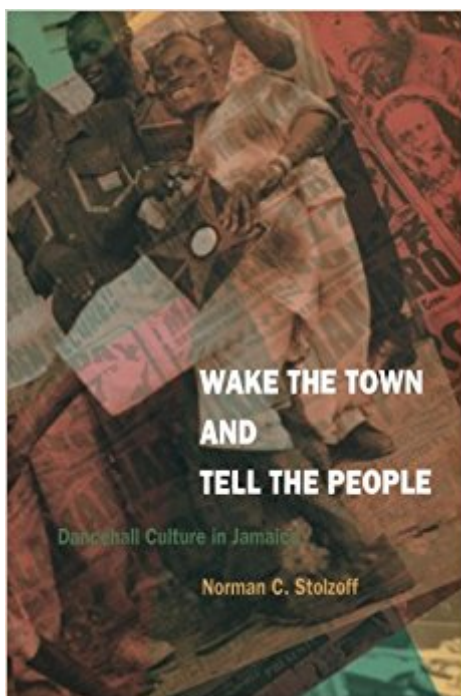


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Wake The Town And Tell The People: Dancehall Culture In Jamaica



Synopsis

Jamaican dancehall has long been one of the most vital and influential cultural and artistic forces within contemporary global music. *Wake the Town and Tell the People* presents, for the first time, a lively, nuanced, and comprehensive view of this musical and cultural phenomenon: its growth and historical role within Jamaican society, its economy of star making, its technology of production, its performative practices, and its capacity to channel political beliefs through popular culture in ways that are urgent, tangible, and lasting. Norman C. Stolzoff brings a fan's enthusiasm to his broad perspective on dancehall, providing extensive interviews, original photographs, and anthropological analysis from eighteen months of fieldwork in Kingston. Stolzoff argues that this enormously popular musical genre expresses deep conflicts within Jamaican society, not only along lines of class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion but also between different factions struggling to gain control of the island nation's political culture. Dancehall culture thus remains a key arena where the future of this volatile nation is shaped. As his argument unfolds, Stolzoff traces the history of Jamaican music from its roots in the late eighteenth century to 1945, from the addition of sound systems and technology during the mid-forties to early sixties, and finally through the post-independence years from the early sixties to the present. *Wake the Town and Tell the People* offers a general introduction for those interested in dancehall music and culture. For the fan or musicologist, it will serve as a comprehensive reference book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Arguing that dancehall music is steeped in the Jamaican slave culture of 200 years ago and is not just a recent form of expression by volatile ghetto youth, Norman C. Stolzoff, an anthropologist at the University of California-Irvine, puts forth the first comprehensive study of a largely misunderstood and underestimated phenomenon. In *Wake the Town & Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*, Stolzoff reveals that the lingo, dress code, power structure (including sexism and violence), sound and expression of dancehall not only reflect the struggle between Jamaica's haves and have-nots but also represent an intra-class (though not insular) battleground among the nation's poor. 44 b&w photos. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“Dancehall is not just about music, it is about a way of life. Norman Stolzoff clearly understands this. I would tell anyone who wants to get a picture of reggae and the Jamaican people to take a read of *Wake the Town and Tell the People*-it's worth it. Blessed. Beenie Man, reigning king of the dancehall and two-time reggae Grammy nominee for *Many Moods of Moses* and *The Doctor* Norman Stolzoff has gone where many fear to tread - to the very heart of the dancehall milieu in the depths of the Kingston ghetto, emerging with the first full, objective look at this fertile birthing ground of Jamaican music. *Wake the Town* introduces us to many of the prime figures in DJ culture producers, promoters, selectors and artists and traces their history back hundreds of years. It is a remarkable work. Roger Steffens, co-author of *Bob Marley: Spirit Dancer and Old Fire Sticks: The Autobiography of Bunny Wailer* “Stolzoff's comprehensive analysis will unquestionably be an important contribution to the growing field of Latin American/Caribbean popular music studies. But beyond its importance as the first study of dancehall, this book is outstanding because of its theoretical sophistication, its comprehensive scope, and its firm grounding in extensive fieldwork among dancehall participants. Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, author of *Bachata: A Social History of Dominican Popular Music* “This is the first sustained study of Jamaican dancehall music and culture in all of its aspects. Everyone interested in the island music, and in popular music in general, will find something useful in this book. Andrew Ross, author of *The Celebration Chronicles*

Stolzoff takes an otherwise fairly circumscribed subculture out of its relatively small arena and presents it to a much wider and more sophisticated audience with great skill and understanding. It is quite surprising and impressive to see the breadth and depth of his emotional commitment and intellectual investment in an area of Jamaican culture that not many foreigners are likely to

understand or appreciate. As a consequence he writes with authority and greater authenticity than one may reasonably expect. The book is extensively researched and very well written. I doubt that many Dancehall artistes or fans are likely to read the book even though they really should. For those of us that pay attention to the deeper significance of what the culture and lyrics of Dancehall communicate and reflect about the larger Jamaican society this book deserves to be seen as one of the most distinctive reference volumes on the subject of Dancehall and its reflection of the broader nature of Jamaican culture. The volume exemplifies the everlasting truth that nothing reveals with greater currency the meaningful history, trials, tribulations, hopes and dreams of Third World peoples than the songs and stories of those most marginalized, excluded or generally disadvantaged by the purposeful prejudices of the guardians of the status quo. Successful practitioners of Dancehall eventually blur the line of demarcation between the haves and the have-nots in a society that prizes status and place in hierarchy. The entire leadership class in Jamaica should read the book and come to comprehend the irony that attends gyrating to the sounds of Dancehall while remaining indifferent to the origins and influence of its philosophy and lyrics.

