

## Original Ragga Muffin (1975-77)

*Although there had been deejay pioneers like the late Winston Count Machuki, Red Hopeton, Cuttins, Phantom, Count Benz, Prince Ruff, Buttercup, Sir Lord Comic and King Stitt talking up a potent mix of Kingston slang and Harlem jive since the beginning of the fifties, it wasn't until U. Roy first committed lyrics to wax for producers Keith Hudson, Bunny Lee and Duke Reid during 1969 that deejay music truly came of age. After U. Roy's example, the Jamaican deejays who followed ensured that this new musical form would become a permanent feature in popular music. Today, talking on a rhythm is a worldwide phenomenon, but it is worth noting that this new form of self-expression evolved in Jamaica first; the ever-present competition between sound systems meant that as soon as sets like Ruddy's Supreme in Spanish Town began playing the instrumental versions of popular rock steady rhythms, they created space for deejays like U. Roy, then deejay for Tubby's Home Town Hi-Fi, to improvise lyrics on the rhythm. All this would inspire successive generations of artists whose only instrument would be a microphone; amongst them the subject of this compilation, Jah Stitch. Living in downtown Kingston, the old centre of Jamaica's capital, Jah Stitch, born Melbourne James 27 July 1949 had become a follower of sound system early in his life:*

Well when I was around say 11 to 12, we use to (be) down at Princes Street, down at our little corner there. We use to listen to music - the bredda wha' use to operate Sir George (the Atomic) name Prince Ruff, 'im come from down our way, so we as kids jus' stick to 'im. 'Im was a neat selector, dress good, an' play a lot a music - 'im tek it very seriously, an' I did really like how 'im deejay, how 'im play music. So I was dere too. Yu 'ave a bredda dere name Finger - 'im now was a man who do beach hut. 'Im did 'ave money, an' 'im like sound business. So, 'im ave this lickle box an' ting, an' we use to 'ave it 'pon the corner. We a play with it, till we call it 'Fingertone', an' we 'ave it deh-deh. We start build up, build up, one box, two box, t'ree box, an' it start sound good now. Then 'im seh: mek we mek a big sound an' start use it as party business. An' we carry it 'til we start get 'nuff date now.... We deh a country one day, a bredda name Wong Chu a select the sound, an' me start deejay. Me seh: Fingertone mek yu tip, yu tip up an' yu tip down. The people dem jus' love that. From that now, when me come up back (to Kingston), me seh: we a go change the sound name from Fingertone to Tippetone. Me start go round an' me seh: Tipper mek yu walk, an' a Tipper mek yu talk....

When me go all a country, when dance done, the people jus' follow me. Me seh: bwoy, so many people a follow me.... an' all a the kids - everyting me seh, dem say it. From that time me seh: look like me a fe go be a deejay, ca' the people dem like me.

Me deh 'mongst Tippetone until a yout' come name Clive, an' Jah Wise, an' the whole a we a play the sound. Dem time deh Big Youth nah come yet. Me a play the sound until the man dem a get greedy - dem alone a get the money, an' me only a do the work. So me look 'pon dem an' say: Ya 'ear me - me a get a sound fe kill unnu yunno, beca' unnu nah wan' let off....

*In spite of financial disagreements with the owners of the Tippetone sound, Stitch retains fond memories of the deejay who not only came to prominence on the set, but who also changed Jamaican deejay music irrevocably, chanting truth and rights for ghetto people in a way that unquestionably broadened the scope of deejay art:*

Well, 'twas on Tippetone me an' Big Youth use to spar. We use to deejay, walk an' deejay. We use to go round an' lissen to the deejays dem talk - we use to say: 'Dem deejay bwoy cyaan chat man, mek we go kill dem!' An' me an' Big Youth jus' go an' hold the mike an' start. We sound similar - that time before me shot, we sound similar - ca' if you listen to 'Danger Zone' you see me sound like Big Youth. So he would talk an' gi' me the mike, an' you don't know which one a we would be talkin'. So one night we go up a Papine. This sound name Kentone a play, an' Lord Comic a talk. Me say: 'Big Youth, dat bredda deh a comic!' From me an' Big Youth a talk, the place tear down, people jus' start come in so, an' me an' Big Youth deejay the whole night. When Kentone say we mus' come talk, we say no, we jus' show dem bredda comic! But when Big Youth start the recordin', me never interested. Y'see, me was bad boy, me nah in a no music business. Me jus' like the vibes. Me did get in a lickle trouble too - me an' some boy fight, so me get in a trouble fe damage dem. So when me in a place of safety, me 'ear Big Youth a voice. So when me come out now, me say the firs' ting me wan' do is record. An' me an' Big Youth nice, an' me do 'Danger Zone', an' then me do the tune name 'Give Jah The Glory'. Big Youth tek offence fe dat tune deh, it's like 'im seh 'im did 'ave a idea fe do that tune, an' 'im a say is 'is lyrics, an' all dem ting deh. Is no really 'is lyric; it was a Christian tune yunno, somebody go a church an' sing 'Rise and shine children, and give God the Glory'. It was a hymnbook music dat me got it from. Me use to deejay 'Natty rise an' shine an' give Jah the glory', yunno, 'pon the sound. So from that me an' 'im nah too really.... until we buck up a England now, an' we start reason back nice again.

