

"COME DOWN SELECTA"- Capturing the Dancehall Phenomenon Through the Album Art of  
Wilfred Limonious

Audrey Arthurs

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History)

at Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2021

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Audrey Arthurs

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Art History)**

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Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Dr. Nicola Pezolet* Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Dr. Johanne Sloan* Thesis Supervisor

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Nicola Pezolet, Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
2021 \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Annie Gérin, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

## ABSTRACT

“COME DOWN SELECTA”- Capturing the Dancehall Phenomenon Through the Album Art of

Wilfred Limonious

Audrey Arthurs

This thesis examines the artwork of Wilfred Limonious (1949-1999), who illustrated hundreds of vinyl album covers for dancehall music, a sub-genre of reggae music, during the 1980s and 1990s. In this thesis dancehall music is regarded as a personal, musical response to inner-city struggles, oppression and the repeated denial of opportunities to improve standards of living and community safety. Using a satirical, comics-like style, Limonious illustrated the musical scene and inner-city lifestyle of Kingston, Jamaica; his art replete with razor sharp wit and humour yet imbued with empathy and respect for the men and women he depicts. The only scholarly work to date that discusses Limonious’s work is Christopher Bateman’s exhibition catalogue *In Fine Style: The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious* (2016). My research sets out to situate Limonious’s work within the history of comics, by comparing his work to countercultural comics and to a number of Black (American) artists who drew Black characters during the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis also draws on interdisciplinary scholarship to frame Limonious’s art: cultural studies, histories of Jamaica, musicology, and gender theory. More specifically, the thesis focuses on gender dynamics in dancehall culture, which takes the form of flashy clothing, bling, exaggerated erotic performances, and fantastical violence. This thesis examines the gender dynamics in his artwork, while focusing on the hypersexual performances of both men and women in the dancehall space and on dancehall album art.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Sloan, my thesis supervisor, who from the first casual meeting, expressed a keen interest in my topic and validated its worthiness for in-depth study. You were undaunted by the topic of dancehall album art and approached learning about Jamaican culture with curiosity and respect. Your guidance and constructive feedback were always on point and helped to propel my project forward. I am also grateful to Graduate Director and enthusiastic second reader Dr. Pezolet, who always proved to be a steadying force and showed me empathy and understanding. I appreciate the time Dr. Pezolet dedicated to reading and critiquing my thesis. Your insights were invaluable and offered a fresh perspective.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Associate Dean, Dr. Kristina Huneault who illuminated a path to enter the MA program in Art History. Her guidance and personal investment in my success will never be forgotten.

I would like to thank Dr. Charmaine Nelson for her encouragement and for providing tenacious leadership. You were a dependable, honest sounding board; you are forthcoming and generous with your expertise.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Wesley Hughes who helped me to reconnect to Jamaica. He deepened my appreciation of the history and culture of a dynamic and inventive people. Our spirited exchanges revealed new avenues of study that I am eager to pursue in the next phase of my education.

Finally, I would not have been able to complete my thesis without the support of my sister Andrea Arthurs, who helped and encouraged me to not give up on my dream and my cousin Andrew King's generosity in providing a welcoming space in Kingston for me to focus and study.



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## Introduction

Before the advent of digitized music and music videos, the combination of music and vinyl album art celebrated a symbiotic, mutually enhancing relationship, merging dynamic musical storytelling with a vivid, visual dimension. Music lovers of all genres relished the tactile and visual interaction with the album covers. Designed for mass consumption, album art was a marketing tool to sell music, but it also captured culture, ideology, and lifestyles. Jamaican dancehall music, a sub-genre of reggae music, is no exception. Indeed, dancehall musicians and producers relied heavily on vinyl album artworks to communicate with the audience by depicting their history, power, class struggles and the grittiness of daily living in the Kingston inner city districts.

My master's thesis project, *"Come Down Selecta": Capturing the dancehall phenomenon through the album art of Wilfred Limonious*, focuses on the illustrated album art of Wilfred Limonious, a renowned Jamaican graphic artist, who participated in the evolution of dancehall music in the 1980's and early 1990's.<sup>1</sup> From his vast number of works, I have chosen a small selection of artworks in order to study Limonious's astute observations on dancehall culture. I intend to show how Limonious's dynamic, satirical artworks capture the posturing, classism, fantastical violence, untethered potent sexuality and raw energy that are performed in the dancehall spaces and are outside of the dominant accepted Jamaican lifestyle. His illustrations for the vinyl album covers reveal pressing social issues in Jamaica. Limonious becomes the voice

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<sup>1</sup> The Selecta chooses the record and passes it to the DJ to play.

of the people as he exposes inner-city struggles and interactions between the sexes, not allowing any of the players to escape his satirical pen. He gives bold visibility to an ignored and marginalized segment of society. While his artwork pokes fun, his audience appreciates not only the humour but also the gravity, depth and pain behind the “livity”—a Rastafarian term that embodies a central energy predicated on love for all living things; the way people live that promotes peace.<sup>2</sup>

As a Jamaican-born student of art history growing up in Montreal, my family maintained a strong connection to our roots and culture. It was especially my summer visits to my father in Brooklyn, New York, a city teeming with a thriving Jamaican diaspora, that moulded and reinforced my Jamaican identity. I have fond memories of hours whiled away in record stores, sifting through the dancehall albums, while engaging in spirited conversations with fellow aficionados. In adulthood, my visits to Jamaica fuelled my desire to dig deeper into the music, its history and messages. My research eventually led me to discover Wilfred Limonious’s artwork, which enthralled me. This is what led me to want to write a thesis that examines how Limonious’s illustrations are deeply connected to the growth and dissemination of dancehall music and situates him amongst other international contemporary, countercultural comic artists and cartoonists.

Dancehall differs from reggae in important ways: while reggae music is marketed to the world and sung in proper English, dancehall is sung in the local dialect, thus targeting primarily

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<sup>2</sup> “Livity,” accessed July 20, 2021, <https://jamaicanpatwah.com/term/Livity/2780#.YPcRBOhKjiU>. And <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-Livity>. Definition of livity or levity can be found in the Jamaican patois dictionary.

a Jamaican audience. Initially, it did not reach out to the world for acceptance. Dancehall looked inward to the disenfranchised, poor, working class Jamaican people and is a reflection of their culture. It is an artistic expression which allows both musicians and fans of the music to escape the misery of inner-city life. Borne out of the poverty in inner-city Kingston, dancehall eventually evolves to become one of the most influential forms of music in the contemporary world. Jamaican journalists and international mainstream culture would define dancehall unidimensionally as too “slack”<sup>3</sup>, erotic and dirty, in an attempt to delegitimize and disrespect it.<sup>4</sup> The longevity and international reach of dancehall have disproved those labels. The overly moralizing and simplistic analysis by the educated and “high culture” segments of society ignore that dancehall music is a deep, textured, multilayered response of the disenfranchised on a personal level to societal oppression, neglect, and denial of rights and privileges. The dancehall space and music have become an inner city haven where ritual meets erotic spectacle.

My thesis is divided into four sections. Section 1 explores the socio-cultural construct of dancehall genre; section 2 presents the artist, Wilfred Limonious, in relation to the history of comic art; section 3 discusses masculinity in dancehall culture and in Limonious’s art; and finally, section 4, debates the representations of women, gender dynamics, and the use of clothing as a form of resistance and a celebration of self.

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<sup>3</sup> Slack is a Jamaican term used to describe behavior that is x-rated, erotic and salacious.

<sup>4</sup> Donna P. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall Popular Culture and The Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 18. Hope cites numerous articles, especially from the *Jamaica Gleaner* newspaper.

