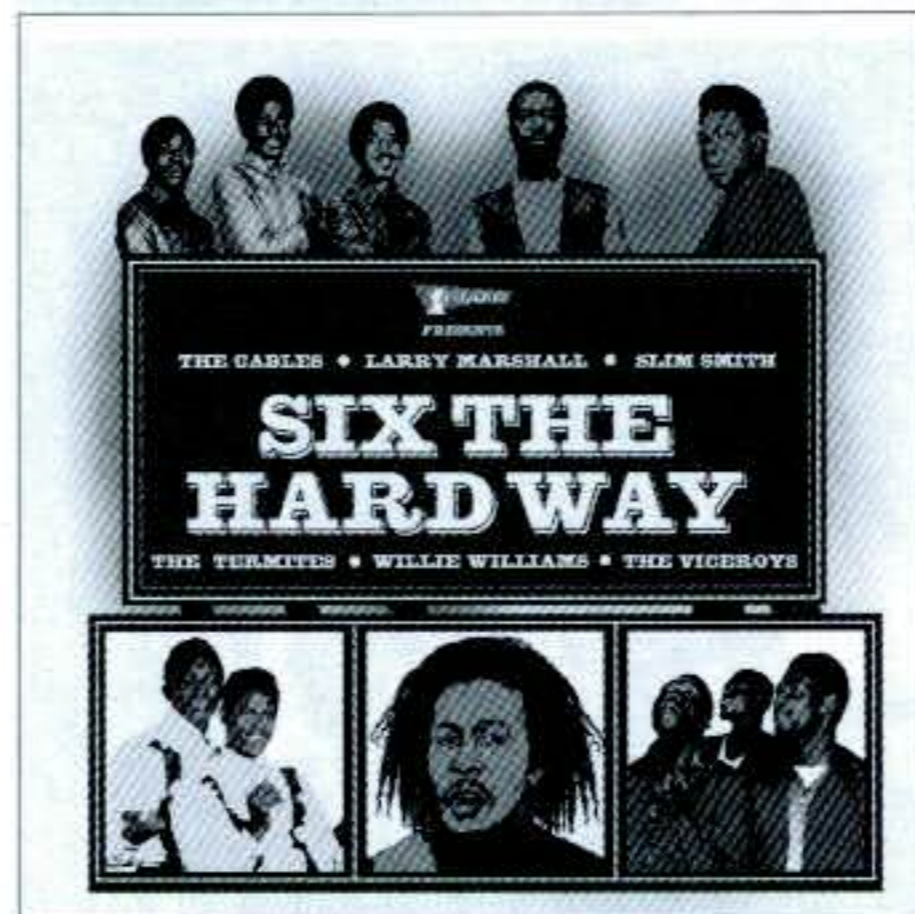
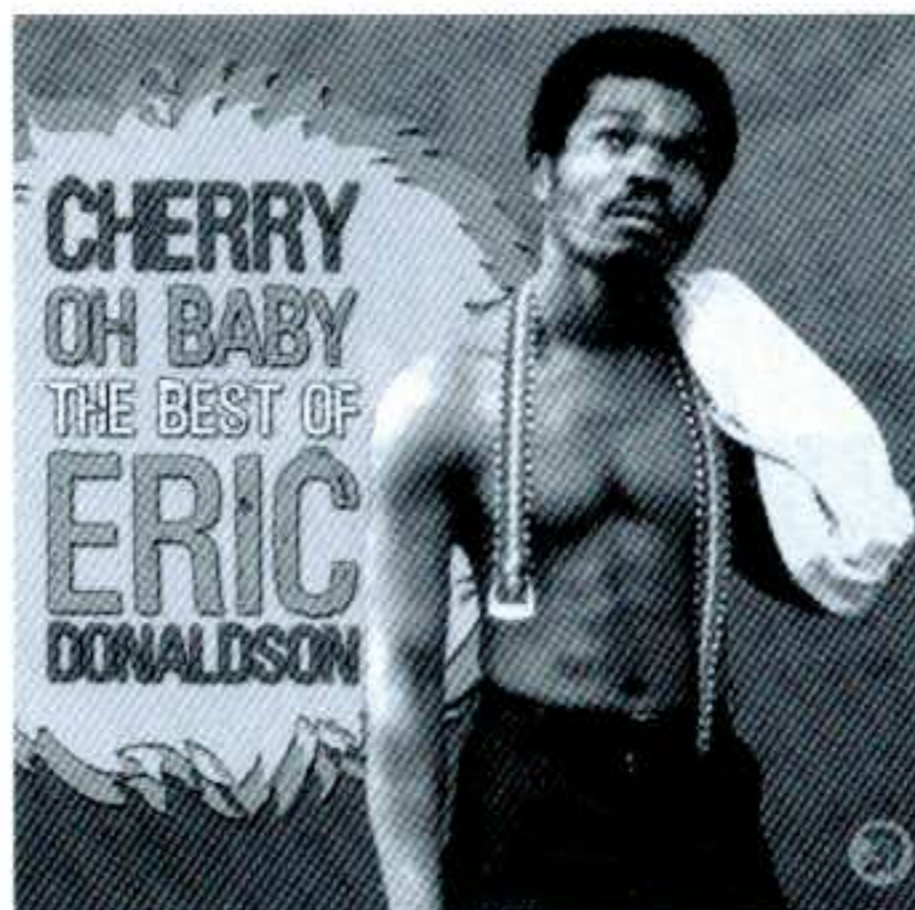


