

Dub Me

The team of Maurice 'Blacka' Wellington and Eric 'Bingy Bunny' Lamont, known professionally as the Morwells, first got together to make music in 1973. The pair had been friends from boyhood, growing up around the Trenchtown area; they sold copies of The Star newspaper together. Bingy Bunny started out on record alongside percussionist Bongo Herman Davis during 1971-72, cutting sides for Derrick Harriott like "Know Far I", "We Are Praying", and "Salaam (Peace)". Blacka had been active as a freelance producer since 1972, when he released the tune "Last Call" by deejay Sir Harry.

The early seventies saw many ghetto-based artists asserting their independence from the big production outfits like Randy's and Dynamic. Groups like the Abyssinians, the Royals, and the African Brothers, solo artists like Errol Dunkley and Gregory Isaacs and deejays like Big Youth, U.Roy and Jah Lloyd all ran their own labels. Even if they weren't always able to get the biggest hits, they at least had the satisfaction of controlling every aspect of their output. The Morwells followed this pattern; operating from premises in the Kingston Arcade on King Street, Blacka and Bingy Bunny made a tune called "Mafia Boss" and released it on a label called 'MOR-WELL ESQ.' On the same imprint, Blacka put out tracks like "Meaning Of Life" by Heptone Barry Llewellyn, a co-production with one of his brothers and deejay Lloyd Young. But the most important of all was a melodic instrumental by Joe White called "Victory Song". Recorded on the same day as the Pete Weston session that produced Tommy McCook and Bobby Ellis's instrumental "Dracula", the "Victory Song" rhythm became a real classic. Joe White's original cut fitted parts of the "Peanut Vendor" melody over the rhythm, but it became much better known after the hit vocal cut, Little Roy's "Prophecy". The rhythm, with its brutally simple but wholly effective bassline, has propelled hundreds of versions in the dancehall, particularly after Sly's "Unmetered Taxi" version came out in 1982. It was there underpinning Foxy Brown's "Fast Car" for Steellie & Clevie in 1989; that year alone there were seven one-rhythm albums featuring it. Freddie McGregor got another hit with his revival of Little Roy's song in 1991; Bounty Killer deejayed on King Jammy's 1995 lick of the rhythm and the same year it even turned up on a Mariah Carey remix.

Back in 1974, the Morwells became a trio when Louis Davis joined early that year. Davis, who had sung in the Versatiles with Junior Byles, taught Bingy Bunny how to play guitar, thus setting him on a route which would eventually take him from the Morwells to the leading session bands of the ensuing decade - the Revolutionaries and then the Roots Radics. He became the arranger for the Morwells group. Recording at Channel One Studio, the trio cut "You Got To Be Holy" and they were on their way. The record sold enough to be rated a success and they followed with nice recuts of the Melodians' rocksteady classics "Swing & Dine" and "Come On Little Girl". These shots were particularly popular in the UK; the group linked up with Sir Jessus, owner of a sound system based in Shepherd's Bush, West London. He played a lot of Morwells music on his set and released the group's "Bit By Bit", a strong seller in the UK reggae market in 1975. His shop at 186B Goldhawk Road was the UK outlet for their product, including the first two Morwells albums released in Jamaica the same year. The vocal debut "Presenting The Morwells" featured a sleeve note written by Gregory Isaacs; it included the Melodians covers and versions of Delroy Wilson's "I Don't Know Why", alongside "Bit By Bit", "You Got To Be Holy" and five more originals. Although dub albums like Herman Chin Loy's "Aquarius Dub", Lee Perry's "Blackboard Jungle", Clive Chin's "Java Java Java Java", and Errol Thompson and Joe Gibb's "Dub Serial" had appeared in 1973, it wasn't until 1975 that dub in the album format really started to make an impact on the reggae market. Soon, every producer would have his own dub set, but the Morwells "Dub Me" was among the first wave that hit that year. Mixed by King Tubby, it versioned six of the songs on the vocal album, including two different mixes of their "Movie Star" version. We have added four extra tracks for this reissue: a further cut to "Swing & Dine" ("Swing & Dub"), the dub to "You Got To Be Holy" ("Ethiopians Special"), a version to the instrumental "Brentford Rock" ("Morpheus Special"), and the Black Ark-recorded "Stepping In H.Q.", which is the dub to "Mother Long Tongue". The slow, deliberate rhythms - the drum and bass of Eric Clarke and Flabba Holt at their heart - all predate the rockers style; King Tubby's mix is suitably mellow and his use of ambient sound effects - a thunderstorm on "Lightning & Thunder", a jet taking off on "Concord" - sparing and subtle.

During 1976 the group released solid roots tunes like "Proverb", "Crab In A Bag" "Run Bald Head" and "We Nah Go Run Away", some of which would feature on their 1978 album "Crab Race". But by this time Bingy Bunny was an in-demand session guitarist with the Revolutionaries at Channel One, and Blacka had begun working as a producer at Joe Gibbs studio on Retirement Road. Blacka worked with Culture when they were called African Disciples; in fact he claims to have renamed them as Culture. He wrote tunes like "Running Up And Down" with Dennis Brown and "No Man's Land" for Cornell Campbell. On the Morwells label he released tunes by Delroy Wilson, Ranking Trevor and his brother Nicodemus. The vocal group

went on to make two more albums - "Cool Runnings" in 1979 and "Kingston 12 Toughie" in 1980 - and a steady flow of singles. The Morwells had over fifty releases on their label during 1975-1980, many of which never appeared on their albums. Occasionally they worked with other producers - they made a couple of singles with Niney the Observer and Joe Gibbs, and released music through Prince Tony Robinson.

By 1980 the Morwells had ceased recording; Errol 'Flabba' Holt and Bingy Bunny had formed the Roots Radics in 1978 and begun working with producers like Don Mais, Junjo Lawes and Linval Thompson; they also formed an alliance with Gregory Isaacs, that proved one of the most successful in the history of reggae, culminating in the 1981 crossover hit "Night Nurse". Bingy Bunny had the odd solo hit, like "Me & Jane" in 1979, but it was as a crucial member of the Radics that he would make his contribution; they would rule the dancehalls until the mid-eighties. Blacka continued production, recording material with Nicodemus and Junior Byles, eventually relocating to New York where he still lives today, occasionally reissuing material. Amongst his recent projects was an album compiled as a tribute to Bingy Bunny who died from prostate cancer on December 31 1993, survived by his wife and six children.

The Morwells showed what could be done with little more than musical talent, hustling ability and determination; they managed to make an impact on the musical history of Jamaica that lasted way beyond their early days as a struggling roots group. The contribution made by groups like them cannot be overestimated, but has somehow rarely been celebrated. We hope that this album of dubs from their foundation days will continue to address that imbalance.

Steve Barrow / March 1997

Dedicated to the memory of Cecil 'Nicodemus' Wellington [27th June 1957 - 26th August 1996]

Eric 'Bingy Bunny' Lamont [23rd September 1955 - December 31st 1993]