Christopher Bateman's and Al "Fingers" Newman's exhibition catalogue *In Fine Style: The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious* serves as a major reference point for my thesis, as to date it is the only scholarly discussion of Limonious's works. The catalogue includes essays by a number of authors: Canadian photographer and reggae journalist Beth Lesser offers insight on Jamaican humour, while professor of Cultural Studies Donna P. Hope addresses the significance of the cartoon in Jamaican culture, showing that Limonious's cartoon art combines many Jamaican traditions of humour and comic art. Also in the catalogue, Steve Barrow, reggae historian, cites 18<sup>th</sup>-century cartoonist Thomas Rowlandson and 20<sup>th</sup>-century caricaturist George Herriman as some of Limonious's antecedents. My thesis sets out to demonstrate that Limonious's body of artwork should also be connected to other Black artists who drew Black characters. Other scholars have not done this research. My thesis will ground Limonious's comic style in relation to other Black historical and countercultural comics by drawing on the research of comics scholar Sheena C. Howard, communications scholar Ronald L. Jackson II, and civil rights historian L.E.J. Rachell.

The scholarship of Donna P. Hope<sup>5</sup> and David Katz<sup>6</sup>, a reggae historian, inform my examination of the political, social and cultural history that allow the birth and emergence of dancehall to move beyond its inner city origin to an international sphere. Hope's prolific work in dancehall culture also provides one of the theoretical foundations for my thesis.

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<sup>5</sup> Donna P. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall Popular Culture and The Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006)

<sup>6</sup> David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (London: Jawbone Press, 2012).



Hope's work allows me to analyze masculinity through the lens of capitalism, classism, social and cultural constructs.<sup>7</sup> Her research informs my analysis of varying depictions of masculinity that appear on Limonious's album covers—from the hypersexual performance and erotic display to the fantastical and real violence. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity structures my analysis of both male and female dancehall participants' exploration and experimentation with the display of gender.<sup>8</sup> Butler explains that gender performativity "is a certain kind of enactment; the "appearance" of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strict binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power."<sup>9</sup>

My analysis of femininity as it is articulated in Limonious's art also draws on Hope and Butler. In Butler's case it is her work on connecting gender performativity to "precarity" that allows me to address the vulnerable situation in which some of the women in dancehall find themselves.<sup>10</sup> I will use Anna Kasafi Perkins' post-colonial reading of scriptures that define desired and undesired female attributes to investigate dancehall's classification of women as virtuous or immoral.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Donna P. Hope, *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall*. (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no.4 (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR. Revista De Antropología Iberoamericana*, 4, no. 03 (2009): 1

<sup>10</sup>Judith Butler. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR. Revista De Antropología Iberoamericana*, 4, no. 03 (2009).

<sup>11</sup>Anna Kasafi Perkins. "Good, Good Goodas Gyll: Deconstructing the Virtuous Woman in Dancehall," in *Reggae From Yaad Traditional and Emerging themes in Jamaican Popular Music* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2015).

Dress and erotic presentation become paramount in dancehall spaces. Limonious captures the spirit of the dances—the flashy, sensual clothing with plenty of bling, through his exaggerated cartoon depiction of the performers and partyers in a concert atmosphere. A historical account of slave dress through historian Steven O. Buckridge’s analysis offers insight into Jamaicans’ preoccupation with dress which can be argued as a form of resistance and a reclaiming of self,<sup>12</sup> while I also draw on Bibi Bakare-Yusef’s investigation of clothing as fantasy, re-imagining of self and resistance against classism.<sup>13</sup>

### **Dancehall Music**

The emergence and success of the dancehall phenomenon should be understood through the socio-economic and political framework that evolved throughout Jamaica’s history of resistance and struggle. To explore the environment that allowed dancehall’s growth, I will provide a synopsis of Donna P. Hope’s research in *Inna Di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica* and David Katz’s interviews of dancehall innovators in *Solid Foundation An Oral History of Reggae*. Hope’s chapter “Setting the Dancehall Stage” lists many factors that allowed the rise of dancehall- free market capitalism, increased urbanization, rising political violence, explosion of Jamaica’s informal economy and increasing merging of political

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<sup>12</sup> Steven O. Buckridge. “The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Bibi Bakare-Yusef, “Fabricating Identities: Survival and Imagination in Jamaican Dancehall Culture,” *Fashion Theory*, 10, no. 3 (April 2015).

ideologies of Jamaica's two parties the People's National Party (PNP) and Jamaica Labour Party (JLP).<sup>14</sup>

Jamaica's long history of poverty, inequality and exploitation was challenged by Michael Manley's PNP when he took office in 1972. Manley sought to redistribute Jamaica's wealth, reduce dependency on foreign companies, and replace capitalism with socialism.<sup>15</sup> But Manley's agenda suffered major setbacks due to the OPEC oil crisis (1973-74) and the resulting devaluation of Jamaican currency. The country's competitiveness and growth declined sharply and with it, living standards of much of the population.

In 1980, the JLP, led by Edward Seaga, ousted Manley's PNP. A consistent pattern of cronyism and political patronage flourished.<sup>16</sup> Economic and social favours were granted to those who were committed to whichever ruling party.<sup>17</sup> The people's loyalty and fervent following of the politicians grew out of desperation and extreme trepidation. The stranglehold that these political leaders had on these communities were compelling; they controlled the cultural, social and economic development of these communities. These paternalistic politicians sought to control and manipulate people and cared for them as long as they voted for them.<sup>18</sup> Social and political upheaval and agendas, Reaganomics, trickledown economics, war on drugs, and Jamaica being used as a drug hub for Columbia and Peru were just some of

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<sup>14</sup> Donna P. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall Popular Culture and The Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 3.

the issues bombarding the island.<sup>19</sup> Soaring unemployment, low wages and lack of price control on basic goods exacerbated poverty and increased desperation. Seaga's war on drugs ideology contradicted what was happening on the ground because both political parties had alliances with gangs who were also drug dealers. The war on drugs, general crime and police brutality led to high rates of incarceration, thereby weakening families, leaving them further impoverished.

To overcome these development challenges, Jamaica had to make several structural adjustment measures to become more competitive on a global level. While the economy grew, it was reliant on foreign aid, especially from the United States. There were severe cutbacks in public expenditure and public programs such as transportation and infrastructure related jobs. Free social programs declined and the people, already burdened by increased debt, had to now pay for these services.<sup>20</sup> The education system suffered because of overcrowding and dilapidated physical structures. Housing conditions were poor as the government moved away from helping those who relied on its services.<sup>21</sup> The development of Kingston was neglected, while other areas were developed for tourism. The deregulation of the labour market led to more unemployment; cost of living increased drastically while wages remained stagnant.<sup>22</sup>

This grim reality propelled Manley and the PNP back into power in 1989. The inability of the government to develop new political, economic and social strategies to help the people,

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<sup>19</sup> David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (London: Jawbone Press, 2012), 332.

<sup>20</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 4.

forced Jamaicans to devise new ways to survive.<sup>23</sup> The informal economy blossomed, as people – predominantly women, known as higglers – were selling fruits, ground provisions such as yams and sweet potatoes on the streets. Soon these women were able to travel to purchase foreign goods and bring them back to Jamaica to sell. Their success did not go unnoticed and was formalized by the state. Other forms of brisk underground activities persist such as route taxis, selling cooked food on the streets (pan-fry chicken man), fruits and ground provisions. Men joined this flourishing market that was formerly women's domain.

