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Animated, energetic, funky-punky evening

By A.D. Amorosi
For The Inquirer

There's not a lot that 74-year-old Lee "Scratch" Perry - dub innovator, producer, madman - hasn't done during his long, wild career.

The Upsetter famously invented reggae's darker, experimental dub sound that influenced hip-hop and electronic artists forever after, produced raw, risky versions of Bob Marley's earliest works along with those of Jamaica's finest toasters (to say nothing of The Clash), and has long insisted that he burned down his legendary Black Ark studio out of anger. Heck, even gun-toting Phil Spector never burned down a studio.

Yet when he sold out World Cafe Live on Thursday night, the rainbow-haired Perry did something this longtime listener had never heard: He brought focus, insistent funky-punky instrumentation, and contagious melody to new songs (from his smashing recent release *Revelation*) and old.

Often, Perry shows are brilliant but meandering dub-atmospheric affairs with quicksilver bolts of energy from his bands and the merry master himself. But with his sizzling opening act, Lionize, as his backing band and with boldly melodic new tunes to guide him, the entire show was electric with Perry as its bristling, animated centerpiece.

Standing beside a table holding a lemon and his electro-effect box (lots of cow moos from that) and dressed in his usual mirror-encrusted baseball cap, Perry toasted and roasted his subjects in a roughly squeaking but solid sing-speaking voice.

Perry & Company made the sharply sonorous tracks from *Revelation* insistent and surging, even when they were slower - like "Run for Cover" and its dub version follow-up. "Government run, parasites run," rapped Perry through dense rhythms and a liquidlike organ tone.

Along with tossing out eccentric non sequiturs - "your test is your mess," "I am the black lion of Zion" - and encouraging all to exercise vigorously, Perry provoked his band to make the manic most out of the Perry catalog. "Roast Fish and Cornbread" got turned into a syrupy psychedelic-jazz jam, M.I.A. would've killed for the reggae-riffic electro that "Inspector Gadget" became, and a Perry-produced Marley fave, "Sun Is Shining" was made into a thrillingly slithering spy-themed ska that would shake and stir James Bond.

Simply magnificent.

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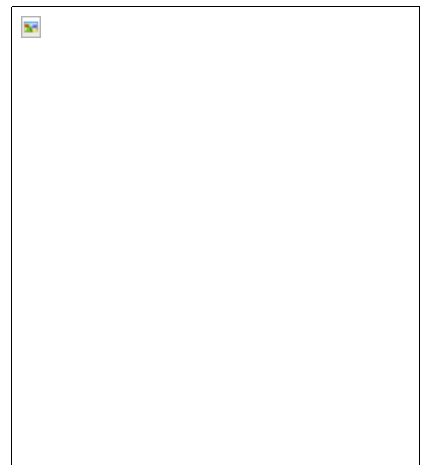
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