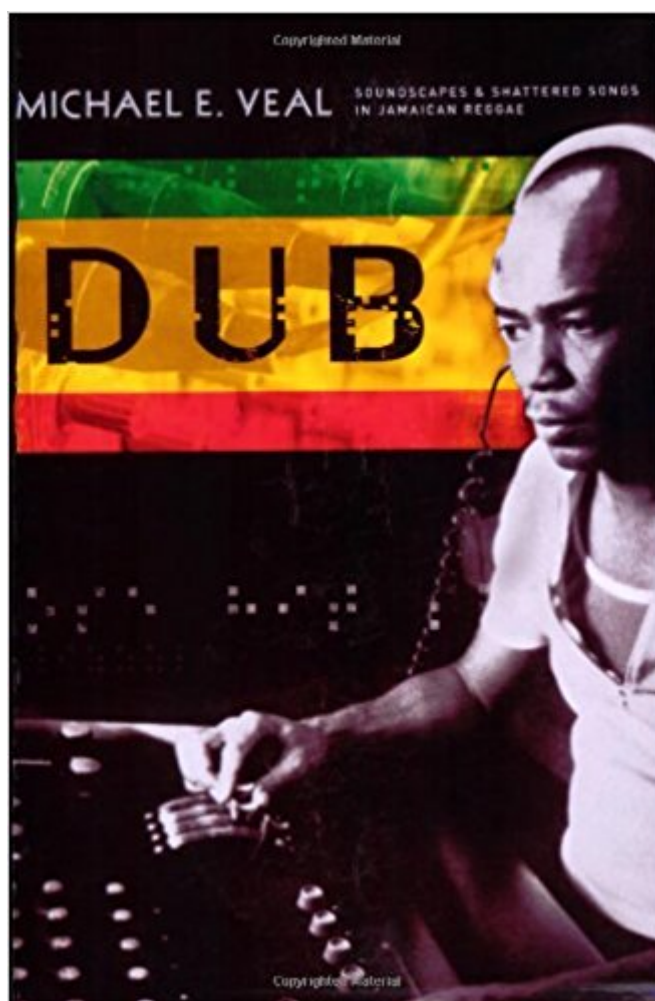


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# Dub: Soundscapes And Shattered Songs In Jamaican Reggae (Music/Culture)



## Synopsis

Winner of the ARSC's Award for Best Research (History) in Folk, Ethnic, or World Music (2008) When Jamaican recording engineers Osbourne "King Tubby" Ruddock, Errol Thompson, and Lee "Scratch" Perry began crafting "dub" music in the early 1970s, they were initiating a musical revolution that continues to have worldwide influence. Dub is a sub-genre of Jamaican reggae that flourished during reggae's "golden age" of the late 1960s through the early 1980s. Dub involves remixing existing recordings electronically improvising sound effects and altering vocal tracks to create its unique sound. Just as hip-hop turned phonograph turntables into musical instruments, dub turned the mixing and sound processing technologies of the recording studio into instruments of composition and real-time improvisation. In addition to chronicling dub's development and offering the first thorough analysis of the music itself, author Michael Veal examines dub's social significance in Jamaican culture. He further explores the "dub revolution" that has crossed musical and cultural boundaries for over thirty years, influencing a wide variety of musical genres around the globe.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Veal chronicles how dub music progressed from remixing and altering existing reggae recordings to studio-creating original songs out of music samples, noise, and found sounds. Inventing and

developing techniques with effects similar to what turntable scratching and sampling later achieved, Osbourne "King Tubby" Ruddock, Lee "Scratch" Perry, and others paved the way for rap by placing the boasting of "toasters" over bass-heavy charts and fractured soundscapes. Veal traces the development of the drum-and-bass sound central to reggae and dub, noting that "sonically and aesthetically, musicians like DJ Kool Herc," often called the progenitor of rap, "essentially transplanted the Jamaican sound system model" to the Bronx, where it was finally distilled into rap. Drawing on interviews with dub pioneers DJ and producer-recording artist Mikey Dread, Veal posits that dub and hip-hop are "deconstructive compositional strategies" that sensitize "listeners to the microaesthetics of production." Yow! Persuasive if weighty stuff that draws a line of musical development from the studios of Kingston to the bling-encrusted world of hip-hop--and it has a killer discography. Mike Tribby

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"Veal has written the first comprehensive overview of (dub's) development up to and including the digital music that followed dub's analog innovations... Veal does an excellent job of explaining, analyzing, and describing sounds. He also connects dub's influence to hip-hop, dance, electronica, and other modern genres, demonstrating how many dub tricks are still being used today in various incarnations. Readers will especially appreciate Veal's excellent Appendix of Recommended Listening, which includes catalog numbers that will make these recordings easier to find... (T)his is certainly the best and only book on dub music; highly recommended for all academic and public music collections where reggae music is popular." •Library Journal