Similar to the unstructured economic activities, in the 1980's, dancehall music – a lively, energetic bass-driven rhythm burst out of inner-city Jamaica, infiltrated uptown culture, eventually spreading through the diaspora, to international shores. It was a much needed cultural response to the grim social, political and economic upheaval and displacement. The genre is named after the literal Dancehall space where low-income Kingstons, who craved entertainment but didn't own personal radios and stereos, would go to express themselves, bodily, lyrically and stylistically.<sup>24</sup> The venues were not new to Jamaican culture; they have been flourishing from the late 1950's and are a source of musical ingenuity and production.

The musical shifts that allowed the rise of dancehall are articulated through the rich, oral histories of reggae music's chief contributors in David Katz's *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae*. Many different elements came together to produce a thriving Dancehall space: the dancers, and musical artists, but it was the DJ's with their lyrical smoothness,

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<sup>23</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Sonjah Stanley Niaah. "'Slackness Personified,' Historicized and De-Legitimized," *Small Axe* 21, (October 2006): 3.

creativity, spontaneity and wit, who spin and toast to “nice up the dance”, that held centre stage.<sup>25</sup> Music fed the souls of the ghetto youths as they created their own culture in the midst of grinding poverty and rigid classism.<sup>26</sup>

Dancehall started in the sound system culture of Clement “Sir Coxsone” Dodd and later on U-Roy known as the “Originator” and king of the Dancehall because of his toasting skills. At its inception Dancehall was meant to be lighthearted, even while it addressed people’s suffering and societal ills. Daily violence eventually seeped into the music. For example, the Green Bay Killings of five JLP gunmen ambushed by soldiers from the Military Intelligence Unit headed up by the ruling PNP Party on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1978 were the inspiration for reggae hits *Peace Treaty Special* (1978) by Jacob Miller and Dillinger’s *War is Over* (1978), indicating how Jamaica’s music was influenced by its politics..<sup>27</sup> Dancehall developed in rural areas with a small number of musicians and few producers that could generate innovative sounds. In the late 1970’s early dancehall styles started to emerge because of a few notable talents like Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare who introduced unique sounds such as the synthdrum patterns that would come to define the sounds of artists like Black Uhuru and Grace Jones.<sup>28</sup> Another producer Junjo, who helped to stylize the back-up sessional band the Roots Radics, was responsible for the rise of such artists as Yellowman and Josey Wales. A sound engineer who was known as called the “Scientist” because of his electronic tech wizardry skills, was added to

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<sup>25</sup>Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 327. Toasting is when the DJ sings and talks over the beats.

<sup>26</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 328.

<sup>27</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 293.

<sup>28</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 300.

Junjo's team.<sup>29</sup> The "Scientist's" experimentation with various sounds helped to infuse innovative, refreshing elements into early dancehall.

Pivotal moments include the deaths of reggae artists Jacob Miller in 1980, and Bob Marley in 1981.<sup>30</sup> During this social upheaval, roots reggae musicians were able to make transitions to the new dancehall sounds. With the new music came dancehall culture's trending themes, "slackness" and gun violence. The government targeted prolific performers and upcoming artists by arresting them for illegal gun possession causing them to move to New York and London<sup>31</sup>. These artists continued to influence dancehall in Jamaica and spread older genres such as lovers rock in London. While they didn't always have access to traditional studios, with the help of technological advancements such as the drum machine and keyboard bass, they created the first computerized rhythm that became a dancehall standard. Sly Dunbar's experimentation with synthdrums revealed how technology could alter the way dancehall music was created. This was a significant development. Inner-city artistes could create their own studios in a small space, circumventing traditional producers.

Entertainers who left Jamaica travelled as far as Japan to perform, collaborating with Japanese musicians, and teaching them about sound systems. Ironically enough, it was the Japanese invention of the portable Casio keyboard with preset melodies and rhythms that provided the blueprint for one of the most popular dancehall rhythms ever, the Sleng Teng

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<sup>29</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 307.

<sup>30</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 298.

<sup>31</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 332.

riddim.<sup>32</sup> After this, every producer went digital.<sup>33</sup> The producers that could not adapt to the sounds became irrelevant. Even those who were not musically trained but tech savvy could benefit if they could create a rhythm. The unpolished sound and brashness of the new rhythms reflected the climate in Jamaica more so than roots reggae.<sup>34</sup> The gruff, vocal delivery matched the rough, less stylized sounds.

The lyrics and attitudes in dancehall reflect the struggle, pain and desperation of the inner-city. The dancehall becomes a place of refuge for some but also is used as a means to escape economic oppression through talent and visibility. It becomes a space that testifies to the people's resiliency and celebrates their survival in systems of oppressions and exclusion.<sup>35</sup> The people take control of the space to re-imagine their lives and reinvent themselves as a means of escapism. To be noticed, the musicians took on various personas and emulated American cowboys, outlaws and gangsterism that would eventually be incorporated in the "Dons and Shottas" culture that exists today.<sup>36</sup> Names of outlaws like Josie Wales, Lone Ranger and Dillinger headline in these spaces. It is a male dominated space but as will be shown—women nonetheless contribute to the scene in numerous ways through their elaborate, theatrical costumes and hypersexualized performances.

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<sup>32</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 346.

<sup>33</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 338.

<sup>34</sup> Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 350.

<sup>35</sup> Niaah. "Slackness Personified," 3.

<sup>36</sup> Dons and Shottas is a term used to describe the gunmen and men who control territories for the politicians or drug dealers.



The dancehall space is crucial to those who want to escape the confines of the ghetto. Local artistes<sup>37</sup> who have global representatives could expand onto an international stage, but with that platform, came international influences and perhaps unwanted attention. Many critics emphasized the crude, sexually-charged lyrics and erotic performances without understanding the culture and the context.<sup>38</sup> Another unwanted label was “murder music” because of dancehall’s overt rejection of homosexuality.<sup>39</sup> Both criticisms will be addressed in this thesis.

### **Wilfred Limonious- Evolution of The Artist behind the Music**

Wilfred Limonious (1949-1999) grew up in the rural area of Albert Town, Jamaica, before moving to the big city of Kingston. His career as a graphic artist started at the tabloid newspaper, *Jamaica Star*, then he became the in-house illustrator for JAMAL (Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy). In 1983, Trevor George, the owner of a local graphic art company, received a request from Neville Lee’s Sonic Sounds to create jacket covers for deejay Jah Thomas’ album *Shoulder Move*, 1983 (Fig. 1 and 2).<sup>40</sup> Bateman explained in the “Working in Reggae” article of *In Fine Style* how Limonious’s illustrations became the chosen visual representation of dancehall culture. Trevor George approached Limonious to illustrate the album cover and found Limonious’s work “new and fresh” reflecting a youthful

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<sup>37</sup> Jamaican scholars and the community at large use the term artistes because it means a professional entertainer, especially a singer or dancer.

<sup>38</sup> Hope, *Inna DI Dancehall*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Cecil Gutzmore, “Casting The First Stone! Policing of Homo/Sexuality in Jamaican Culture,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6, no.1 (2004): 120-122.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Bateman and Al “Fingers” Newman, *In Fine Style: The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious*, (London: One Love Books, 2016), 75.

approach to life.<sup>41</sup> Emerging dancehall artistes didn't want their images on their albums; they preferred more jovial, light hearted characters that would tell a story, and so they embraced Limonious's comic characters.<sup>42</sup> Lee's Sonic Sounds kept Limonious's identity a secret for as long as possible,<sup>43</sup> but other record labels such as George Phang's Powerhouse, Winston Riley's Techniques, Coxsone Dodd's Studio One, Prince Jazzbo's Ujama and Dennis Hayles's Dennis Star International, eventually enlisted his services.<sup>44</sup> From there, he found tremendous success and honed his artistic prowess, accompanying the birth and growth of dancehall in the 1980's and 1990's through his illustrations of logos, posters, record centre labels for 45's and over three hundred album covers.<sup>45</sup> Inspiration for his dancehall scenes came from attending the Gemini Nightclub located on the boundaries of upper and lower Kingston/St. Andrew, frequented by many reggae and dancehall artistes and personalities.<sup>46</sup> The true essence of his mission was to capture the unbridled energy, erotica, swagger, classism, and fantastical violence performed in the dancehall scene, without being judgmental and condescending toward the genre and the people.

