

SUMMER DOUBLE ISSUE

# Rolling Stone

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**LADY  
GAGA  
TELLS ALL**

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**DENNIS  
HOPPER**  
THE FINAL DAYS

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**OBAMA'S  
GENERAL**  
WHY HE'S  
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DRILLING  
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WET, HOT, LOUD  
**4 DAYS AT  
BONNAROO**

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**EMINEM**



# REGGAE'S

# MAD

THE SOUNDS INSIDE **LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY'S** HEAD CHANGED THE WORLD - REGGAE AND RAP WOULDN'T EXIST WITHOUT HIM. AND HE DID IT ALL WITHOUT EVER LEARNING TO PLAY AN INSTRUMENT OR MAKE A DAMN BIT OF SENSE. BY **JAY BULGER**  
PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER YANG

# SCIENTIST



JUST BEFORE DAWN, IN THE GARAGE OF HIS MANSION, SET HIGH above a medieval village in the Swiss Alps, Lee "Scratch" Perry balances precariously on the top step of a ladder and spray paints an abstract self-portrait. Dozens of medals and pendants hang from his army jacket and jangle as one of reggae's founding fathers stretches his wiry frame to reach the canvas. His foot taps to the beat of a dark dub track he created more than 30 years ago. His black biker boots are covered with a mosaic of shattered mirror pieces that he has glued to the leather. His mohawk and beard are painted cardinal red. "Being a madman is good thing!" Perry shouts over the music. "It keeps people away. When they think you are crazy, they don't come around and take your energy, making you weak. I am the Upsetter! Suffer, you were born to suffer! I am the Upsetter!" ⚡ It is a title Perry conferred on himself with

