

2020's *One Fire*. Whilst they're not credited as such, *Chu Chu Train* sounds like something Zion I Kings would do. It's the use of flute and organ, also the warmth and weight of the steady rhythm that suggests this but then you could be persuaded that they had a hand in *Chant And Sing* as well, and especially when the trombonist is given space to stretch out over a few bars.

The pace of the rhythms varies little in truth, although the closing *Ancient of Days* has more urgency to it as Ras Teo contrasts unbelievers' "dirty ways" with the purity of the Rasta livity. *Long Iwa* makes the point that Rastas have been chanting from creation, meaning long before Haile Selassie I in fact, whilst evildoers meet with further chastisement in the lyrics of *Hard Fe Ketch* which invokes the Biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – three men who refused to renounce their God, and were then saved by divine intervention after being thrown into a fiery furnace.

John Masouri ★★★

## DESMOND DEKKER LIVE AT BASINS NIGHTCLUB [BURNING SOUNDS]

With a string of pop chart hits in the late '60s and early '70s, Desmond Dekker was the singer principally responsible for merging Jamaican music into the British mainstream. He settled in England and when the hits stopped coming, he kept touring until his death early this century. January 1987 found him at Basins, a beacon of light in a grim '60s shopping centre. The club's engineer recorded the show from the sound desk, and it circulated in limited quantities as a cassette album before vanishing, apparently forever. Now, the enterprising Burning Sounds label has tracked down a copy from the club's original DJ and offers it on a choice of CD or LP.

Mind you, you might think at first that you've come to the wrong record, as the opening track is a guitar-led instrumental of Van Morrison's *Moondance*. But there's a tell-tale ska backbeat, and by the time Desmond takes the stage, with the ubiquitous Delroy Williams providing his customary firm, gruff backing vocals, the band has revealed itself as a sharp little outfit whose organist has a particular feeling for reggae. But the focus is on the man out front, as Desmond applies his exuberant, tricky, light tenor voice to a stream of catchy self-composed songs which made his name, like *It Mek*, *Unity*, *Intensified* and of course *Israelites*.

It's a pity that, during one of those belting ska medleys which were always such a feature of Desi's gigs, the engineer must have slid the wrong slider, so that his lead vocals fade into the background for a while. But throughout the

album it's obvious that performers and audience alike are having a rollicking good time, adding to the appeal of this unique historical document, which is indeed a valuable addition to Desmond's recorded legacy.

Mike Atherton ★★★★★

## NINEY PRESENTS LIGHTNING AND THUNDER [DOCTOR BIRD] NINEY

### DREADLOCKS COMING TO DINNER [DOCTOR BIRD]

There's some doubt as to whether his real name is Winston Holness or George Boswell, but after losing a thumb in an accident as a youngster he was saddled with the somewhat unkind nickname of 'Niney', which he must have been happy with, as he's used it professionally ever since - often coupled with the self-bestowed and more flattering epithet 'The Observer'. In the late '60s he began learning the music business by working for up-and-coming producers Joe Gibbs and Bunny Lee. Indeed, he took his first tentative step towards becoming a producer by borrowing a Lee rhythm, Pat Kelly's *Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye*, to create the instrumental *Pepper Seed*, which kicks off the first of these double CDs. This writer wonders if the somewhat inept organ overdubs really are the work of the accomplished Danny Williams [as credited], but nonetheless Niney was on his way, and the album follows his career up to 1972.

After laying down tracks with Dennis Alcapone, a promising toaster who hadn't yet reached the stardom which would soon be his, Niney stepped up to the mic himself in late 1970 and delivered his first real hit *Blood And Fire*. Apocalyptic lyrics, sung with declamatory assertiveness over a brooding, heavy-on-the-afterbeat rhythm, added up to an instant classic. As we hear, Niney then milked the rhythm by creating numerous versions thereof, with the horns instrumental *Psalm 9* the best of the bunch.

He then produced some pleasing sides with Max Romeo, notably *Rasta Bandwagon*, and then Niney came up with his next big thing, the frank, single-entendre *International Pum*, whose tightly grining [what else?] rhythm also supported numerous versions - also included in this most comprehensive anthology of his early years. The back-cover notes reckon that 22 of the 48 tracks are new to CD, with good reason in some cases: if this writer never hears the tedious *Observing The Avenoe* or its wearisome dub again, it'll still be too soon.

The second double-CD covers the period from 1973 to '75 and shows the progress which Niney had made: no longer a man in search of a sound, he's found it and knows how to use it, building rhythms which are confident, weighty and fluent. It helped that his stature in the business meant that he could now attract major artists, like Ken Boothe whose *Silver Words* opens the album, the ever-soulful Delroy Wilson who reggaefies *I Can't Help Myself*, Big Youth who gives that *Blood And Fire* rhythm one more chance on *Fire Bunn*, and an alleged Tommy McCook who offers a neat instrumental revival of *Beardman Shuffle*. With a supporting cast including Michael Rose, Keeling Beckford and the mysterious Sang Hugh, named after a prominent Jamaican cricket umpire, this is a far more consistently enjoyable collection than its companion.

Mike Atherton ★★★/★★★★

