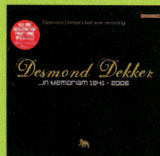


ON TOP



DESMOND DEKKER In Memoriam 1941-2006

Secret/MVD

While Desmond Dekker will always be remembered as the king of ska, his last recording, *Desmond Dekker...In Memoriam 1941-2006*, spins like a defeated convoy led by one of the king's minstrels. The collection finds Dekker back in the studio, circa 2004, re-recording a 20-track "Best-Of" sampler with an overly polished, down-tempo backing band that transforms some of his most memorable tracks into sluggish imitations of themselves. Familiar anthems like "Intensified," "Israelites" and "Sabotage" have become muddled and de-energized in this collection by an overall hollowness. The raspy sound that made these originals so appealing in the first place has been vacuumed out and modernized—fleshed out on a slower beat that gives them an over-simplified feel. Still, despite some of the album's shortcomings, Dekker's voice retains the endearing, effeminate falsetto that fans have come to identify him with. Tracks like "Problems," "Pretty Africa," "Wise Man" and "Unity" retain their classic status.

Dekker, who died of a heart attack last May at the age of 64, was one of reggae (and ska's) most dazzling stars. He brought the sound of Jamaica to the rest of the world with hits like "Israelites," "007 (Shanty Town)" and "It Mek," which were released in the late '60s. His music soundtracked Jamaica's tumultuous social struggles in the wake of its 1962 independence, and inspired the island's rude boys to rally around his tougher than tough lyrics. His rude

boy styling (short suit, skinny tie) eventually took over the U.K. mod scene, influencing its fashions, attitudes and music.

Born Desmond Adolphus Dacres in St. Andrew, Jamaica on July 16, 1941, music was integral to Dekker's upbringing through church and gospel gatherings. He studied music at the Alpha Boys' School in Kingston (much like many of his reggae constituents), but was orphaned in his teens and began working as a welder at the South Camp Yard, where he continued to sing. In 1961 he auditioned for Coxsone Dodd's Studio One and Duke Reid's Treasure Isle, but was rejected by both producers. Eventually Derrick Morgan and Leslie Kong at Beverly's gave the young singer a chance and in 1963, "Honour Your Mother and Father" was released, with "Sinners Come Home" as a follow-up, and Desmond Dacres was renamed Desmond Dekker. Dekker's fourth hit, "King of Ska," was recorded with the backing band the Cherrypies, who would later become the Maytals.

After a succession of hits in the late '60s and into the '70s, Dekker moved to the U.K. while continuing to tour and record new material. Toward the end of the '70s, he signed with punk rock label Stiff Records on the heels of the 2-Tone ska movement in England, which resulted in his *Black And Dekker* album. Dekker went on to release the *Compass Point* album, which was produced by Robert Palmer, in 1981. Although his albums didn't garner the attention they once had, Dekker was still an energetic performer. Throughout the '80s and '90s he released different versions of his past hits, and in 1992 he hooked up with The Specials for their *King Of Kings* disc.

Throughout his career, Dekker seemed to fall back on his earlier hits reworking and re-releasing them—so this last collection doesn't come as a surprise, just a mild letdown. This is not the album by which someone who defined a movement and sparked a cultural revolution should be remembered. Even his "Israelites" track, a classic, chart-topping poem evoking the hardships of Jamaica, sounds deflated right from the start as Dekker's voice quivers and the drums trip over themselves before leading into the song's familiar and powerful lyric, "Get up in the morning slaving for bread, sir." The opening of "Sabotage" opening runs on a different, more simplistic rhythm than the original, and "Intensified" sounds like reggae for kids, complete with the cutesy "we're having a partyeee..." Desmond Dekker should be remembered for his crackling, ebullient songs evoking social and political change—after all, there's nothing cutesy about "lootin' and gun shootin'" the way it's spelled out in his original "007 (Shanty Town)." —MATT SCHEINER

EDITOR'S TOP 10



1 **BOLE 2 HARLEM**
Volume 1
(Sourdis of Muzik)



2 **CHICO BUARQUE**
Carioca
(DRG)



3 **VARIOUS ARTISTS**
Life Goes in Circles
(Pressure Sounds)



4 **KENNY GARRETT**
Beyond The Wall
(Newswatch)



5 **MARTA TOPFEROVA**
Flor Nocturna
(World Village)



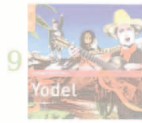
6 **HAZMAT MODINE**
Bahamut
(Barben)



7 **RICHARD BONA**
Tiki
(Dental)



8 **BORKNAGAR**
Origin
(Century Media)



9 **VARIOUS ARTISTS**
The Rough Guide
To Yodel
(World Music Network)



10 **VARIOUS ARTISTS**
Dynamite!
Dancehall Style
(Soul Jazz)



Global
Rhythm
December 2006
issue