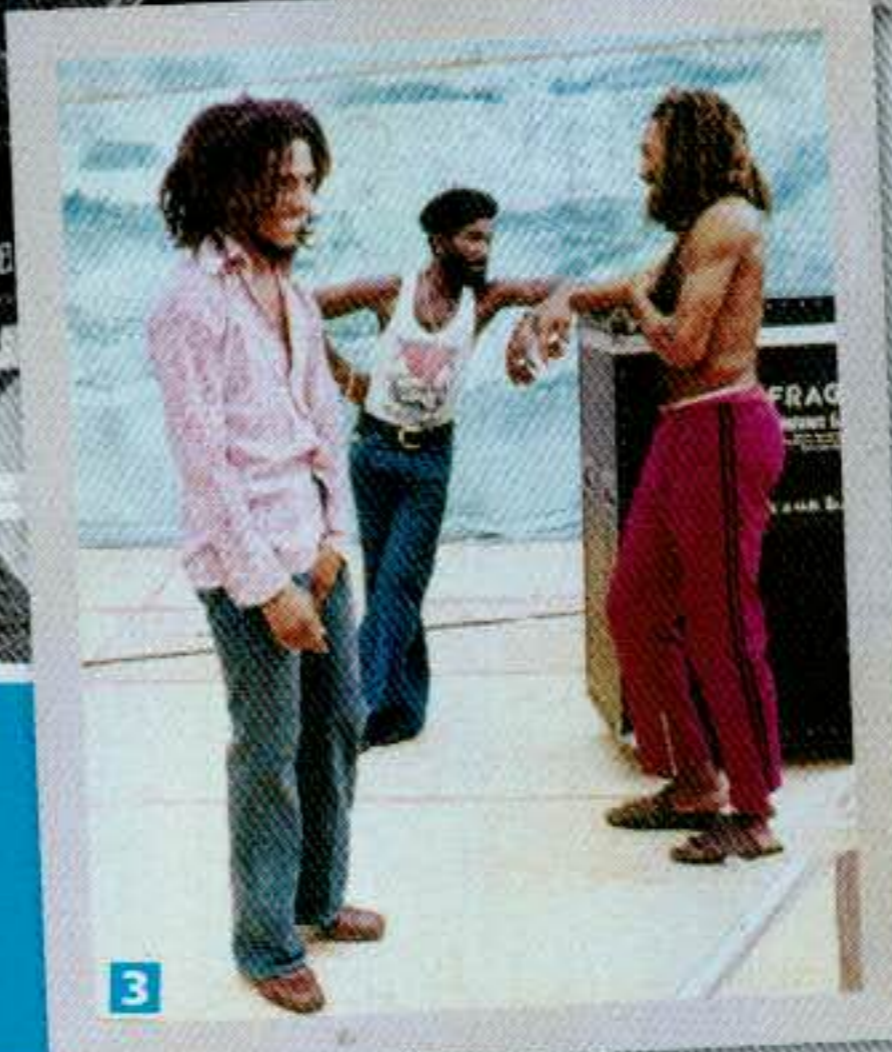


**DUB CONQUEROR**  
Perry, the psychedelic  
godfather of reggae,  
in New York



**The Upsetter**

Perry helped create reggae and became one of the most influential producers of his era. (1) At his Black Ark studio in the Seventies. (2) As a young producer in 1966. (3) In 1975, with Marley, who recorded his early hits with Perry.



from nowhere else, but also translating those sounds to the musicians. Scratch is a shaman."

Along the way, the 74-year-old Perry has also been called a madman, charlatan, con man and prophet; but mostly, he is just an obsessive-compulsive artist who believes that he is a vessel for the divine, placed on this earth to spread a gospel of peace, harmony and positive vibrations. "They say man is not perfect," he says. "Well, then I say I don't want to be a human being! Because I have to be perfect. You must believe you have a guardian angel, only then can you be perfect too."

**A**FTER AN HOUR of painting, the garage door swings open and Perry's wife and manager, Mireille, shouts, "Lee, you need air!" Large tubes of industrial-strength glue and spray paint have created a toxic fog that hangs like a cloud in the room. Perry turns around, his eyebrows raised. "I am shark," he says to me. "She is my shadow, the fish that cleans my gills. My wife, my knife, enemy of my mess!" Perry laughs, looking up and down at his blond wife's voluptuous body spilling out of her designer dress. Like a Swiss Zsa Zsa Gabor, the 50-year-old beauty puckers up and lays a wet one on her husband.

For the past 15 years, Perry has been living here in a tiny village just outside Zurich, with Mireille and their two children. He still can't speak a word of Swiss-German, and Mireille runs the day-to-day operations of the Perry household. A former dominatrix, Mireille has engaged in a two-decade-long struggle with Perry over his lack of cleanliness. "I am tidy, so I give him this room to make his mess," she says, "but he must learn to be clean in the house."

Perry battles against this enforced domestication, and every so often, he defecates in champagne glasses, placing them in cabinets throughout the house or burying them in the backyard. He justifies this habit by explaining that shit and piss are the essence of humanity: "The rain holds the sky, the rain goes in the water, we swim in the water, we piss in the water, and we drink the water. To live, we must piss and shit the water out. I believe in my piss. I believe in my shit."

"I don't understand it," says Mireille with a sigh. "I guess sometimes he just takes his belief in the natural too far."

his 1968 Jamaican single "I Am the Upsetter." It is also a perfect description of Perry's historic, confrontational impact as a record producer, in the late Sixties and Seventies, on reggae and beyond. Perry cannot read or write music, but with his intuitive ear for the natural complexities of reggae rhythms and the spiritual rebellion in R&B voices, Perry produced Bob Marley and the Wailers' best early recordings - Seventies sessions including the righteous anthems "Soul Rebel," "Small Axe" and "Duppy Conqueror" - and the mid-Seventies Rasta-protest classics *War Ina*

*Babylon* by Max Romeo and *Police and Thieves* by Junior Murvin. Meanwhile, Perry's pursuit of extremes on his seminal dub releases - mesmeric rhythm tracks chopped and rebuilt with primitive electronics and confounding logic - laid the foundations for hip-hop, electronica and the entire remix industry.