The 2016 exhibition catalogue *In Fine Style: The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious*, edited by Christopher Bateman and Al Newman, provides an overview of his career.<sup>47</sup> Bateman

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<sup>41</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> "Wilfred Limonious: The Jamaican Illustrator Who Defined Dancehall Art," accessed May 28, 2021, <https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/in-fine-style-the-dancehall-art-of-wilfred-limonious-book-180816>

<sup>46</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 36-144. This catalogue operated as the centre piece for my thesis and was a culmination of Christopher Bateman's album collection, Ian Whitham and Dan Prin's library. Between the collectors, they unearthed an impressive, comprehensive collection of Wilfred Limonious' artwork.

and Newman document how, at the inception of Limonious' career his comic strips "Amos", "Shane and Shawn" and "Chicken" graced the *Jamaican Star* pages.<sup>48</sup> Amos and Shane and Shawn are child-friendly characters who spoke in proper English, but Chicken's utterances are written in Jamaican patois and have the swagger and "slack" comedy that would later characterize the dancehall sensation.<sup>49</sup> The significance of comedy and humour in Jamaican culture is articulated in Beth Lesser's foreword to the exhibition catalogue, where she describes humour in the old, folk songs accompanied by pantomime as "clear and sharp" and inclusive; everyone including those being lampooned, are in on the joke.<sup>50</sup> As Donna P. Hope points out in her contribution to the catalogue, "Smiles to Cover Heartburn," Jamaican comedy is used to deal with painful events, and make social commentary about important facets of Jamaican identity.<sup>51</sup> She adds that Limonious's jacket covers "capture themes and underlying codes that artistes and their producers impute in their music, insisting that you must listen and look."<sup>52</sup> The album jackets with their vivid, colourful imageries capture a "lyrical narrative" that complements the energetic, pulsating dancehall rhythms.<sup>53</sup> According to Vincent "Fowly" Dillon, a fellow designer, Limonious used either fine or heavy pointed markers to draw the

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<sup>48</sup> The *Jamaican Star* is a racy tabloid for lower income group. It is significant that Limonious did not make the *Jamaican Gleaner*. The *Star* had Leandro a white Jamaican whose artistic style was more traditional.

<sup>49</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Beth Lesser, "Foreword: Limonious and Jamaican Humour, in *In Fine Style: The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious*, ed. C. Bateman and A. Newman (London: One Love Books, 2016), 13.

<sup>51</sup> Donna P. Hope, "Smiles to Cover Heartburn" in *In Fine Style The Dancehall Art of Wilfred Limonious*, ed. C. Bateman and A. Newman (London: One Love Books, 2016), 19. Note: In Caribbean culture, pantomime and comedy is often used as an antidote to the harsh conditions of plantation slavery and to celebrate and commemorate African culture.

<sup>52</sup> Hope, "Smiles to Cover the Heartburn," 19.

<sup>53</sup> Hope, "Smiles," 19.

images, indicating with a pencil where each colour should go and its gradation.<sup>54</sup> A secretary typed the fonts or cut letters from the newspaper and then Limonious arranged and pasted the letters, adding freehand writing as well.<sup>55</sup>

According to Lesser, as part of the construction of a new postcolonial identity for Jamaica, new musical forms such as mento and ska emerged in the 1950's and 1960's; these are infused with the same type of humour found in pantomime, which is to say that the lyrics poke fun at Jamaicans while helping to forge a national identity.<sup>56</sup> By the 1970's, reflecting greater political tension and deteriorating social conditions, reggae music emerges with a more serious message and commentary.<sup>57</sup> The oppressed people of Jamaica, represented by Rastafarians, look beyond Jamaica's shores for liberation, yearning for solace and redemption in Africa.<sup>58</sup> Reggae is performed in proper English, and that made it easily marketable on international shores where other marginalized communities could relate to the Rastafarian plight. Dancehall did not draw inspiration from Rastafarianism but from internal, daily ghetto life and its surroundings, while celebrating and exhibiting Jamaicanness.<sup>59</sup> Limonious's album work captures everyday happenings in Jamaican life from motorcyclists weaving in and out of traffic to "labrish," which is a Jamaican expression describing women gossiping while working or selling goods (Fig. 3).<sup>60</sup> He uses Jamaican patois, the common dialect or form of expression for

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<sup>54</sup> Bateman and Newman, "In Fine Style," 96.

<sup>55</sup> Bateman and Newman, "In Fine Style," 103.

<sup>56</sup> Lesser, "Foreword," 10.

<sup>57</sup> Lesser, "Foreword," 13.

<sup>58</sup> Lesser, "Foreword," 13.

<sup>59</sup> Lesser, "Foreword," 13.

<sup>60</sup> See Limonious's art for Dennis Star Presents Labrish, Volume 1 (1987).

the Jamaican working people in the dialogue and commentaries on the album art to reflect how dancehall is sung, much different from his earlier newspaper cartoons which are written in standard English which is the official language of the elite.

Limonious's artwork on dancehall album covers showcases the complexities and paradoxes of Jamaican culture along with an array of gender roles and performances. His depiction of daily life and dancehall scenes along with comical dialogues allow international audiences "a peek over the zinc fence" into local Jamaican dance scenes.<sup>61</sup> Much of Limonious's work depicts the cultural life of people from the inner-city who are not the usual subjects depicted by other mainstream artists.

Limonious's art-making process commenced with him listening to the recorded songs on the album; then he would create comedy by drawing on daily scenes in the community.<sup>62</sup> Limonious tirelessly worked to impart the mood and the spirit of one of Jamaica's biggest musical styles, giving dancehall its upbeat visual vibes and exhibiting the exuberance and playfulness of Jamaicans through using patois speech bubbles and exaggerated cartoons depicting everyday scenes.<sup>63</sup> However, he also exposed the effects of classism and social fragility arising from limited resources within Jamaican society.

In doing this, he managed to epitomize a Jamaican expression "tek bad tings and mek laugh,"<sup>64</sup> a defining feature of Jamaican identity and a strategy for survival. For example, on the album cover *Original Stalag 17, 18 and 19* (Various Artistes) (1985), Limonious lampoons the

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<sup>61</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 24.

<sup>62</sup> Lesser, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style* 32.

<sup>64</sup> Jamaican expression that means take bad things and make a joke out of it.

Jamaican prison system by imagining a dance within prison walls (Fig. 4 and 5). A prisoner and a guard find willing dance partners as the other prisoners look on doltishly. One of the prisoners is blindfolded, yet smiles broadly and faces a firing squad even as the head prison guard orders the squad not to shoot until the prisoner has finished dancing to the “Stalag Riddim”. Even the dancing rats in the prison find the music infectious but Limonious’s written comment on the rats biting the prisoners, reveals the deplorable prison conditions. Despite this, everyone is having a good time; dancehall becomes a powerful mechanism that allows inner-city people to transcend the abominable conditions, whether those are in prison or in open society—to find joy even if it is short-lived. While dealing with a serious societal matter, Limonious’s illustrations and blurbs allow viewers to chuckle.