grabbed it up (thereby increasing my tithe) and find the music as surprising as the appearance of the disc itself. Perhaps nothing from MRR should shock us as the loose-knit original group was as experimental as can be imagined, with wild bebop horn solos from Bra Gainor, Don Drummond or others slicing through burru drumming and chant vocals without regard to key or convention. The biggest surprise is that this isn't really a Nyahbinghi album, like, say, a classic Ras Michael or the Wingless Angels which featured the unlikely combination of Justin Hinds and Keith Richards. There are some definite trance-inspiring drum and chant works here but also some high-production-value vocals and a few songs without a hint of hand drum. Approached without preconceptions this is a very listenable roots exploration not quite like anything else out there. Extended chant "Little Samuel" and "Inna Barrel" are among the suggested cuts. [www.mysticrevelationofrastrafari.com]

Desmond Dekker in Memoriam 1941-2006 (Secret Records) puts forward 20 cuts recorded in London in 2004 reprising pretty much his biggest hits—like "Israelites," "007," "It Mek," "Unity" and "Rudy Got Soul." Produced by Delroy Williams (his longtime manager and a singer in his own right) it is what it is—a final run-through of the songs Desmond Dekker will always be best known for. Although it won't replace the original (mainly) Leslie Kong productions of these songs it documents the power of a mature singer with the amazing ability to recapture the sound and energy of the records he made when he was very young. His brother George, a longtime member of the Pioneers and the second voice on many early Derrick Morgan singles, is among the backup singers. Straightforward arrangements with bass, guitar, keys, drums and a small (two-piece) horn section lay the foundation and Desmond Dekker shakes it one last time. [www.secretrecordslimited.com]

You knew reggae was going to be different when you first encountered **Doctor Alimantado**, mystifyingly depicted on the cover of his first album in his middle-of-the-street office dispensing prescriptions. **House of Singles** (Keyman) pulls together some great selections never before available on cd from this very unique dj. The earliest of these recordings was cut in 1967 at West Indies Recording (later known as Dynamics), the bulk of them are from the early '70s cut at Randy's, Tubby's, Channel One and Black Ark with one each done at Joe Gibbs and Harry J. Alimantado went on to a second career in England that includes a series of fine dub albums but these are crucial original Jamaican recordings and include singles like "Teach the Children," "Conscious Man" and "Rasta Train" as well as very early works like "Maccabee the Third" with Max Romeo and "Blessed Is That Land Africa" over Junior Byles' "Place Called Africa." A stellar set of essential works from one of the most indepen-



dent of producer/djs, with extensive liner notes by David Katz. [Distributed by Greensleeves, www.greensleeves.net]