"You could never put your finger on Lee Perry - he's the Salvador Dalí of music," says Keith Richards, who has been working on some recordings with Perry. "He's a mystery. The world is his instrument. You just have to listen. More than a producer, he knows how to inspire the artist's soul. Like Phil Spector, he has a gift of not only hearing sounds that come

JAY BULGER profiled Cream drummer Ginger Baker in RS 1085.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DENNIS MORRIS/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA; TRAX ON WAX ARCHIVE; © 2010 KIM GOTTLIEB-WALKER, WWW.LENSWOMAN.COM, FROM HER BOOK "BOB MARLEY AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF REGGAE"

When his wife leaves the garage, Perry returns to his work and paints the words "Reggae Judgment in the USA" on the wall, a warning, he says, to *ROLLING STONE*. Despite his isolation, Perry still produces a tremendous volume of music - he has three releases out this year, and he will be playing dates in Europe and the U.S.

He bends over the assortment of colors, takes a dab of purple and white, and begins to paint his own face lavender and says to me, "You must become the Mad Hatter of Manhattan. You will wear a funny hat - only then will *ROLLING STONE* understand the Upsetter."

**R**AINFORD HUGH "LEE" PERRY was born on March 20th, 1936, in the rural sugar-cane fields of Kendal, Jamaica. The third of four children, Perry grew up watching his mother perform the Ettu dance - a ceremony held to commune with the spirits of the afterlife in which the devotees enter trancelike states. At 20, according to his biography, *People Funny Boy*, by David Katz, Perry left his village, eventually finding his way to the teeming capital of Kingston, where he got a job running errands at Studio One, the Motown of Jamaica.

Perry worked his way up through the organization by writing catchy songs like "Chicken Scratch." "Everyone has to start from Scratch!" he says about the popular dance anthem that gave him his nickname. In 1966, Perry left Studio One and subsequently produced the song "The Upsetter," marking the birth of the incendiary alter ego that Perry would carry with him for the rest of his life. "The Upsetter is a two-edged sword," Perry has said. "I upset to bring them up, but I also upset to destroy them!"

In 1969, walking by a church, Perry was mesmerized by the soulful sound of the congregation's music. Inspired, he recorded "People Funny Boy" - a track widely credited as one of the first reggae songs. Decades before "sampling" became the norm, the tune featured a baby crying, hinting at Perry's future sonic surrealisms. "Reggae is a useful exercise I created to get the people skipping," Perry says today, but in his usual contradictory way, he has also described his music as "revolution - it's war."

That same year, a young and frustrated Bob Marley returned to Jamaica from the United States, where he had been working in a Delaware auto factory. After regrouping with bandmates Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer, Marley came to Perry seeking musical and spiritual guidance. "Scratch helped my father look deeper into himself," says



## PERRY'S HIGHS

The essentials from Lee Perry's catalog  
BY DAVID FRICKE

### BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS SOUL REBELS (Upsetter, 1970)

Perry's first album with the Wailers is a reggae milestone - the group's emerging spiritual militancy anchored in bony propulsion and sweet-water echo. "Soul Rebel" and Peter Tosh's vocal in "400 Years" are pure Rastaman vibrations.

### THE UPSETTERS THE UPSETTER SHOP, VOLUME 2, 1969 TO 1973 (Heartbeat, 1999)

This compilation helps make sense of Perry's blizzard of productions with raw, delightful sides by the Mellotones, falsetto marvel Eric Donaldson and singer Carl Dawkins, who covers the Temptations' "Cloud Nine" with help from the Wailers.

### THE UPSETTERS SUPER APE (Island, 1976)

The Caribbean-psychedelic flow of haunted-Rasta soul singing ("Zion's Blood"), DJ toasting ("Croaking Lizard") and spooked dub is a legendary peak of Perry's sorcery.

### THE CONGOS HEART OF THE CONGOS (Blood and Fire, 1996)

Perry's rare mix of this 1977 album is a masterpiece of Jamaican group-harmony glow, Rasta-sermon urgency and intricate rhythmic hypnosis.