"Veal deftly outlines the sociopolitical context in which dub arose, and explains how the cut-corner, make-do economics of the Jamaican record business led to a maximization of materials: song begat deejay version(s) beget dub(s)-at least three products for little more than the price of one... Where Veal's book steals a march on the competition is in his technical analysis of how Tubby, Perry, Thompson, Sylvan Morris, and other mixing engineers adapted (and creatively abused) the equipment in studios... He also analyzes a number of tracks by each of the principal dub engineers under discussion...to show the transformation of song to version and dub, all of which is illuminating...(H)e provides valuable information as to where these tracks may be found... (T)his is an extremely bold and interesting book." •The Wire

A book like this is long overdue. The simple fact that it was published makes it good. Of the two most important strains of contemporary black music, hip-hop has generated thousands of books

and articles, but dub has been largely ignored by the ethno-musicological world. *Dub - Soundscapes And Shattered Songs In Jamaican Reggae* by Yale ethnomusicologist Michael E. Veal, is a scholarly work, but don't let that scare you. I know some of you might dislike the book because of its somewhat academic tone, scoff at many of its themes and find them pretentious, but I strongly disagree. This is a terrific analysis. Prof. Veal examines dub in a variety of contexts not only as an expression of Afro-Caribbean culture and the Jamaican music business but as an art form and creative process comparable to just about every modern, futurist and post-modern movement from dada and surrealism to conceptual art, from Luigi Russolo and John Cage to its influence on hip-hop and worldwide dance-pop culture. It's not all dry, academic stuff. The man knows, and more importantly, loves his dub music. First, Prof. Veal shows us his dub credentials by going into detail about Jamaican music. But instead of the more familiar reggae legends about impoverished young ghetto singers and gun-toting producers, Veal's emphasis here is on recording studios, audio equipment, and the engineers themselves. After all, dub mixed at the various studios sounded the way it did because of the improvised, often homemade technology the early reggae engineers used. Syd Bucknor, Sylvan Morris, Graeme Goodall and Byron Smith are all mentioned, moving on to Tubby, Errol ET Thompson at Randy's, Channel One etc. There's a lot of interesting information about how JA studios developed during the late 60s and 70s. Veal also compares dub with rock psychedelia and the use of ganja, but also notes that many of the most famous dub originators didn't smoke (Tubby and ET, for example) and while some reggae figures insist dub is not "ganja" music, others insist it most certainly is. Dub can be seen as similar to psychedelia's liberation from sonic slavery, but it seems unlikely that Jamaican engineers were listening to Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma*. On the other hand, a certain amount of psychedelia's production techniques like echo/delay and phase shifting made their way into some American R&B and Soul records of the late 60's and early 70's, which have some rather proto-dubby-sounding parts. These records would've been familiar to Jamaican musicians at the same time dub began to appear, and are likely to have influenced them. Prof. Veal conducted dozens of recent interviews with various figures connected with dub's 70's heyday. "Fortunate survivors" would perhaps be a more accurate way of describing them, given the all too common murders and early deaths which are a tragic fact of life in JA. The dark, moody and aggressive nature of much dub is also considered as a reflection of the crime and violence in Kingston's ghettos. These interviews contain a wealth of comments which help shed new light on the development of dub. Sadly, the fact that a book on dub has taken 30 years to appear means that King Tubby and several others aren't around to offer their comments. Then, he takes us through a few carefully analyzed mixes by various engineers. It's good to see others

besides Tubby and Scratch getting their due credit. Here, Prof. Veal shows us he really listens to this stuff like a truly obsessed fan. Starting with some late 60's Studio One productions, he describes the recordings in great detail, noting the peculiarities of the mixes, instrument placement, sound quality and tape hiss. He describes how the mixes were done based on his interviews with the engineers, what key the tunes were played in, how echoed/delayed chords and vocals create strange rhythmic and harmonic juxtapositions, even noting the echo/delay rates used, the qualities of various types of reverb equipment, and how the signal path through the mixing board created certain sounds. There's a lot of interesting comments by the engineers; Jammy says his best mix ever was "Jammy's A Shine", his powerful, mind-blowing dub of Ronnie Davis' cover of the Wailer's "Sun Is Shining" produced by Bunny Lee around 1977-78. "That record mash up Jamaica and England and Europe and them places completely!" says Jammy. Professor Veal explores the concept of dub as a process rather than product, which transforms the "truth" and "reality" of a normal reggae tune, its sounds unfolding and being turned inside out in the mix, causing the listener to question the authority of their preconceived notions. This was similar to the goal of dada/surrealism (to take one example) and thus dub can be considered to be part of the 20th century's avant-garde tradition. Many of the themes have been briefly discussed by music critics in the pages of *The Wire* and the liner notes to the *Macro Dub Infection* compilations for instance, but Veal devotes 300 plus pages to it, and expands on dozens of the same thoughts and feelings about dub as I (and others) have had for these last 25 years. Slavery and colonialism, the Afro-futurist sonic sci-fi of Sun Ra and Lee Perry, class and race issues, technology and information, all get name checked. The fact that Veal's themes are sprawling yet coherent demonstrates the importance of this music. I've always felt it is probably one of the most revolutionary developments in late 20th century "pop", and Veal also touches on this line of reasoning. Dub radically subverts traditional structures of harmony, rhythm and composition. Dub disrespectfully ignores the notion that every recording of a musical performance is sacred and must not be technologically tampered with because it destroys the integrity and authenticity of the musicians' "artistic expression" as caught on tape. The implications of this subverts the idea that a piece of music (or any art) is "complete" in only one, final form, as intended by its "creator", and ignores ownership and copyright issues. Thus it can be compared to such figures such as Cage, Stockhausen, Warhol, Duchamp, Derrida, Deleuze and Guatarri, post-structuralism and deconstructionism (etc bla bla bla). Dub wallows in gimmicky, anti-musical sound, using echo, fade-ins and outs and other sound effects in totally inappropriate ways which an "authentic" "serious" musician would find absolutely appalling. It not only re-mixes, but it re-thinks, ignores, or gleefully violates practically every rule in the book. The