In the *In Fine Style catalogue*, Steve Barrow, a reggae historian and cartoon enthusiast, states in an interview with Al “Fingers” Newman that Limonious’s illustrations of exaggerated caricatures is reminiscent of artworks of 18<sup>th</sup> English cartoonist Thomas Rowlandson and 19<sup>th</sup> century German artist Lothar Meggendorfer.<sup>65</sup> Barrows also cites other influences such as early 20<sup>th</sup> century American comic artist George Herriman, UK artists Dudley Watkins and Leo Baxendale’s version of Blondie as antecedents to Limonious’s work.<sup>66</sup> However, I believe that it is important to provide an artistic genealogy for Limonious, within a tradition of cartoons and comics, by connecting him to early Black artists who feature Black characters. Most of these artists were active in the USA from the early part of the twentieth century but have received little attention. It is difficult to know whether these artists’ works were readily available and

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<sup>65</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Bateman and Newman, *In Fine Style*, 27.

consumed by Jamaican people. The important scholarship of Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson II in their book *Black Comics Politics of Race and Representation*, as well as L.E.J. Rachell's article "This Forgotten Comic Artist From The Black Power Movement Was A True Revolutionary," have helped to incorporate Black cartoonists works into the mainstream lexicon of comics. Their scholarship provides the foundation for my analysis. According to these authors, in the 1920s, Black cartoonists created Black characters that reflected their hopes and dreams, the Black experience and the emerging middle-class in America.<sup>67</sup> These comic strips were featured in black newspapers such as *Pittsburgh Courier*; the *Chicago Defender*; the *Afro American* and the *New York Amsterdam News*.<sup>68</sup> Most of these comic strips were illustrated by more than one artist: Sunnyboy Sam was sketched by Wilbert Holloway and Clarence Washington, while Bungleton Green had four different artists over its forty-three year run (1920-1963). At first Sunnyboy Sam was more a gag strip with a fast-talking man speaking a heavy Black American dialect, but by the 1940's Sunnyboy Sam turned into a college-educated intellectual, reflecting Black peoples' pursuit and achievement of higher education,<sup>69</sup> similar to Limonious' illustrations of class divisions on the dancehall album jackets. However, Sunnyboy Sam retained his roots as expressed in his heavy dialect when angered by white people.

In the 1930's, to escape the hardship of the Great Depression, Henry Brown's Bungleton Green became adventure driven, a fantasy of the Black self. For instance, Bungleton becomes an eccentric millionaire who honeymoon in lavish style in Africa. While there, Bungleton slayed

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<sup>67</sup> Sheena C. Howard, *Black Comics Politics of Race and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 13.

<sup>68</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 15.

six lions, became the chief of the Congo and owned all the wealth in Africa- the diamonds, the gold, and copper mines.<sup>70</sup> During perilous economic times, the fantastical Bungleton Green offered comic relief and escapism for Black people who were affected greatly by unemployment and financial uncertainty.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike Henry Brown's Bungleton Green, Jay Jackson's Bungleton wrestled with the day-to-day grind that plagued Black Americans. In one strip, Bungleton could not enlist in the war; although he recognized that the United States was not an ideal country, he wanted to help maintain it by doing whatever he could and so with the shortage of food in mind, Bungleton went off to the country to raise chickens to help with war effort.<sup>72</sup> While in the country, Bungleton struck oil but quickly covers it up because there was nothing to purchase anyway, making reference to shortages of food and basic goods.<sup>73</sup> Both Brown's and Jackson's versions of Bungleton Green could be compared to the dancehall attendees Limonious depicted; Brown's Bungleton Green fantasy-self mirrors the Limonious's dancehall attendees dressed in over the top styles and behaving in a hypersexual manner, to escape daily drudgery and to deal with hardships, while Jackson's more ideological Bungleton aligns with Limonious' commentaries on the socio-cultural construct of Jamaica. While it is not possible to ascertain whether, or how, Limonious might have encountered these American cartoonists, it is nevertheless important to establish these predecessors in the field of Black comics.

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<sup>70</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 14.



Another notable Black American artist, Ollie Harrington, combined illustrations with poignant satirical commentaries. His regular feature “Dark Laughter” appears in the *Amsterdam News* in 1935. The combination of satirical drawings and comments addressed social issues such as capitalism and racism, while exposing inequalities and abuses.<sup>74</sup> In the strip titled *Dark Laughter*, “Now I ain’t so sure I wanna get educated,” from September 21, 1963, two Black boys on their way to school are running from an armed, angry mob of white people (Fig. 6). Harrington adeptly captures the boys’ fearful expressions as they wonder if their lives are worth endangering to get a good education. This is a commentary on the fight to desegregate public schools. As Limonious would do after him, Harrington tackled social problems while calling attention to the issues with humour and wit.

Limonious’s illustrations can also be considered alongside the works of Jim ‘Seitu’ Dyson, a contemporaneous Black graphic artist. My analysis builds on L.E.J. Rachell’s article “This Forgotten Comic Artist From The Black Power Movement Was A True Revolutionary” in *AfroPunk* magazine. Rachell discusses Dyson’s body of work made during the Black Power Movement in the 1960’s and ‘70’s. His iconic comic strips appeared in *Black News*, a newspaper belonging to the Black power group EAST (1969-1986) whose motto was: “Agitate, educate and organize” (Fig. 7 and 8).<sup>75</sup> Dyson’s artwork espouses goals, philosophy and culture of the Black movement.<sup>76</sup> During this era, there is a noticeable shift from funny comics to more realistic

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<sup>74</sup> Howard, *Black Comics*, 15. Harrington, like many other progressive Black artists of the era, found greater artistic freedom in Europe, in particular Paris.

<sup>75</sup> L.E.J. Rachell, “This forgotten comic artist from the black power movement was a true revolutionary,” accessed May 28, 2021, <https://afropunk.com/2018/07/this-forgotten-comic-artist-from-the-black-power-movement-was-a-true-revolutionary/>.

<sup>76</sup> Rachell, “This Forgotten Comic Artist from the Black Power Movement was a True Revolutionary.”

representations of Black people and their social problems. In his illustrations, the intense rawness and grittiness reveals the obstacles and tribulations that Blacks face daily in a ghetto environment.<sup>77</sup> It is a cultural manifestation of the Black experience that confronts the dire conditions in the inner-cities. While Limonious's illustrations, on the surface, appears to be more comical, they are similar to Dyson's body of work in that both artists expose the harshness of grinding poverty in the inner cities. In Jamaica, gun violence has a stranglehold on the poor communities, while in American ghettos, it is the constant need to feed drug addiction. On the covers of *Black News* April and May 1970, Dyson moves away from "white patriarchal universalism" that portrays white people as heroes, saviours and winners and Black people as villains, victims and losers—stereotypes that made lasting impressions on young minds in racialized communities.<sup>78</sup> While Dyson's characters are not super heroes, they fight against the white supremacist' establishment and protect the minority rights of not only Blacks but Arabs, Asians and Latinos as well.<sup>79</sup> Dyson upends the idea of heroism by portraying Black people as heroes, and powerful white people, such as the police and the president, as villains.<sup>80</sup> The inspiration for his characters were the people in EAST who were legitimate crime-fighters; they fought the drug dealers, corrupt cops and politicians.<sup>81</sup>

Like Limonious, Dyson also provided artworks for record albums. The Last Poets' 1972 album *Chastisement* depicts street fighters who are also spiritual warriors, focusing on the metaphysical (Fig. 9).<sup>82</sup> In different ways, Limonious and Dyson illustrated real societal

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<sup>77</sup> Rachell, "This Forgotten Comic".

<sup>78</sup> Rachell, "This Forgotten Comic".

<sup>79</sup> Rachell, "This Forgotten Comic".

<sup>80</sup> Rachell, "This Forgotten Comic".

<sup>81</sup> Rachell, "This Forgotten comic".