### THE CLASH "COMPLETE CONTROL" (Columbia U.K., 1977)

First, the Clash covered Perry's street-war smash "Police and Thieves." Then the band got Perry to add his Jamaican-Phil Spector spatial dynamics to their fuck-you guitars and vocal rage. The result: the Clash's first great single.

Ziggy Marley, Bob's oldest son. "He put Bob in the forefront and was instrumental in my father's career."

In Marley, Perry found the consummate vocal counterpart of the Upsetter sound. Under Perry's mentorship, Marley recorded some of his early classics. However, when Perry allegedly sold the Wailers' music to a British label, the Wailers acrimoniously split from him and recorded "Trench Town Rock" as an insult to Perry.

The only surviving member of Marley's original band, Bunny Wailer, still holds a grudge. "Lee Perry did nothing for the Wailers," Wailer says. "He just sat there in

the studio while we played our music, and then he screwed us. We never saw a dime from those albums we did with him. Records that other people have made millions from. Lee Perry's ignorance cost us a lot of money, and I never forgave him."

For his part, Perry says, "I'd rather not talk on Bunny Wailer - he's a miserable person."

Whatever their differences, for the rest of his life Marley would return to Perry in search of inspiration, advice and to occasionally collaborate on songs like "Jah Live." "The only person Bob worked with whom he really respected was Lee Perry," says Chris Blackwell, who would assume production responsibilities for the Wailers from Perry. Blackwell had the band rerecord many of the original Perry tracks, removing some of the grit, weirdness and mysticism from songs like "Duppy Conqueror" and "Small Axe" for release in the U.S., taking Marley and reggae music into the mainstream.

In Marley's absence, Perry began focusing less on vocally based music and more on "versions," a form of remixing, stripping the tracks down to their core and then building them back up. For years, Jamaican producers had been creating "dub plates": custom mixes for local DJs. Often, Perry would create multiple versions of each song. In the absence of a great singer, Perry began "toasting," what we now know as freestyling. With his 1973 release of "Cow Thief Skank" years before DJs were mixing between turntables, Perry spliced rhythms while rhyming over the beat. "It was Lee Perry's sound and the Jamaican toasters that inspired us to start hip-hop," says Afrika Bambaataa, who, along with DJ Kool Herc, created the basis of hip-hop in the South Bronx.

In 1973, Perry built his legendary Black Ark studio, a small backyard bunker behind his home in Kingston, and embarked on a five-year period of around-the-clock production increasingly fueled by marijuana and alcohol. Black Ark would become the birthplace of countless reggae and dub classics. "Dub is the shadow of the song. It is the ultimate beginning with no ending," says Bill Laswell, who produced Herbie Hancock's "Rockit," using the dub sound as its basis. This psychedelic approach to reggae transformed the producer into the composer, and the mixing board became his instrument as he created boundless soundscapes and journeys into nature's sonic fragmentation. "The bass is the brain, and the drum is the heart," Perry says. "I listen to my body to find the beat. From there, it's just experimenting with the sounds of the animals in the ark."

"Perry was using a 4-track at the Black Ark studio, but he could get about a hundred other tracks bouncing in and out of there by using stones, water, kitchen utensils and whatever else was available," reggae legend Max Romeo [Cont. on 122]

## PREVIEW PERRY'S DOC


Exclusive: Watch a clip from "The Upsetter" at [rollingstone.com](http://rollingstone.com).

Iraq in 2006. "That's the game we're in right now. What we need, for strategic purposes, is to create the perception that we didn't get run off. The facts on the ground are not great, and are not going to become great in the near future."

But facts on the ground, as history has proven, offer little deterrent to a military determined to stay the course. Even those closest to McChrystal know that the rising anti-war sentiment at home doesn't begin to reflect how deeply fucked up things are in Afghanistan. "If Americans pulled back and started paying attention to this war, it would become even less popular," a senior adviser to McChrystal says. Such realism, however, doesn't prevent advocates of counterinsurgency from dreaming big: Instead of beginning to withdraw troops next year, as Obama promised, the military hopes to ramp up its counterinsurgency campaign even further. "There's a possibility we could ask for another surge of U.S. forces next summer if we see success here," a senior military official in Kabul tells me.