Destined to become a classic and one that our children can be proud of. The most authentic and evocative portrait of the Jamaican poor---the rich and sustaining vernacular of their culture, the sheer heroism of their economic existence--that I have seen.

As a lover of the creative, colorful and very controversial culture known as Jamaican dancehall, I received this book ecstatically, but I wasn't quite sure of what to expect. I mean, this is a world that changes so rapidly that any attempts to document it have felt outdated even before their ink dried. I thought Stolzoff would play it safe and keep his approach as superficial as possible--a nice coffee table book perhaps, filled with eye-pleasing full-color pix of scantily-dressed dancehall queens, posturing dapper dons, maybe even the occasional text paragraph with amusing tidbits like, "Whatever happened to Wayne 'Sleng Teng' Smith?" Instead, I found a meticulously researched study packed with so much detail that several times I had to "wheel back and come again" (re-read pages) in order to digest it all. Of course, this isn't the first piece of writing to cast a critical eye on dancehall; but past discussions (helmed mostly by staunch roots reggae apologists who make no bones about expressing their view of the subject as an anti-musical ebola responsible for devouring the innards of upright, "real" reggae as exemplified by the likes of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Burning Spear), irrespective of whether they have been pro- or anti-dancehall, have all revolved to

varying degrees around the old dancehall "reggae" vs. "traditional" reggae issue. Stolzoff distinguishes himself from the pack by sidestepping that stumbling block altogether: In (what I think is) a revolutionary move, he posits ALL Jamaican music, in essence, as dancehall—from the creolized drum and fiddle music of 18th century slave frolics to the thundering amplified bass blaring from contemporary Kingston sound systems. In short, he sees dancehall not as a distinct genre of music, but as an interactive method of experiencing music that might be specifically Jamaican. Stolzoff's an anthropologist, not a rock critic, so rather than examining the music in isolation, he reconstructs the world that is dancehall's context, starting from the beginning with the sound systems, the cornerstone of the Jamaican music world. (Stolzoff scores a major coup by including extensive interviews with sound system pioneers like Hedley Jones, who provide a lot of insight into the Jamaican music experience prior to the birth of the local music industry—all other books on reggae up until this time have summed the whole era up in a sentence or two). Upon that foundation, Stolzoff layers the various social and ideological trends that have shaped the dancehall: rude boys, Rastafar-I, fashion, technology... You come to see that as chaotic as the dancehall universe appears to be, it is a well-ordered cosmology where everything has its place: sexuality, piety, violence, flamboyance, humility... They can all co-exist. What I really, really love is the "career trajectory" Stolzoff maps out from his observation of the dancehall field. Using many of the aspiring and established dancehall stars he befriended, Stolzoff illustrates the stages of a career as a performer in the dancehall economy—which is an actual economy that employs millions of Jamaicans in various capacities. I think this is definitely an important book and a complete must-read not only for fans of Jamaican music, but for anybody interested in the way that music and culture intersect with the daily lives of its participants.

This book is too incredible to believe. For those of us who are into dancehall, when we are in the midst of it, study and academia seem so far away. I never thought it was something that someone could record on paper and carry the true vibes of the whole thing. Stolzoff has not only captured the vibes of the dancehall itself, but also the vibes of life for the dancehall community, the economy, and the realities of Jamaica today. For anyone who ever wanted to get away from the tourist fakeries of what you think Jamaica and reggae music are all about, this book is for you. Of course there is nothing like the true experience of the dancehall itself, but outside of that, this book is the next best thing. Buy this book, you won't regret it. Even most of us Jamaicans, can learn a thing or two from it. And for my anthropologists out there, this book is the most gripping, meaningful ethnography since Bourgois' "In Search of Respect : Selling Crack in El Barrio".

As funky, ferocious, and fun as any big beat coming out a sound system in downtown Kingston on a summer night, this book brings Jamaican dancehall to life with some scintillating prose 'riddims'. A sensitive and vivid writer and a longtime student of all things Jamaican, Stolzoff goes everywhere, knows everyone, and brings it all together in the best book on popular culture that I have read in years. A must-read for anyone interested in contemporary music, African-American studies, or the Caribbean. Kudos also to the publisher for creating a beautifully designed book, with many superb photos from Stolzoff's camera. This book will be a classic for many years to come. Randy Lewis Assistant Professor of American Studies University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

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