<sup>82</sup> Rachell, 'This Forgotten comic'.

problems that plague disenfranchised Black communities. However, while both artists wanted to show Black people's strength and resiliency, Dyson focuses on turning Blacks into metaphysical heroes, while Limonious depicts Blacks defying the odds, rising out of poverty and trauma to become famous musicians who transformed the local and international mainstream culture.

In Jamaica, Limonious is not the only artist to deploy a comic style on dancehall albums. Like Limonious, Orville "Bagga" Case is a prolific illustrator and designer with over 150 album jackets to his credit. His style and technique are quite similar to that of Limonious, as both use different ballpoint marker pens and applied pure colour palettes of yellow, magenta, red and blue.<sup>83</sup> Case also uses the names of songs as the inspiration for his illustrations. For example, on Massive Dread's *Strictly Bubbling* (1982) Case depicts vampires between the sound systems for the song "Vamps on the Corner" and chickens and roosters running around for the songs "Chicken Chest" and "Mr. Rooster," (Fig. 10).<sup>84</sup> Looking at Limonious and Case together, their mutual influence seems evident—as reflected in their styles and in their comical yet accurate, observation and representation of dancehall culture. As Cases's artworks are not readily available (unlike Limonious's), it is difficult to make strong comparisons between the two artists.

Limonious can also be compared to non-Black artists of the mid-twentieth century, because it is in the 1960s that comic artists such as Robert Crumb begin making comics not for a

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<sup>83</sup> Christopher Bateman and Al "Fingers" Newman, "All Hail the King of Dancehall Doodling" interview by Ian Mc Quaid, *I-d vice.com* 24 August 2016, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/mbvmky/all-hail-the-king-of-dancehall-doodling](https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/mbvmky/all-hail-the-king-of-dancehall-doodling).

<sup>84</sup> "Orville "Bagga" Case, accessed May 28, 2021, <http://reggaealbumcovers.com/tag/orville-bagga-case/>.

mainstream audience, but rather for a countercultural scene that they were a part of. Thus, Crumb depicts hippies, drop-outs, pot-smokers and other characters from the scenes that he himself is part of. Likewise, Limonious' art responds to the dancehall scene even as he himself is very much a part of the scene; his observations serve as artistic reference points of inner city Jamaican daily life and dancehall culture. Like Limonious, Crumb also illustrates album covers which include *Cheap Thrills* (1968), by Big Brother and the Holding Company which features Janis Joplin and *The Music Never Stopped: Roots of the Grateful Dead*, (1995) (Fig. 11 and 12). These album covers are densely packed with rich comical imagery.

Graphic art has for centuries been a disruptive force in art and journalism. Harvey Pekar, a quotidian innovator and collaborator of Robert Crumb's, has pointed out that the versatility of comics allow many kinds of stories to be told.<sup>85</sup> It was in the 1960's that comics developed along more strident and aggressive paths; the images became more hostile in order to upend mainstream ideologies, and attack the contemporary establishment. The underground comic art culture, designed for adult consumption, bared society's taboo subjects and exposed uncomfortable truths through hard-hitting commentary and exaggerated images that would elicit visceral reactions from discomfort to outrage. Crumb's iconoclastic humour could be quite brutal, as it broke people down and shoved taboo subjects into readers' faces. For example, through the grotesque character "Angelfood McSpade," Crumb eviscerates mainstream values by exposing their fears of a Black woman; in his story this character is

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<sup>85</sup> Brian Doherty. "Cancel Culture Comes for Counterculture Comics," accessed May 28, 2021, <https://reason.com/2019/04/29/cancel-culture-comes-for-count/>.

imprisoned in Africa so that she won't threaten white society with her freedom (Fig. 13).<sup>86</sup> As a Black woman, this image strikes me in a deeply personal space and leads to an examination of Black beauty in a white world. As I move around in this white world, I am not perceived as attractive. The ideas of Black beauty and desirability are a joke to the dominant culture. Crumb's exaggeration of Black facial features in Angelfood McSpade is exactly what white culture finds unattractive. The blatant racism in this image is cruelly refreshing in that it contradicts the lip service and the disingenuous efforts disguised as inclusivity by white culture. Crumb's images of Black women reflect the true perception of his white audience; in looking at the image, they will get the joke and will see an expression of their true feelings. The hypocrisy transcends Black beauty to encompass the entire scope of racism against Black people. White women's status as beautiful is solidified and unthreatened; they are confident that they will not lose their white men to these unattractive Black women. Crumb's image, borrowing from the teeming underground reality of racism, pokes through the veneer of political correctness and hypocrisy. The pseudo-polite society feigns shock and dismay when their racism is starkly exposed and unavoidable.

In his comic *Mr. Natural* the title character is a "cynical and mercenary guru" who skewered the hippies' pretentiousness and the falsehoods of the cults (Fig. 14).<sup>87</sup> It could be argued that Limonious does the same thing as Crumb but in a less crude manner. Limonious challenged mainstream culture's rejection and treatment of lower income people by depicting

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<sup>86</sup> "Robert Crumb American Cartoonist," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/R-Crumb>; Angelfood McSpade: She's Sock-a-Delic — She's All Heart," *Zap Comix* #2 (July 1968).

<sup>87</sup> "Robert Crumb American Cartoonist," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/R-Crumb>; And <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/15222/lot/117/>

them empathetically, revealing how they survived and negotiated their way through a challenging existence. He satirized and exaggerated the hypersexuality and aggressive nature of women who had few resources and options and also satirized men's need to be seen as successful, desirable, envied and feared.

At the level of pictorial style there were similarities between Crumb's drawing techniques and Limonious's.<sup>88</sup> Both artists used quick strokes to illustrate dynamic, energetic characters, documenting action and movement. Limonious and Crumb were fascinated with depicting hypersexual women with exaggeratedly large derrieres and bounteous, protruding breasts who overshadow and dominate diminutive male figures. Crumb's women were a combination of harlot and goddess, their physical presence imposing, pulsating with life and force.<sup>89</sup> Limonious' representation of sexually charged women were not as muscular and strong; in their sexual freedom Limonious revealed their vulnerabilities and he understood their actions as a means of survival.

Despite certain commonalities, there was an enormous difference between Crumb and Limonious. The Jamaican artist was a Black artist illustrating Black people in his comics. His ultimate aim was to build up and support the dancehall phenomena as it evolved artistically, unlike Crumb who was ripping apart mainstream culture through his extreme illustrations of sexual and racial violence. Even though the grittiness and edginess existed in dancehall, Limonious was not denigrating it or the people who participated in that scene. Rather he

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<sup>89</sup> See Crumb's Sex Obsessions- comic strips from 1980's-2006.

illustrated the people of the dancehall scene embracing their culture without seeking the approval of the disparaging classists.

## MASCULINITY

One of the ambitions of this thesis is to explore the range of masculine types who appear on Limonious's album-cover art. While I am unable to do justice to the full breadth of the work, I have chosen to analyze key artworks that are characteristic of his practice. On these selected album-covers the artist represented men in many different ways: virile he-men are depicted on their own or as rivals. He portrays male companionship, he shows men and women interacting. In contrast to the virile he-men, he also created skinny characters whose presence are dominated by robust, full-figured women. This section will draw on Donna P. Hope's work on masculinity in the dancehall culture to examine the social complexities and social resistances operating in Jamaica. Judith Butler's analysis of gender performance will provide a theoretical framework to discuss how Jamaican men interpret masculinity through violence and escapism.