Alton Ellis is one of the most soulful singers you will ever hear in your life. As a songwriter and vocalist he is on a par with the greatest and stands shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Sam Cooke, Solomon Burke or Aaron Neville, not to mention Slim Smith or Delroy Wilson. A contemporary of Bob Marley, he told me once how the two battled it out in a string of records on which Bob fired up the rude boys and Alton tried to cool them down. *I'm Still in Love With You* (Heartbeat) continues the recent revival of Studio One classic albums with bonus tracks galore (in this case many of the bonus tracks feature Alton's late sister Hortense). The operant word here—besides Alton Ellis—is Studio One. Alton recorded for Duke Reid and many other producers before becoming an excellent producer himself and his most recent recordings are superb in every way. But no one will ever be able to match the feel these young artists got at Coxson Dodd's—the tracks are so foundational they are still being copied and re-copied three and four decades after the fact.

The alternate versions are among the standouts on this one. "Willow Tree" and "Why Birds Fly" are a couple of Alton's greatest compositions, here magnificently interpreted by sister Hortense. She also turns in fine versions of American r&b hits

Alton is well known for having covered like "Sitting in the Park" and "Can I Change My Mind." A stylistic remake of "Breakfast in Bed," a huge hit for Lorna Bennett, features some late '80s overdubs from Jackie Mittoo himself. Alton is at his best on "Lord Deliver Us," the extended mix of "Live and Learn" and the pair harmonize beautifully (she sang background on many of his early hits) on the popular and poignant "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do." With informative notes from *The Beat's* own Roger Steffens drawing on interview material with Alton himself this disc includes some of the greatest music ever recorded. [www.heartbeatreggae.com]

Cherry Oh Baby: The Best of Eric Donaldson (Trojan) offers 25 cuts from the boyish-voiced man including original Jamaican hits "Keep on Riding," "A Weh We A Go Do" and "Sweet Jamaica" as well as distinctive versions of "The Way You Do the Things You Do," "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" and "Love of the Common People." A perennial winner of the Jamaica Song Festival, Donaldson also scored internationally when the title song was covered by no less a band than the Rolling Stones, and later UB40. His original still sounds better than both and this collection, compiled and annotated by Stephen Nye, reintroduces his clean, crisp voice to a new generation. [www.trojanrecords.com]

In the days before superstars, troubadours/minstrels sang in rounds, each singer contributing his part to the whole musical experience. Similarly, in the rock steady era that preceded reggae, vocal groups shared in the creation and presentation of songs with tight harmonies and backing vocals supporting and uplifting the lead singer's vocal. These early days of music are recalled on **Six the Hard Way** (Heartbeat), an anthology gathering three singers and three vocal groups performing at their best as rock steady turned to reggae. Culled from the vaults of Studio One, this set is a "best of the best" compilation of top songs from outstanding artists presented with a simplicity and depth of emotion that brings back the sweet and soulful sound of the birth of reggae music.

Slim Smith, who fronted both the Techniques and Uniques (and is backed on one of the three songs presented here, "You Don't Care," by the Gaylads) opens with the lilting "Born to Love" and closes his set with the prophetic "Rougher Yet." Larry Marshall, who started his career as half of a duo (something we don't see too much of these days) is represented with "Thelma," "Nanny Goat" and an extended mix of "How Can I Go On." Willi Williams offers "Master Plan," "See You When I Get There" and penultimate masterpiece "Armageddon Time." Three songs from the Cables include "Cheer Up" and "Love Is A Pleasure." The Viceroy's offer "Love and Unity," "Ya Ho" and "Slogan on the Wall," and the Termites' "Do the Rock Steady," "Have Mercy Mr. Percy" and "It Takes Two to

Continued on page 14