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Case Number 16817: Small Claims Court



Reggae In A Babylon

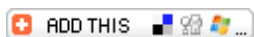
MVD Visual // 1978 // 46 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Victor Valdivia // July 15th, 2009

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Judge Victor Valdivia rides the riddim while smoking a spliff of ganja—usually while listening to polka music.

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Search:

Scales of Justice

Judgment: 70

Perp Profile

Studio: [MVD Visual](#)

Video Formats:

- Full Frame

Audio Formats:

- PCM 2.0 Mono (English)

Subtitles:

- None

Running Time: 46 Minutes

Release Year: 1978

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Genres:

- [Concerts and Musicals](#)
- [Documentary](#)
- [Performance](#)

Distinguishing Marks

- None

Accomplices

- [IMDb](#)

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[Riddim Driven](#)
[Film Director](#)

The Charge

The acclaimed documentary by Wolfgang Büld that captured the birth of British reggae.

The Case

MVD Visual deserves some credit for releases like this one; at least the company's heart is in the right place. Who else would reissue an obscure European documentary about a style of music that has never enjoyed much mainstream success in the United States? The DVD presents the film reasonably well—the print shows its age, with some scratches, but overall the audio and video transfers are about as well as could be expected with a thirty-year-old low-budget documentary. The audio is particularly solid, delivering the musical performances captured here very well.

That said, however, it's hard to recommend this DVD to anyone who isn't already a huge reggae fan. Clocking in at a meager 46 minutes with no extras at all and bearing a list price of \$16.95, this is not exactly a good buy for the money. There are plenty of film clips and performances that could have been added to this disc. MVD could have also licensed some

out-of-print releases related to this topic (such as Steel Pulse's **Introspective**) and added this film to it. As it is, this is a pretty thin release.

To be sure, it does have its high points. There are some excellent musical performances. Aswad give a great performance of "It's Not Our Wish." Jimmy Lindsay is filmed in the studio recording beautiful covers of "Ain't No Sunshine" and Lionel Richie's "Easy." The highlight, though, is a stellar performance by Steel Pulse, whose version of "Ku Klux Klan" remains the disc's highlight. There are also some brief but revealing interviews with the artists as well as DJs and producers who discuss how the reggae scene in England is treated by the industry and press. These are informative but because the film is so short they can't help but leave an awful lot out. How is British reggae different from Jamaican reggae? When did the reggae scene come together? What does life in England mean for Jamaican immigrants and how does that affect their music? These are all questions that the film doesn't answer. In some ways, it sort of seems that **Reggae in a Babylon** was made for a cult audience that would already know the answers. That may prove true for hardcore reggae fans, but anyone else is just going to be confused. Had MVD Visual provided some sort of addendum to place the stories and music seen here in proper context, this would be a far more essential DVD.

Reggae in a Babylon, then, is not a bad film at all. It's a reasonably well-crafted look at a time and place and it has some great music. It's just too meager to be released as a standalone feature. Even a discography of recommended albums or a text history of British reggae would have made a halfway decent extra. The high list price makes it vastly overpriced, even if it's a film that anyone interested in reggae should at least see. Before you do, however, you should familiarize yourself with some of the landmark albums in British reggae history, such as Steel Pulse's *Handsworth Revolution* (1978) or Aswad's *New Chapter* (1981). Ultimately, those make better investments than this disc, unless you find it really, really, cheap.

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The Verdict

Reggae in a Babylon itself is not guilty, but MVD Visual is guilty of packaging it poorly and expensively.

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