Back in Afghanistan, less than a month after the White House meeting with Karzai and all the talk of "progress," McChrystal is hit by the biggest blow to his vision of counterinsurgency. Since last year, the Pentagon had been planning to launch a major military operation this summer in Kandahar, the country's second-largest city and the Taliban's original home base. It was supposed to be a decisive turning point in the war - the primary reason for the troop surge that McChrystal wrested from Obama late last year. But on June 10th, acknowledging that the military still needs to lay more groundwork, the general announced that he is postponing the offensive until the fall. Rather than one big battle, like Fallujah or Ramadi, U.S. troops will implement what McChrystal calls a "rising tide of security." The Afghan police and army will enter Kandahar to attempt to seize control of neighborhoods, while the U.S. pours \$90 million of aid into the city to win over the civilian population.

Even proponents of counterinsurgency are hard-pressed to explain the new plan. "This isn't a classic operation," says a U.S. military official. "It's not going to be Black Hawk Down. There aren't going to be doors kicked in." Other U.S. officials insist that doors *are* going to be kicked in, but that it's going to be a kinder, gentler offensive than the disaster in Marja. "The Taliban have a jackboot on the city," says a military official. "We have to remove them, but we have to do it in a way that doesn't alienate the population." When Vice President Biden was briefed on the new plan in the Oval Office, insiders say he was shocked to see how much it mirrored the more gradual plan of counterterrorism that he advocated last fall. "This looks like CT-plus!" he said, according to U.S. officials familiar with the meeting.

Whatever the nature of the new plan, the delay underscores the fundamental flaws of counterinsurgency. After nine years of war, the Taliban simply remains too strongly entrenched for the U.S. military to openly attack. The very people that COIN seeks to win over - the Afghan people - do not want us there. Our supposed ally, President Karzai, used his influence to delay the offensive, and the massive influx of aid championed by McChrystal is likely only to make things worse. "Throwing money at the problem exacerbates the problem," says Andrew Wilder, an expert at Tufts University who has studied the effect of aid in southern Afghanistan. "A tsunami of cash fuels corruption, delegitimizes the government and creates an environment where we're picking winners and losers" - a process that fuels resentment and hostility among the civilian population. So far, counterinsurgency has succeeded only in creating a never-ending demand for the primary product supplied by the military: perpetual war. There is a reason that President Obama studiously avoids using the word "victory" when he talks about Afghanistan. Winning, it would seem, is not really possible. Not even with Stanley McChrystal in charge. 

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## LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY

[Cont. from 80] recalls. "He makes his money by being crazy, but he's no crazier than I am. All geniuses are mad. I remember Chris Blackwell at Black Ark sitting on a couch and saying, 'Scratch, the tape is spilling over. You can't do that!' Scratch just said, 'The album is called *Super Ape*, and so I need a Super Tape!' He is a wizard, there is nobody else like him."

In 1976, as political turmoil erupted in Jamaica, Perry produced the classics *War Ina Babylon* with Max Romeo and *Police and Thieves* with Junior Murvin. The albums catapulted him to international acclaim. After the Clash covered "Police and Thieves," Perry worked as their producer in London, and was swept up by the punk scene. Inspired by the new sound and energy, Perry co-wrote "Punky Reggae Party" for Bob Marley. "If I want to spit here, I spit here," Perry has said. "If I want to piss there, I piss there. I am punk."