Jamaica's colonial history imposes a rigid social structure and classism, which results in a patriarchal society that adhered to specific types of masculinity; this is both reflected and subverted in Limonious's representation of male figures. Hope's book builds on sociologist R.W. Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>90</sup> Connell, cited by Hope, describes hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to

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<sup>90</sup> R.W. Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society*, vol. 19, no. 6 (2005).

guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women.”<sup>91</sup> Hope asserts that Jamaica’s hegemonic masculinity is negotiated, but not limited to, conceptual notions of status, education, white collar career and wealth.<sup>92</sup> Hegemonic masculinity values heterosexuality and presence of “manly “ personality traits such as independence, dominance, power and competitiveness, all evident in the traditional dancehall man. Simultaneously, fantasies are created and acted out in an exaggerated fashion, in a reckless abandon of normative values.

Limonious’s spectrum of male bodies highlighted varying types of masculinity that were often contradictory. His treatment of the male figure depended on what or who he wanted to emphasize in his artwork. When the men were rivals, their forms were muscular and hulking; when they were portrayed as businessmen or friends, their physique was slender and non-threatening. The biggest contrast in male representation occurred in the presence of female company; in these cases, the women’s figures tended to overpower the space as the men’s physique became even more slender, reduced to stick-figure forms. The depiction of women in this context exposed an underlying contradiction between masculinity expressed as male dominance in the dancehall culture and the reality of the empowered women with better education, earning potential and physique.

Limonious depicts virile, potent men on the album cover *Death in the Arena* (1987), a musical compilation. (Fig. 15). Limonious illustrates two robustly built men confronting

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<sup>91</sup> Donna P. Hope, *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall*. (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2010), 9.

<sup>92</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 9.



each other combatively, armed with microphones and ready for the lyrical showdown. Neither man's facial expression exhibits any deep-seated tension or animosity; the real battle is suggested in their dynamic stances and impending vocal clash. The two dueling, musical artistes are fittingly situated in a musical arena flanked by two overpowering sound systems. The vibrant background with white flags on posts round out the stadium effect, reminiscent of Roman battles in the arena.

To explore this thriving brand of machismo, I look to Hope's work on various types of Jamaican masculinities in the dancehall scene and culture. According to Hope, in her book *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall*, "these lyrical debates publicly exhibit the gendered cues that are encoded in Jamaica's rigid bound classed and gendered hierarchies which tacitly encourage and/or privilege particular ways of being masculine in Jamaica."<sup>93</sup> Hope further argues that dancehall culture "selectively appropriates" Jamaican middle-class hegemonic masculinity, coupling this with inner city values on manhood.<sup>94</sup> In this milieu, masculinity is rigidly defined as tough, aggressive, resilient and courageous.<sup>95</sup> It is used to maintain dominance and subordinate those who are considered weaker. Hope argues that hegemonic masculinity is dependent on society's existing laws, political and social structures.<sup>96</sup> Although the ruling class usually decides what is deemed appropriate behaviour, they are not necessarily the most influential gate keepers, as is evident in

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<sup>93</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> In Jamaica's history requires both men and women to exhibit these traits to survive slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

<sup>96</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 3.

dancehall culture.<sup>97</sup> The performers, dancers and revelers have similar life experiences, and through their achieved recognition and status within the dancehall communities, they become exemplars in this space—highly regarded and emulated.<sup>98</sup> So the dancehall scene is not only an expression of hegemonic masculinity, because it serves as a place where inner-city cultural values and rituals are inculcated and practised.

Unlike *Death in the Arena* that depicts two men in combat, Limonious's artwork for Michael Palmer's *We Rule* (1985) offers a different take on masculinity in Jamaican dancehall culture: non-threatening men, comrades whose body language is easygoing. On the front cover of *We Rule*, the three singers are photographed in a low-key fashion; the men are clearly comfortable with each other (Fig. 16). Their relaxed poses reveal a kinship: the men on either side are resting their arms on the middle man's shoulders as their other hands are locked tightly in an unbreakable grip that establishes them as brethren. On the back cover, Limonious's pictorial storytelling is a real life affirmation of masculine bonding (Fig. 17). Two attractively thin and well-dressed men, holding rods (the rod has symbolic meaning in Jamaica's dancehall and political culture as a source of power) strut towards the viewer with obvious swagger and confidence. Neither of the men look threatening; their confident air commands attention and respect. The blurb, "Michael nuh worry yuhself. Ah we rule. We safe!"<sup>99</sup> confirms their place as leaders and respectable men in control. The radiant, yellow background with a pouf of white clouds may symbolize a celestial connotation. The two men walking with rods on

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<sup>97</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Translation: Michael don't worry yourself. We are the rulers. We are safe.

the brown turf (earth), although human, are established as supreme rulers, larger-than-earthly-life, untouchable by the average man.

While the two previous pictures depict men in relation to each other, on Supercat's Album *Si Boops Deh* (1985), Limonious examines the reciprocal relationship between male and female dancehall participants (Fig. 18); here, masculinity is defined in relation to women. Similar to Palmer's *We Rule*, Supercat's image appears on the front cover, however he represents the 'cool and deadly' persona in dancehall culture. On the back of the album, Limonious portrays monetary interactions between a dancehall man and his female counterparts (Fig. 19). Supercat, the central figure, is surrounded by two women and a third woman situated in the left background. Two of the three women have already received money but Supercat still has big wads of green and red money bills to hand-out. While his body faces the viewer, his gaze is on the background woman with the well-ample derriere, who has not received money yet. The woman on his right stands behind him, legs apart, her manicured right hand grasps Supercat's left shoulder possessively; perhaps she is the main girlfriend. In the background, a luxury car serves as a commentary on Supercat's financial status. The title *Si Boops Deh* (There is Boops) is significant; Boops is Jamaican slang for a rich man who does not benefit sexually from this financial arrangement but lives vicariously through interactions with women. However, his masculinity is firmly established by his ability to give material resources to women as he sees fit. He gains their admiration as the relationship is mutually beneficial. Limonious's fictional commentary is based on the true-to-life economics in Jamaica, whereby a man's success and ability to support many women is a desired feature of masculinity. Hope states that for many inner city Jamaican men,

manhood is defined and achieved through heteronormative practices, the ability to have multiple women, the financial ability to support women and offspring and to be the head of the household.<sup>100</sup>

On other album covers, Limonious's women are more contentious and combative in their interactions with men. On the album *Bank Account* (1985), the artiste Leroy Smart graces the front cover, spryly walking down the bank steps carrying an empty brief case, suggesting that he just deposited a pile of money into his bank account (Fig. 20). On the back cover, Limonious depicts a comedic scene of three women fighting over Leroy Smart, not an unusual scene in Jamaican culture (Fig. 21). Although the treatment of the figures is humorous, the women's dialogue undermines the comedy to expose a fragile societal and familial structure. The woman on the far left is telling the other women to stop fighting over her child's father but the other women strongly believe that Leroy is their man. The women's exaggerated facial expressions—bulging eyes and protruding, gaping mouths—bring hilarity to the fight. The woman in the dress chokes the other woman whose red tongue extends out of her wide-opened mouth. The third woman looking crazed with braided hair sticking up, and a dishevelled yellow dress, runs frantically after the two other women, but her feet never touch the ground. The dynamic images of the women contrasts with Smart's cool unbothered appearance. He ignores the uproar and mayhem behind him and stays above the fray. The women fighting over him is a testament to his masculine

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<sup>100</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 10.

prowess and reinforces the idea that he is someone worth fighting over. He is like the “ole dawg”<sup>101</sup> with plenty women.