*Following his term in a 'place of safety', Stitch was looking to deejay on his own sound:*

So, by this time a nex' dread deh 'bout the place, an' 'im 'ave some money. 'Im want do some investment, but 'im nah know fe do, 'til 'im seh: yunno, me like sound. An' me seh: Sound? Dat me want yunno, me want a sound fe kill Tippertone!

So we get a bredda name Froggy - 'im build Tippertone, an' 'im build Sir Coxson - 'im is a good technician. So we use 'im, an' we call the sound Black Harmony. When we build Black Harmony, we tell Tippertone well, this sound a go kill unnu. Dem seh: go ahead, unnu no sound so good.

We start down the Farm - Ninth Street. Me start pick up records, but we never 'ave no portion a dub, but most a Coxson's tunes dem, with the versions, an' we use dem. The first night we start play Ninth Street, it did start 'pon a Monday, an' we play straight back to the nex' Monday. No stoppin', every night it RAM. We start get a lot a dates, an' the people say, bwoy, a new sound a come. Dat time Ray Symbolic, with Rankin' Joe and Jah Screw use to play down there, an' Channel One did 'ave a nex' sound. An' so we mash it up - dem two sound cyaan get no crowd, me a jus' flop the place. We start run tings now. My sound was the firs' sound mek singers start sing on it. Me firs' put Johnnie Clarke an' Linval Thompson to sing on my sound....

*Playing in the Greenwich Farm area of Kingston, it wasn't long before Stitch came to the attention of producer Bunny Lee:*

I use to go to the studio to cut the dubs dem, fe play on the sound, an' I get a music from Channel One with the Mighty Diamonds. It was 'Poor Marcus' - dem never love poor Marcus. I like their lyrics, but the riddim wasn't right. So I bring it to Bunny Lee. Bunny Lee use to hear 'bout me, an' see me all the while, an' lissen, beca' down at his yard me a play, but Bunny Lee never interested fe use deejay. Anyway, when I carry the dub to 'im, I say; 'Bunny, lissen dis'. 'Im say: 'Alright, I 'ave the exact riddim fe it'.

So me an' Johnnie Clarke, an' Wayne Jarrett, an' Horace - the whole a we go a studio. That night Bunny Lee say all deejay mus' come, an' we go 'ave someting called deejay jamboree. Me never record yet, an' none a who was dere never record yet neither. That was U Brown, Rankin' Joe - dat time dere 'im name Little Joe. Horace Andy did 'ave a deejay name Jah Bull weh 'im carry from uptown, weh 'im play a sound name Emperor Marcus. Even the night, me never wan' record. Me say: 'Boy, Bunny, me nah in a no recordin' business'. 'Im say me coward, a coward. Me say: alright.... so me go to Harmony, dat a the bredda weh a control the sound, an' me say come.... (At the session) Me aks 'im: 'How the man say Harmony?' 'Im say: 'How ya mean, this ya sound a the killer!'

I do 'Danger Zone' fe Flabba Holt the same day at Channel One. When me go up a Channel One, me go fe do a tune, but me nah know which tune me a go do, me nah even 'ave the riddim or nuttin' yet. Thru' dem nah ready fe me yet I go up a lickle more up the road an' go in a yard where dem 'ave some weed an' chalice. As me look, me see a Bible open. Me jus' tek up the Bible an' me read: 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil'. Me say: 'No, Rasta cyaan deal with death'. So me change it up, an' me say: 'Yea though I walk thru' the shadow of the valley of the wicked, natty fear no evil'. Dat was the punchline me 'ave. As me done draw the chalice an' go at the studio, dem ready fe me. Me jus' go in deh an' me say: 'Rastafari liveth in the heart of everyone I-tinually, this one is called the Danger Zone' an' me jus' start.... one cut, an' me lick dat, an' me feel nice now, an' me say: yeah, me 'ave a tune.

