one!", said Bunny Lee with a kind of sheepish grin. *"I never remember dis till you play it. It bad man! Gimme a cut of that an' the version too!"*

The song in question was "I Man Naah Run" by Owen Gray, released on Count Shelley's Third World label in 1976, but the truly remarkable thing to me was that Bunny couldn't remember it! Was this the same Bunny Lee who could remember the details of every recording session, every singer, every musician, every studio, every engineer, but somehow, inexplicably, this one had disappeared down the memory hole? The song rides the same rhythm as Derrick Morgan's "Rasta Don't Fear" which Bunny could certainly recall, but as for the Owen Gray cut he seemed slightly bemused, muttering to himself *"Me never remember 'im sing 'pon this one!"*

But I suppose when you've worked with as many great singers and produced as many records as Bunny has it's probably inevitable that there's going to be one that slips under the radar. Indeed, the roll call of great singers Bunny has worked with who are not included on this compilation - the likes of Slim Smith, Alton Ellis, Delroy Wilson, Dennis Brown, Pat Kelly, Max Romeo, Ken Boothe, Horace Andy, Linval Thompson, Barry Brown etc. - is going to be considerably longer than the list of artists included on this set.

Nevertheless, this release features nine great singers ranging from veterans such as Owen Gray, Derrick Morgan and Jackie Edwards to vocalists who emerged later like Cornell Campbell, John Holt, Ronnie Davis, Leroy Smart, Joy White and Johnny Clarke. The tracks included on this set were originally released between the years 1975 to 1978 and range in subject matter from straightforward love songs to socially aware roots and reality themes with all the singers proving themselves equally adept at the different styles.



Good News kicks off the album in fine style with Ronnie Davis riding Striker's re-cut of John Holt's "Sad News", which was originally issued on the obscure Studio One imprint Faze Four. Bunny's cut is surely best known for the Johnny Clarke classic "Move Outa Babylon" but he went on to use the rhythm for numerous artists including Max Romeo ("Natty Dread Take Over"), Tommy McCook ("Move Out") and Dillinger ("Dub Scrub Them").

Bunny Lee - "This is a John Holt tune that 'im sing named "Sad News" so I change it around an I say 'I want to hear some good news'. The musicians was Earl "Chinna" Smith, Tony Chin, Robbie Shakespeare, Carlton "Santa" Davis on drums, you hear the flyers? I dub in the horns when I do this and the horns was Bobby Ellis, Lennox Brown and Tommy McCook."

Not such good news for Johnny Clarke who is headed to **Up Park Camp**, headquarters of the Jamaica Defence Force, which housed the draconian Gun Court and its associated detention centre, set up in 1974 by Michael Manley's PNP government in response to the rising wave of gun crime in Jamaica. The song is a cover of John Holt's 1976 smash hit for Channel One, itself an update of The Heptones' Studio One rhythm "Get In The Groove".

Bunny Lee - "Niney did make this riddim, at Channel One. I take a cut from Niney and put Johnny Clarke 'pon it. Same set of musicians but George Fullwood play the bass".

Niney's rhythm is most readily identified with Gregory Isaacs' "Slavemaster" but he also used it for various deejay versions including two by I-Roy ("Point Blank Observer Style" and "Camp Road Skanking"). Ossie Hibbert also licked it over for the deejay cut of "Slavemaster", Dillinger's "Take A Dip".

Cornell Campbell recorded many Gorgon-themed tracks for Bunny and **Gorgon A The Ginegog** is one that didn't make it on to the Blood and Fire "I Shall Not Remove" set in 2000. It was a 1975 release in the UK on the Grounation label under the somewhat hilarious title of "Gorgan At The Ginesos". Obviously someone at Grounation had difficulty reading the hand-written title on the tape box!

Bunny Lee - "See di man deh a ginegog, that mean seh like you are the champion, that you inna the t'ing longtime. 'Some a ginegog, some a hooligan'. Where yuh find dis? Beca' dat one deh a rare y'unno!"

Derrick Morgan is best known for his numerous hits during the ska and rocksteady eras but in reality he has never stopped recording and he was certainly active in the mid-Seventies when he made the four little-known tunes included on this compilation. The first of these, **Teach My Daughter**, is an update of "Teach My Baby", a song he originally recorded for Leslie Kong's Beverley's Records in 1962.

Few Jamaican female singers have had the kind of prolific output enjoyed by their male counterparts and Joy White is no exception. In 1974, the year prior to recording **Idlers On The Street** at Harry J's studio she cut a handful of sides for Lloyd 'Spiderman' Campbell including "Dread Out De" and a cover of the Mary Wells classic "My Guy". In the same year she also recorded "Lady Lady" for Lee Perry with "Enter The Dragon" by the Upsetters on the flip. She has continued to record sporadically ever since for outfits as diverse as Germany's FünfUndVierzig, Roof International and Jazzy Creations.



Rasta Don't Fear is another update of a classic Derrick Morgan song, this time his massive 1967 rocksteady hit "Tougher Than Tough (Rudie In Court)" which he made for producer Leslie Kong. Robbie Shakespeare adds a real kick to the bassline on this 1975 re-cut.

