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**Culture**

STEPHEN DALTON AT THE JAZZ CAFÉ

★★★★☆

With their London show on Thursday, Culture proved almost miraculously defiant in the face of adversity. Despite the unexpected death of their founder and frontman Joseph Hill last week, the Jamaican roots-reggae veterans have taken the bold decision to continue their European tour without breaking their stride. Their Jazz Café date was a euphoric celebration of Hill's life-affirming musical legacy.

Culture, who were friends and contemporaries of Bob Marley, began life as a close-harmony trio, releasing their debut album in 1976. Since the 1980s they have weathered splits and dormant periods, but they recently returned to strong form, releasing their latest album in 2003.

The show began with hearty tributes to Hill. Then the late singer's son Kenyatta stepped into the limelight, flanked by co-vocalists Albert Walker and Telford Nelson. A towering beanpole, Hill Jr was the youngest and tallest person on stage, his fresh-faced vigour and bright cannabis-leaf T-shirt in sharp contrast to the grey beards and military fatigues of his colleagues. But he proved to be a natural performer, charismatic and energetic.

Built around a steady procession of midtempo "rock steady" rhythms and splashy keyboard flourishes, most of the set sounded simultaneously soothing and strident. Steeped in three-part harmonies and soulful melodies, there were echoes of vintage Motown and even doowop to lilting tunes such as *Love Shine*

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*Bright, Zion Gate* and *The International Herb*. Hill modified some lyrics, dropping in lines from Peter Tosh's pro-cannabis anthem *Legalise It* and even *There's no Business like Showbusiness*. He also worked the crowd with Rastafarian chants, prayers and political diatribes. Like father, like son.

Culture have always managed to sound indestructibly upbeat, even at their most pessimistic. Although it was written as a protest against street violence in late 1970s *Jamaica, Stop Fussing and Fighting* bounced along like a sun-kissed carnival crowd-pleaser. Likewise, the band's signature tune *Two Sevens Clash*, conceived by Joseph Hill as an apocalyptic prophecy to mark the ominous arrival of 1977, is still an infectious dancefloor filler three decades later. Take away any sympathy factor and this would still have been a terrific show. More magic than tragic, it was less about death than rebirth.



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