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NR (Not Rated),

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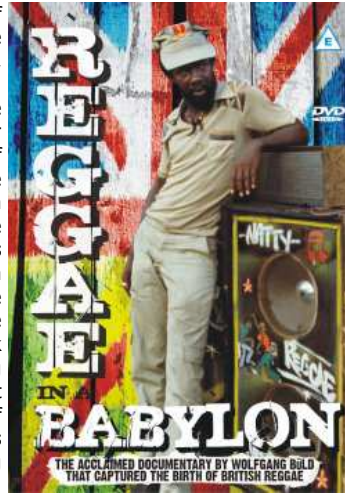
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## Reggae in a Babylon

Score: **85%**  
 Rating: **Not Rated**  
 Publisher: **MVD Entertainment Group**  
 Region: **A**  
 Media: **DVD/1**  
 Running Time: **45 Mins.**  
 Genre: **Documentary/Independent/Live Performance**  
 Audio: **English Mono**  
 Subtitles: **English**

**Reggae in a Babylon** is the third in a series of documentaries created by Wolfgang Büld to showcase the musical scene in England during the late '70s, beginning with *Punk in London* and *Punk in England*. **Reggae in a Babylon** is a natural, because the impact of reggae has been hinted at during the other films, even from the mouths (and instruments) of punk acts like The Clash and The Slits. Bands at the time were being influenced by more than American soul music and classic rock of the '40s and '50s. The latter was, after all, being co-opted by the Teddy Boys and by the Mods for their rowdy revivals, so it was a natural that punk borrow from island music. The easy-going, mild quality that some people associate with reggae isn't what struck a chord with the punk movement. The reggae practitioners were preaching the same gospel as the punks, even from distant burghs of England such as Coventry. The message of overthrowing the status quo, and upending systems that kept young people on the dole without strong options for their future, all came through in reggae.



Not that there was more than a nod from either side in respect for the other, but reggae managed to exist alongside punk much more comfortably than other musical forms of that time.


Some of the artists interviewed for this documentary were quick to distance themselves from the Rasta religious movement. Listening to Steel Pulse, a band given especially good coverage in **Reggae in a Babylon**, one can hear the urgency of their mission to break through and make themselves known on the London scene. The quality of the music and musicianship showed by Steel Pulse and the other bands featured here goes beyond what Büld showcased in his earlier films. These were serious musicians making really good music, and taking it seriously. All the same, they talk about being held back by limiting factors like reluctant DJs and outlets for bands. The answer to this comes across a bit like what Rough Trade did for punks, a system of records and listening parties that allowed reggae fans to gather and hear the new music being made on a more underground level. The larger purpose behind these gatherings was to integrate the movement, but Büld's camera shows a pretty uniform crowd of dreadlocks and dark faces. The challenges faced by reggae in England at that time were obviously different than those faced by punk bands, since there was judgment being made about both musical legitimacy and skin color. None of the bands spend a lot of time talking about discrimination outside the system holding them back by not playing their records. Bands like Steel Pulse obviously overcame these challenges and went on to be major acts, worldwide.


Büld's direction for **Reggae in a Babylon** shows him maturing, with artsy shots around the city giving a flavor for what appear to be black neighborhoods. His coverage of bands give the viewer plenty of time to watch an entire song, so the best moments of **Reggae in a Babylon** feel like concert video from a time long past. His interviews come off better, perhaps due to editing or asking good questions, but also seem fundamentally better produced, structured, and shot. The entire affair only runs 45 minutes, so **Reggae in a Babylon** is a snippet that probably could have been rolled under another of the recent Büld releases from MVD. Reggae fans will love this collection of performances and artists, as will anyone interested in the history of English pop music. It is Büld's best from a production standpoint, even if the content is fairly niche.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA Matt Paddock

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**Reggae in a Babylon** on IMDB  
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