Owen Gray has been described as "Jamaica's first home-grown singing star". Riding the same rhythm as "Rasta Don't Fear" this 1976 UK release on Third World finds him adopting his "rough" voice to send out the defiant message **I Man Naah Run** to every bad man, gunman, knifeman, koorakong, King Kong, ginegog, gorgon and dragon!

Recorded at Randy's studio and released in 1975 on the Hot Stuff label the Cornell Campbell original **Jah Forgive Me** perfectly demonstrates the vocalist's technical mastery as his voice glides fluidly from tenor to falsetto and back again.

We Want To Go Home first appeared on the 1977 Super Star album on Jackpot in Jamaica and Third World in the UK, and was subsequently issued as a 45 on Attack UK. The rhythm is Bunny's re-cut of Dennis Brown's 1973 hit "Tribulation", produced by Niney The Observer. Here Leroy Smart gives a typically impassioned performance on a repatriation-themed lyric in his own unmistakable and inimitable vocal style. **"Ee-yo, ee-yeah!"** Tenor saxophonist Tommy McCook and trombonist Vin Gordon also make their presence felt on the track, though their playing can be heard to best effect on the dub cut "Going Home Dub" which is included on King Spinna's first release "Dub Will Change Your Mind" [KSPCD 001]. As an interesting side-note on the rhythm, things came full circle when Sly & Robbie used Bunny's re-cut to voice Joy White singing the original Dennis Brown song "Tribulation" for their Taxi label.

Two more songs from Derrick Morgan reflect on the dread times and turbulent political situation of 1976 Jamaica, observing on the first song that soldiers, police and gunmen have the people **Under Heavy Manners**.

Bunny Lee - "This was the first tune Sly play for me, yes, at Channel One. Now this is Cornell Campbell a play bass and Horace Andy play guitar".

On **Pick Sense Out Of Nonsense** the focus shifts from the socio-political to the spiritual as Derrick declares that "Jah is going to put us under heavy discipline", over a jumping rhythm propelled by Tony Chin's wah wah guitar and embellished with tasteful lead guitar flourishes courtesy of Earl "Chinna" Smith.

At first glance Derrick Morgan and Johnny Clarke might seem an unlikely pairing , but they do harmonise beautifully on this 1975 re-make of **Behold**, the 1962 original having been performed and written by Philip James and Lloyd Campbell a.k.a. The Blues Busters.



Former Tennors, Westmorlites and Itals vocalist Ronnie Davis certainly knows how to take a lyric by the scruff of its neck and wring the last ounce of emotion out of it. His rendition of **That's Life** must surely be one of the standout performances of this set. *"Fight fight fight, fight with all your might!"*

Wilfred "Jackie" Edwards was already a longtime music veteran when he cut this tune for Bunny. In 1962 he travelled to London with Chris Blackwell to help establish Island Records and was soon recording for the label and also developing as a prolific songwriter. This led to two of Jackie's compositions "Keep On Running" and "Somebody Help Me" being recorded by The Spencer Davis Group fronted by a teenage Stevie Winwood. Both were UK Number Ones, in 1965 and 1966 respectively. On this song written by Carl Dobson especially for the 1975 Jamaica Independence Festival Jackie celebrates all things Jamaican such as the doctor bird and ackee and saltfish, delivered in his familiar smooth as velvet tone.

Cornell Campbell returns with another update of a John Holt tune; **Have You Changed Your Mind** first appeared on the 1973 album "My Desire", also produced by Bunny Lee. This version is presented in a straightforward reggae style whereas the John Holt original managed to combine blues and doo-wop influences (as did the entire "My Desire" album)

Bunny Lee – "Yeah, Sly & Robbie dis, Winston Wright 'pon keyboard. Where you find dem tune?"

It's seemingly impossible to describe John Holt's voice without descending into cliché. "Relaxed", "effortless", "assured"; these epithets have surely been used a thousand times, but like all good clichés they stand the test of time and most certainly apply to **In The Springtime**. Here, with a slight change of title, John takes on David Ruffin's 1976 Motown release "Everything's Coming Up Love" and sings it beautifully.

Cornell Campbell's final contribution to this set **My One And Only Lover** is of course an update of the 1973 Gregory Isaacs' hit "My Only Lover", the record that kick-started Gregory's career after an initial series of releases failed to make an impression.

The thing that always strikes me about Jamaican singers is that when they step up to the microphone they are **ready!** No messing about in JA studios, it's often one take and you're done! Especially if you're working for a producer like Bunny Lee. In addition to being blessed with natural vocal talent all the singers featured here have done their homework and honed their technical skills, and each is a master of their instrument. Many of these artists had to wait years before getting their chance to record so when the opportunity came along it was **serious business!** And of course Bunny had lots of little tricks to get the best out of his singers.

A special mention should be made of Robbie Shakespeare who plays on all but two of the tracks on this album. Tough, tight and at the same time highly melodic, his basslines add an extra dimension to these recordings. The opening track "Good News" provides a perfect example.

Bob Harding, May 2013

