

PREVIEW: Bob Marley producer Lee Scratch Perry on his very diverse career

by Jade Wright, [Liverpool Daily Post \(http://ldp3.liverpooldailypost.co.uk\)](http://ldp3.liverpooldailypost.co.uk) |

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Lee Scratch Perry

Bob Marley producer Lee Scratch Perry has done it all. Here he talks to Jade Wright about his very diverse career

YOU might not guess to look at him, but Lee Scratch Perry is the godfather of dub and the high priest of reggae.

Bob Marley's producer and a truly original musical innovator, from 1970s Jamaica to the present day his music has been a huge influence on modern reggae, pop, soul and RnB.

"I'm an artist, a musician, a magician, a writer, a singer – I'm everything," he says.

"My name is Lee from the African jungle, originally from West Africa. I'm a man from somewhere else, but my origin is from Africa, straight to Jamaica."

Lee "Scratch" Perry was born Rainford Hugh Perry, on March 20, 1936, in Kendal, Jamaica, and is a Grammy award-winning artist.

He employs numerous pseudonyms, such as "Pipecock Jaxxon" and "The Upsetter". Arguably the first creatively driven, artist-producer in modern recorded music, he stands alongside pioneers like George Martin, Phil Spector, and Brian Wilson.

His musical career began in the late 1950s as a record seller for Clement Coxsone Dodd's sound system. As his sometimes turbulent relationship with Clement developed, he went on to record nearly 30 songs for the label.

Disagreements between the pair, due to personality and financial conflicts, led him to leave the studio and seek new musical outlets.

He soon found a home at Joe Gibbs's Wirl Records.

Working with Joe Gibbs, he continued his recording career, but once again, financial problems caused conflict.

Lee formed his own label, Upsetter, in 1968.

His first single People Funny Boy sold very well. It is notable for its innovative use of a sample (a crying baby) as well as a beat that would soon become identifiable as "reggae" – the new sound did not really have a name at this time.

From 1968 until 1972 he worked with his studio band The Upsetters. During the 1970s, he released numerous recordings on a variety of record labels that he controlled, and many of his songs were popular in both Jamaica and the UK. He soon became known for his innovative production techniques as well as his eccentric character.

In the early 1970s, he was one of the producers whose mixing board experiments resulted in the creation of dub music.

In 1973, Perry built a studio in his back yard, The Black Ark, to have more control over his productions and continued to produce notable musicians such as Bob Marley & the Wailers, Junior Byles, The Heptones, and Max Romeo.

With his own studio at his disposal, his productions became more lavish, as the energetic producer was able to spend as much time as he wanted on the music he produced.

By 1978, stress and unwanted outside influences began to take their toll: both Lee and The Black Ark quickly fell into a state of disrepair.

Eventually, the studio burned to the ground.

Lee says that he burned the Black Ark himself in a fit of rage, but it has also been said that fire could have been an accident due to faulty wiring. After the demise of the Black Ark in the early 1980s, Perry spent time in England and the United States, performing live and making records with a variety of collaborators.

It was not until the late 1980s, when he began working with British producers Adrian Sherwood and Neil Fraser (who is better known as Mad Professor), that his career began to get back on solid ground again. He quit drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis.

"I wanted to see if it was the smoke making the music or Lee Perry making the music," he says. "I found out it was me and that I don't need to smoke."

His modern music is a far cry from his reggae days in Jamaica – in some ways he is more of a performance artist. In 2003, he won a Grammy for Best Reggae Album with Jamaican ET and in 2004, Rolling Stone Magazine ranked Perry 100 on their list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.

More recently, he teamed up with a group of Swiss musicians and performed under the name Lee Perry and the White Belly Rats, and made a brief visit to the United States using the New York City based group Dub Is A Weapon as his backing band.

Currently there are two films being made about his life and work – Volker Schaner's Vision Of Paradise and The Upsetter by filmmakers Ethan Higbee and Adam Bhala Lough.

LEE SCRATCH PERRY plays Eric's Liverpool on February 17, 2013.

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