same things were said about bebop back in the 40's, but ironically it is often the jazz purists who loathe musical developments like dub and hip-hop. Like the use of sampling, dub's entire assault on musical convention infuriates traditional, conservative musicians, and on balance, this is certainly a good thing. That's what makes dub so innovative and important, and of course so much fun. These days, when there are so many people creating what Adrian Sherwood calls "designer dub" - a reggae composition intended to be "dubby" from the start, Veal reminds us that "dub" cannot really exist without a "vocal" version to compare it with - dub is a process of transformation. That's what makes dub so powerful. It's far more dramatic when you hear the vocal followed by the dub (or perhaps vice-versa). A "dub" tune by itself may sound good on its own terms, but it will be far more thrilling when heard in contrast to its traditionally-mixed vocal cut. Obviously, the 12" and "showcase" LP are the ideal formats for this. I'm really impressed with this book, and it's about time someone from the academic world gave dub some serious consideration as a major, influential musical art form.

This is a mind blowing piece of work by Michael Veal. I highly recommend it if you want a well researched account with a detailed analysis of the contribution Jamaica's dub music made to contemporary pop music (hip-hop, techno, house, jungle, ambient, and trip-hop). He argues that it is not overstating the case that this music has changed the way the world conceives of the popular song. Through this book he expertly demonstrates that the production style of Jamaican music has helped transform the sound and structure of world popular music. It is a page turner and well worth the time. I was not disappointed with what I learned and in fact I crave more, I was truly fascinated.

This book is the bomb. Academic in design, but eminently readable. It explains so much about the music that Kool Herc brought to the Bronx in the beginnings of Hip Hop (this book is not about the hip hops). It explains so much about the burgeoning reapplications of technology to their unintended usage. It's the very unappreciated story of one of electronic dance music's major foundations. I tend not to write long reviews about books I love, because I can't find anything wrong with them, and singing their praises would be an exhaustive effort, when I should be writing my own articles, instead.

**Must have for reggae specialists**

If you love Reggae and you're a music nerd, you'll love this book. It gets a bit technical in certain

areas, but I like that about it. If you want a more straightforward history of Reggae, there are probably better books out there. This one deals with the progression of Reggae from Rocksteady to Dub and explores the similarities between Jamaican Dub and American Hip Hop. Interesting read indeed.

While there may be some readers grumbling about the author's 'dryness' in this volume, I found it to be a unique and invaluable resource in bringing out many heretofore unknown details of dub production techniques from some of its most revered protagonists. This book authoritatively helps frame Dub in the greater context of Jamaica's musical and cultural landscape in the second half of the twentieth century, with unique innovations which some would argue has had an immense but vastly under-appreciated impact on the rest of the planet's musical development up to this very moment. The author has managed to provide studio rats such as myself with the luxurious wealth of information that -short of being having been there- some of us had been looking for since first hearing some of these recordings more than a quarter of a century ago, and as such is an invaluable addition to any dub creator's toolbox. The minute and precise details in which some of this is recounted is a unique asset in helping preserve what has up to now been nothing but soon-to-be-gone and more often than not distorted oral tradition, and its many direct quotes from those key players still alive today will make it a solid historical reference point for those planning to further study this subject for years to come! It is also welcome and refreshing to read such an account from the writer's African-American perspective, as it brings up many crucial facets of Jamaican music and culture into a sorely needed focus, which up to now has been the province of either ethnomusicologists who for the most part somewhat missed the point, or enthusiasts without the necessary research background and clarity of expression to bring it all together. There are very few books that arguably helped change one's life. In my case, this is most definitely one of them. It comes with my highest recommendation.

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