*Both 'Danger Zone' and 'The Killer' were very successful in the UK; producer Lee was quick to capitalize on this breakthrough in what was then easily the largest market for reggae:*

After that Bunny say me mus' do some more tune, so me go a nex' night. Bunny carry me back in the studio a night now with this bredda name Phil - Philip Smart. An' that bredda, me like how 'im 'ave a vibes, so me do 'Strictly Rockers' an' 'Greedy Girl' (both available, along with 'The Killer' on the compilation 'If Deejay Was Your Trade' BAFCD/LP 001) an' 'Give Jah The Glory'. After me do dem tune, me tear up the place an' everybody jus' a check fe me, now me a get big on the music scene.

*Armed with the tapes, Bunny Lee went to England to arrange the UK release of the tunes with Count Shelley, then based in Stoke Newington:*

So Bunny Lee gone a foreign, an' my sound, which is Black Harmony, go on. Me a go round Tippertone now. Dem seh well, fe see who is the best, we went a clash. So we line up a clash between we an' Tippertone. With Tippertone now, the bredda weh play Tippertone, which was my bredrin too, 'im get in a conflic' with some bredda, an' 'im get killed. When 'im get killed everyone wan' put the blame 'pon me. Seh a thru' me 'fraid a 'im as a selector, mek we line up somebody fe kill 'im. So dem ting deh never matter to me anyway - 'im was my bredrin too, an' me feel it fe 'im. Me would a prefer no clash, an' 'im alive. Though me really wan' kill fe dem sound yunno!

*In spite of Stitch's desire to avoid my ill-feeling, subsequent events proved far more dangerous:*

So, everybody a gi' me dem record, an' me a fe meet Ernest (Hookim), dat a Channel One original. 'Im say 'im 'ave the dub fe gi' me that the Revolutionaries a play. Dat a downtown deh, where dem 'ave dem pressin' plant. Me suppose to wait 'pon 'im down there fe it. An' then me see Jack Ruby, an' 'im gi' me an album, Burning Spear, which name 'Marcus Ghost' - dat was a nex' instrumental. So when me get dat from

'im now, same time me down deh a wait fe Ernest. Two bredda a come down an' say to me, why me jus' leave Tippertone so, an' gone fe this new sound? So me say: no progress on deh with Tippertone - too much man, me a fe go 'pon my own. But thru' me get so big an' bad, everybody a follow me now. Dem say me mus' come back on fe dem sound. But me wouldn't come back on fe dem sound. So dem a wild me up, an' me an' the bredda ketch up. And then me get shot.

When me really get shot, me deh-deh, an' me an' dem start fight. Dem couldn't manage me, an' dem go 'way. But when me an' dem deh-deh an' start fight, a man walk up to me, an' 'im look like a police. 'Im start aks me wha' appen. Me say me an' dem man in some argument. 'Im say, come, mek we go round. Me say, who is you, fi go round deh so? Me know what happen round deh so, pure gangster round deh so.

Around deh so me come from, so me know. By the time me look, me see two man come, an' a bredda 'ave a rag a cover someting. Me did a check seh it was a cutlass. The bredda back off the rag an' me see it is a gun. The bredda weh look like police a get panic now, an' let me go, an' say 'im nah know nuttin'. Me get panic now, an' start hold 'im. But thru' me know about gun, me seh if anything, the gun mus' cyaan fire. An' the bredda a fire a shot, an' me get low. Hold on 'pon me ear, an' say, bwoy, this gun a quick now - me a fe go run fe me life. So me run in a Bob Marley shop - Bob Marley did 'ave a shop on Beeston Street and King Street. Me run out back, an' run in a shop beside Bob Marley shop, where a bredda a do some paintin'. An' me get shot in deh so. As me drop, me 'ear the people dem a say: Lawd, Lawd, 'im dead. Me say: Dead?! One a unnu come carry me a hospital. Me see I. Roy, an' Sky High, dem pick me up an' carry me go a hospital. From me get shot an' go in a hospital, me nah lose consciousness, no time at all. The doctor say: boy, you mus' be born from a different tribe!

*Stitch's injuries were such that it was a miracle he was still alive. One bullet had literally gone through his head:*

What's so wicked again, me get shot from here in the back (indicating a spot in the neck behind his left ear), and come thru' here (indicating a point on his face in front of his left ear). Is only a specialist who can deal with me, an' the specialist deh a England, an' I a fe wait four months fe the specialist to come.

*Whilst waiting for micro-surgery, Stitch had a visitor:*

When me deh in a the hospital, me see Bunny Lee come. 'Im say dem say me dead a England, an' 'im want fe show dem me no dead. So 'im come with a photographer, 'im an Ken Boothe, an' John Holt. We tek picture, an' mek dem carry dat back a England, mek dem know seh me no dead. The only ting, me wan' know seh if me can voice tune again, beca' anyhow me cyaan voice, me a go be one a the wickedest murderer in a Jamaica.

