



**A**s I was listening the other day to a fine CD by Kenyatta “Culture” Hill, son of the late and sadly missed Joseph Hill, it struck me that reggae, more than any other cultural genre I can think of, has a rich tradition of passing talent—musical talent, in this case—from one generation to another. The most obvious example, of course, is the first family of reggae, name of Marley, and more about them in a moment.

When Joseph Hill, the revered leader of the wonderful harmony group Culture, passed away almost two years ago, only a few hours after his final stage appearance, in Germany, fans around the world were grief-stricken—and, as we mourned, we also resigned ourselves to the sad fact we’d probably never hear his like again.

Then we started reading about Joseph’s son, Kenyatta, taking over his father’s lead role and bravely continuing the Culture tour. He’d been on the road

with his dad, as the group’s engineer, for many years, making a behind-the-scenes name for himself as a master of the sound board, but he’d never performed live and never recorded.

We also read about audience members at those emotional shows

breaking down in tears when they realised that Kenyatta sounded so much like Joseph and moved on stage so much like Joseph. He often cried too, moved both by their response and by the memories of his father as he sang songs like Two Sevens Clash,

Natty Never Get Weary, International Herb and Fussing and Fighting, reggae classics that for decades have been associated with Culture Senior.

Then we read of more stage performances, many of them in Jamaica in front of the most demanding and

knowledgeable reggae audiences in the world. And again, the reports were glowing. At one show, the great dub poet Mutabaruka, who was emceeing, told the crowd that in his estimation Kenyatta sounded more like his father than the offspring of any other reggae great.

**Reggae, more than any other cultural genre I can think of, has a rich tradition of passing talent from one generation to another**



Listening to the son  
of the late great  
singer Joseph Hill,  
Garry Steckles  
reflects on the reggae  
talents being handed  
down through the  
generations

*Photograph courtesy Fast Lane  
International*

*From left Telford Nelson, Kenyatta Hill,  
Albert Walker*

And a member of the audience, expressing herself in a purely Jamaican way, put it like this: "Culture body might be dead, but his voice nuh gone nowhere. What a bwoy sound like him father!"

Those accolades—and there could be no greater compliment—came to mind recently when I got my eager hands on *Pass The Torch* by Kenyatta "Culture" Hill.

The title's more than a little misleading—the CD consists of seven songs by Kenyatta, along with seven that his father had completed or almost completed before passing away. And of Joseph's seven, most are new versions of Culture staples, numbers like *Why Worry* and *Study Rasta*.

On one or two of his own tracks, Kenyatta sounds distinctly like the great Joseph—the biting, raspy tenor, the spot-on phrasing, the fine sense of melody.

On other tracks, Kenyatta shows

# PASSING ON THE CULTURE

that he has his own voice. One, *The Message*, is very much in a Marleyesque vein, tempo-wise. Another, *Rasta Empress Haffe Clean*, is dancehall of the highest calibre, rhythmically. The words, I have to say, are anything but. Observations on bodily odours have no place on a CD invoking the name of a reggae group that always took the high road lyrically.

Kenyatta's emergence from virtual obscurity to becoming a potentially worthy successor to his father is by no means unique in the world of Jamaican music.

Tarrus Riley, whose *Parables* is one of the finest reggae albums of this century, is at the forefront of what is shaping up as a new wave of conscious roots reggae. His lyrics are innovative—his take on a world dominated by computers is priceless; the song's ending, the sound of a computer grinding to a standstill, even more so—his melodies are sweet, sweet, sweet, and so is his voice. Tarrus, of course, is the son of roots veteran Jimmy Riley, for decades one of the leading solo performers in Jamaica and a founding member of the fine harmony trio the Uniques.

Other sons and daughters of reggae stars making their mark on the current scene include Queen Ifrica, daughter of the chart-busting ska pioneer Derrick Morgan; Sugar Minott's daughter, Pashon; Alton Ellis's son, Noel; Freddie McGregor's daughter, Yashemabeth; and Gregory Isaacs' son, Kevin. Reggae royalty all.

Which brings us back to those never-ending Marleys. Best known of Bob's offspring are Grammy-winning dancehall-roots sensation Damian "Junior Gong"

Marley, the multi-talented Stephen, oldest son Ziggy and Julian, who record and perform, often together, under the Ghetto Youths International umbrella. They also work frequently with another of Bob's gifted sons, Ky-Mani, a highly successful musician and, in recent years, movie star. Bob's daughters Cedella and Sharon, original members of the popular *Melody Makers*, along with Ziggy and Stephen, continue to be involved with music and much more, having broadened their horizons and careers into the worlds of movies, fashion and business.

**"What a bwoy sound like him father!"**

And, just as their dad did with oldest son Ziggy, his children are now bringing their own children on to the stage. And that shouldn't surprise anyone familiar with the Marley family's long musical history, which goes back way before Bob's emergence as the Third World's first superstar. Bob's mother, Cedella, is a talented singer, with several albums to her credit, while her mother, Alberta, was an outstanding member of her church choir. Bob's grandfather, Omeriah, was also a skilled musician, playing accordion and banjo in mento-quadrille bands.

Reggae wasn't created until the Sixties, but its artistic roots go back a long, long way further than that. And it's becoming increasingly clear that they're going to continue to spread, not only through the current generation, but through many more to come. ■