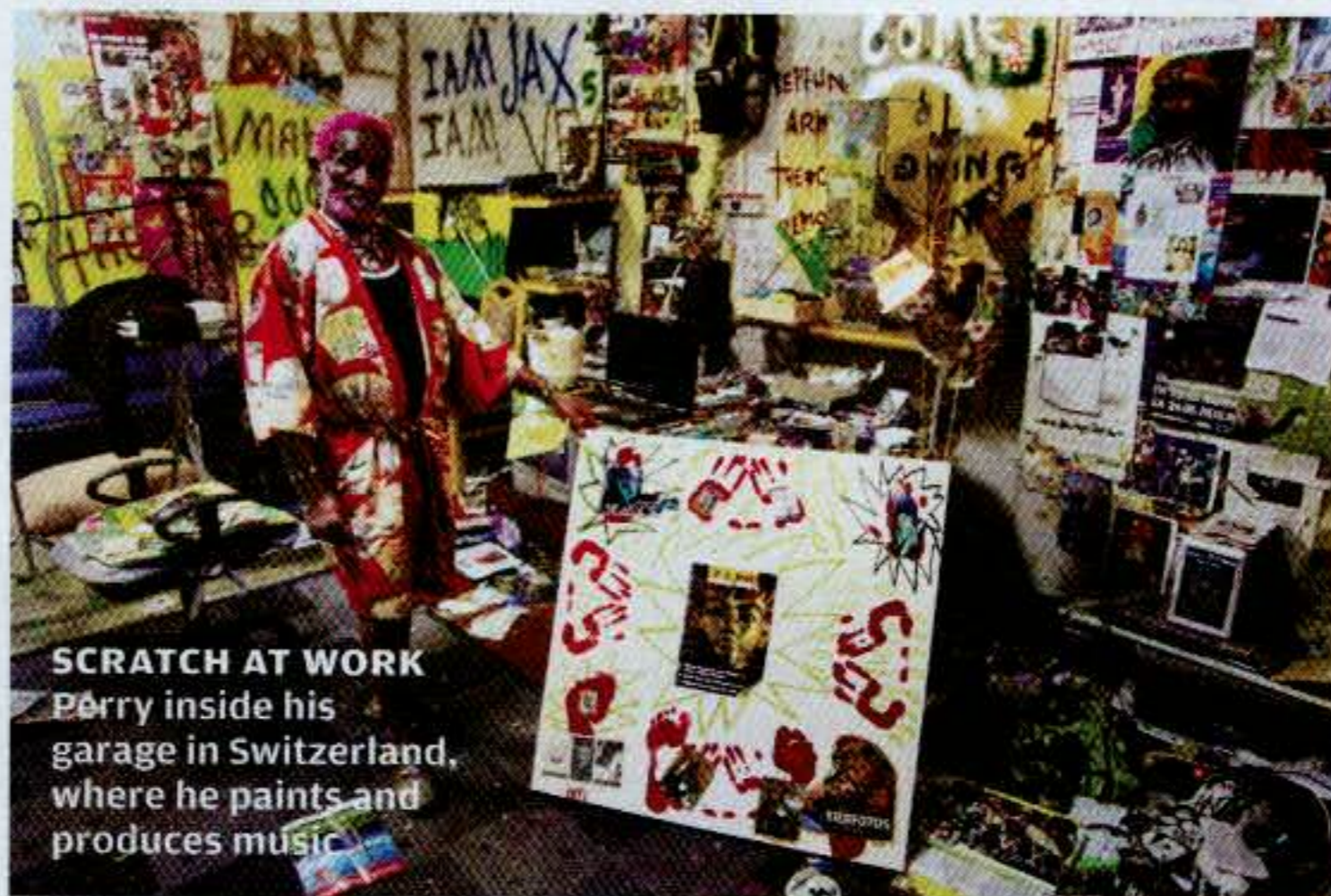
The late Seventies marked the most prolific period in Perry's career, as Paul McCartney, Gregory Isaacs and Robert Palmer all sought out the Upsetter sound. But in 1978, Perry, who was always wildly eccentric, suffered a dramatic mental breakdown after his wife left him for a Rastafarian studio musician. The grounds of his property were cluttered with Rasta sycophants, and he was being extorted by the local gangs. Perry became convinced that Rastafarians were to blame. He vowed to rid himself of "all things dread" and drove through Kingston with a rotting, maggot-infested slab of pork as a hood ornament. He began to paint obsessively, covering the property with incoherent graffiti. In 1983, in the depth of his madness, convinced the studio was possessed by evil spirits, Perry set the Black Ark studio ablaze. So monumental was the Black Ark's destruction that one music critic described it as "the close of the roots-reggae era."