*Fotunately, the latter outcome never materialised:*

As me come out a hospital the firs' place me go a on the sound, tek up the mike, an' TALK. My vibes deh-deh, but my voice - different voice me 'ave. Me say, bwoy, me a fe work with this voice yah, an' me try it, an' me talk, an' me sound a way, but me still deh 'pon track. So when Bunny Lee come back from England, me say Bunny, me feel me can voice yunno. Bunny hear me but 'im say your voice sound different. Me say me still 'ave voice, a still me. Anyway, when me deh a hospital the idea come to me to do a tune name 'No Dread Can't Dead', Ca' the people dem a bawl, seh me dead. Dat was the firs' tune me do as me come out. Then me do 'Raggamuffin', 'Sinners', an' all dem tune deh come down.

His career back in full swing, Stitch became part of Bunny Lee's production team, alongside men like Pepe Judah, who originally gave Stitch the lyrical concept for 'African People', and Tappa Zukie's brother Blackbeard. He toured the UK in 1977, playing to packed houses (most memorably at the Hammersmith Palais with Johnnie Clarke and John Holt). He had three albums of Bunny Lee-produced material released via Count Shelly's Third World label, as well as numerous singles on Lee's 'Jackpot' imprint. Many of these are included in this programme, which concentrates, for the most part, on Stitch's output as deejay on cultural and reality themes. One exception herein is the track 'Crazy Joe', a dismissive sideswipe from Bunny, Stitch and Randy's producer Clive Chin straight to Joe Gibb's head. Clive Chin used to play the tune in Randy's North Parade shop at full blast; Joe Gibbs' premises were situated just a few yards away across Chancery Lane. Also included are two productions by Vivian Jackson aka Yabby U, from the same period. Although he was a mainstay of Lee's roster of artists, Stitch also recorded titles for Enos McLeod, Fil Callender and Phil Pratt, as well as an unreleased album for Roy Cousins.

By the early eighties Stitch was not recording as much; nonetheless he was still active in the world of dance hall. Styling himself 'Major' Stitch, he had become the selector for Sugar Minott's Youth Promotion sound systems, supervising the cutting of dubplates for the sound. Amongst others, he was responsible for recording the first efforts of Yami Bolo and the late Tenor Saw, as well as such as Nitty Gritty, Pinchers and Chris Wayne. Recent years have seen him recording for Tappa Zukie, as well as unreleased material for his longtime friend and original mentor in the recording business, Bunny Lee. Still a keen follower of, and astute commentator on the Jamaican sound system scene, Stitch lives near Bunny's studio in

Duhaney Park, Kingston, close by the HQ of La Benz sound system. He is currently looking forward to a return to the stage during 1996. In the meantime, these vintage cuts, voiced and mixed at King Tubby's studio during its heyday, serve to remind us that Jah Stitch truly is the original raggamuffin.  
Steve Barrow January 1996

**Glossary:**

*a fe* have to  
*fe dem* their  
*ca', beca'* because  
*cyaan* can't  
*unnu* you (plural)  
*gi'* give  
*buck up* meet  
*thru'* because  
*ketch up* grapple  
*aks* ask  
*let off* pay out  
*ram* full up  
*gone a foreign* gone abroad (from Jamaica)

**African People (Three in one)**

Now three in one and one in three, as I would say  
featuring Africa Zion and Ethiopia, as I would tell you say  
This is the alphabetical order of my musical introduction  
featuring Africa Zion and Ethiopia  
Good Gosh! Dealing with Africa first  
**A** is for Africa, the land of our birth as I would say  
**F** is for our great Forefathers who have passed away (but we always remember them)  
**R** is for the Richness of the African soil as I would say  
**I** is for His Imperial Majesty that rules supreme over all human bein'  
**C** is for the beautiful Colours of the Emperor throne, yunno  
**A** is for the sincere leaders of Africa who laid the foundation as I would say  
Yeah. Movin' to Zion, yunno.  
**Z** is for the holy mountain that is so high  
**I** is for the International peace with the father that our day lives on earth I would say  
**O** show that we are all One people on the face of the earth with the same value or worth, whether we are wearin' pants or a skirt, as I would say, yeah  
**N** is for the Numerous enemies that try to overcome the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah, the elect of God I would say  
And now I'm dealing with Ethiopia, where we find  
**E** stands for the Everlasting powers  
**T** stand for Time, because Time is the complete master and no-one know if it will be peace or disaster, yeah  
**H** is for Home, and no more will we roam or live in Rome, yeah  
**I** is for the everlasting Inspiration he gave unto I and I  
**O** shows that the almighty One is no Ordinary One in this land so please know where you stand, yeah  
**P** stand for his Power which covers the whole day and night  
**I** is for the little Infant which he suffers to come unto him  
**A** is for the Ancestors, yunno