"I needed to be forgiven of my sin," Perry recalls. "I created my sin, and I burned my sin, and I am born again." He entered into a deep depression, and at the height of his insanity, Perry blew \$25,000 on an antique set of silverware.

In 1989, Mireille Ruegg, a Swiss-born reggae-record-store owner, went to Black Ark to find Lee "Scratch" Perry. "No one would walk up to the gates with me - they were scared of Lee," Mireille recalls. When she reached the entrance to the ruins of Black Ark, Perry was standing there. "I've been waiting for you," he said. Escorting her to his bedroom, he showed her his wall,

where he had written, "You will be saved by a Sagittarius," on a Princess Diana poster. "We are soul mates," Mireille says. "The universe wanted us to be together."

**P**ERRY'S CAVERNOUS MANSION IS museumlike, covered in bleach-white carpets (shoes are forbidden), ancient Egyptian artifacts and Zen rock gardens - only the isolated garage feels like the home of the Upsetter. While



**SCRATCH AT WORK**  
Perry inside his garage in Switzerland, where he paints and produces music

**"I needed to be forgiven of my sin," Perry says of the Black Ark fire. "I burned my sin, and I am born again."**

Perry is early to rise and no longer drinks or smokes marijuana, Mireille can't function without a joint in hand, often spending her nights in Zurich's reggae clubs, partying. Despite their many contradictions, their affection and mutual admiration is palpable. "Without her, I would be dead," Perry says. His one complaint about life in Switzerland is that he lacks rivalry. "I've got to find someone to upset," he says one afternoon. "Sometimes what makes you perfect is competition. If you have no competition, you won't get to where you should get." He has not driven a car in nearly 30 years, so once in a while when he becomes restless, he will have someone drive him down to the 14th-century monastery where, in hopes of unsettling the priests, he walks into the chapel with a giant snowball balanced on top of his head. "God is the vice of the people," Perry says. "I believe in me."

After his meal, Perry sprawls on a white couch, his feet impatiently kicking back and forth, and watches *The Upsetter*, a feature-length, soon-to-be-released documentary about his life. Grainy 8mm foot-

age depicts Perry as he lights fires on the floor of his charred Black Ark studio, a baseball-bat-size marijuana joint in his hand, a half-naked madman spinning in place. Seeing this, Perry winces, crimps his shoulders, and like Rick James, proclaims, "Drugs. Very powerful shit!" Perry's teenage son and daughter, Gabriel and Shiva, saunter into the room. In the film, a crazed Perry holds the two children as infants: Later, he tells the film crew,

"There is nothing more important in life than music and pussy!" Perry has at least eight children with four women. Shiva and Gabriel are Perry's youngest, and his only children with Mireille. He puts his arms around his son and daughter, mirroring the documentary; Shiva and Gabriel sit in his lap - 18 years later they tower over their father. "He's more like a big brother," Gabriel says.

"Papa Smurf!" Perry interrupts, then signals his daughter: "She's 20, and she's a virgin. She knows what men want. She has to

stay here with us, forever!"

Shiva shakes her head, unfazed by her father's humor. Gabriel is graduating from high school and plans to move to a big city. "It's so boring here," he says, looking out the window at the snow-covered valley. "There's nothing to do."

Perry heads back to his garage to work on some music. He's been hired to do a remix for Santigold and still has to finish his three records. He e-mails his cryptic and circuitous lyrics to Keith Richards and various collaborators. He rarely returns to the island of his birth to work. "Whenever I go to Jamaica," he says, "it's like the money tree come and everybody wants money."

Perry burns his microphone's top with a lighter, expelling any bad vibes, takes a deep breath and tries to channel the energy of his children on the floors above. "I need the energy of youth," he says. "That's the good energy!" With eyes closed, he swings to the music, his round belly leading the rest of his small body. "I came, I saw, and I conquer," Perry rhymes. "I capture Lex Luthor with my teddy bear, my hair and my invisible chair." **ES**

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