According to Hope, polygamous relationships are expected and central to dancehall culture. Masculinity is tied to sexual virility, to conquering as many women as possible and fathering many children. Being able to juggle multiple women rendered a man “King”, especially if he could convince these women to live harmoniously; he does not even need to have money or weapons to assert masculinity.<sup>102</sup> This behaviour is not specific to the lower classes; upper classes also seek out sexual liaisons but may have tried to be more discreet.<sup>103</sup> In the dancehall space, this machismo principle is acted out through suggestive lyrics and highly provocative dance moves that can reinforce hegemonic masculinity. A common theme in much of dancehall music is the encouragement to conquer as many punaanies (vaginas) as possible. Hope proclaims that the “apparent ambivalence about the role of women in the lives of men in the dancehall is reflective of the tensions and ambivalence that characterize their own personal negotiations of highly qualified and status-generating masculinities and, thus, cannot be classified exclusively as misogyny.”<sup>104</sup> It reflects the frustration men go through to negotiate and establish masculinity in other aspects of their lives. They are excessive in the areas of their lives that they can control and therefore seize the opportunity to enact hegemonic masculinity. Their space is the dancehall space where hyper masculinity is boasted and admired.

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<sup>101</sup> Beenie Man’s dancehall song Ole Dawg is about men in multiple relationships.

<sup>102</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 19.

<sup>103</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 20.

Unlike the blatant show of female sexuality presented previously, on *Devon D Presents Girls Them Chemist* dated c.1992, Limonious featured modestly garbed women, with no outlandish flash of jewelry, who are less conspicuous and aggressive in their pursuit of the central male figure (Fig. 22). Although the album cover is understated and not an example of Limonious's humour at its most extreme, he does present a comical scene of a woman rebuffing one man, in favour of the central male figure, who wears a black cap with the word "Chemist." In Jamaican patois, a chemist could have varying definitions depending on the situation. In relation to women, it means that the man has the right "potion" to satisfy women sexually. Limonious wanted the viewer to recognize the Chemist's desirability; unlike *Si Boops Deh!* and *Bank Account*, the male figure's attraction is not only monetary, it is his "swagga" (confidence) and perhaps established reputation as a good lover. This man can be from the inner-city, and, perhaps too, he brags about upper-class women coming to him for sexual satisfaction because their well-to-do men cannot satisfy them sexually.<sup>105</sup> To use Donna Hope's phrasing, this is a "sexually driven ideological backlash" against the upper-class men.<sup>106</sup> Hope likens this posturing to the "class myth" and the racist idea of the "well-hung," sexually voracious Black man, that creates an unease and frenetic tension in white societies.<sup>107</sup> This trope is re-imagined by marginalized men who can only assert their fantastical sexual power over the sexually impotent middle-class men.<sup>108</sup> The inner-city men's power comes from seizing the ultimate sign of masculinity:

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<sup>105</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 24.

<sup>108</sup> Hope, *Man Vibes*, 24.

being able to satisfy uptown women, thereby undermining the upper-class men's attempts to dominate.

### **Masculine violence**

Limonious's artworks show that posing and posturing are vital elements of dancehall culture, while Jamaica's fascination with Hollywood outlaw movies of the 1950's and '60's is on display. In Jamaica, going to the movies is a favourite pastime, especially for the inner-city poor. Men often go to the movies together, similar to how they attend the dancehall together: it is a male-bonding ritual. At the movies, the boisterous audience talks back to the screen, to either voice their agreement or displeasure with the plot, contrary to North American movie-going etiquette. The on-going passionate commentaries reveal their investment in the characters. Jamaicans particularly enjoy Hollywood, western, gun-toting, cowboy movies that display a warped perception of masculinity, glamourized gun culture, violence and the American culture of heroism.<sup>109</sup> Violence is deeply imbedded in Jamaican culture and is transported into the dancehall spaces through lyrics, interactions between singers, the singers' interactions with the audience and between the audience members.<sup>110</sup> Quickly, the dancehall space moved from "pram pram" (fantastical violence) to "get flat" (real violence). Jamaicans particularly enjoy the classic Jamaican film, *The Harder They Come* (1972) where hegemonic masculinity is recreated and embellished (Fig. 23 and 24). In the movie starring reggae artiste Jimmy Cliff as outlaw Ivanhoe "Rhygin" Martin turned

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<sup>109</sup> Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 147.

<sup>110</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 86.

Jamaican folk-hero, feeds the inner-city youths 'fantasy of urban revolt and heroism.<sup>111</sup> The absence of positive male role models allows local Jamaican outlaws like Ivanhoe "Rhygin" Martin to become someone to emulate and revere. The Jamaican inner-city men recognize the potent power of the gun and uses it as a means to get what they want- whether it is justice, revenge or material goods. The gun symbolizes liberation and personal power.<sup>112</sup> Like Rhygin, many men move from rural to urban communities hoping to find gainful employment but instead find shanty towns filled with despair and poverty, a breeding ground for the recruitment of criminals.<sup>113</sup>

In the early 1980's, dancehall performances were imbued with violent lyrics and symbolic use of the gun; it was metaphorical.<sup>114</sup> However, as inner-cities became more poverty-stricken and desperate, the violent lyrics started to reflect social, political and economic realities. Guns were easy to access. The upcoming dancehall artistes came from this environment and were personally involved in violence. The violent symbols were part of their daily lives, which was easily brought into the dancehall spaces. Men in the inner-city areas were not taught to walk away from fights; their manhood depended on their reaction to an insult or a perceived slight.

Limonious recognizes the shift between performed and real violence on Michael Palmer's album *Lick Shot* (1984) (Fig. 25 and 26). *Lick Shot* moves from symbolic celebratory

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<sup>111</sup> Cooper, "Lyrical Gun," 147, 153.

<sup>112</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 86.

<sup>113</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 89.

<sup>114</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 88. People would "lick shot" meaning to form fingers into the shape of a gun and make-believe firing into the air.



bullets released in the air with two fingers to real guns resulting in actual violence. On the back cover, Limonious depicts the man literally “getting flat” (dropping to the ground) as bullets are flying all around him. Limonious depicts the leg of a fleeing man losing his shoe as he is escaping. This has become the reality of dancehall culture.

The idea of acting out gender through violence in dancehall spaces can be addressed by turning to the notion of performance as escapism – which is put forward in Judith Butler’s article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”. In this article, Butler examines Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s and Simone de Beauvoir’s notion of the body as a historical idea. Merleau Ponty—cited in Butler, believes that the body “gains meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression of the world.”<sup>115</sup> Beauvoir asserts that the term ‘woman ’is a historical idea, not a fact, clearly distinguishing between sex as biological and gender as “cultural interpretation.”<sup>116</sup> Butler investigates the ways in which real and assimilated conceptions of gender add up to create a whole, and how these components can be reconfigured differently.<sup>117</sup> Instead of adopting the theatrical and phenomenological models which analyze only the gendered self before its acts, Butler extends her inquiry to include constituting acts that define not only identity but how it makes that identity a “compelling illusion, an object of belief.”<sup>118</sup> She draws on theatre, anthropology, philosophy but mainly

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<sup>115</sup>Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal*, 40, no.4 (1988): 521.

<sup>116</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 522.

<sup>117</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

<sup>118</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

on phenomenology to reveal “that what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo”.<sup>119</sup> Butler postulates that, “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”<sup>120</sup> They construct artificial personas to carry out excessive acts.<sup>121</sup> As Butler states, these manufactured identities are believed by the actors and observers; they are “performed in the mode of belief and believe their own contrived existence.”<sup>122</sup> Butler argues that gender can be retooled and enacted differently, as she distinguishes between sex and gender, the first biological, and the latter, cultural and historical.<sup>123</sup> She further notes that the body is an “incessant materializing of possibilities” which I interpret as meaning that the body’s performance is malleable and that gender is not always portrayed in the same manner.<sup>124</sup>

Although Butler’s article focuses primarily on ‘woman’ and becoming woman, I would like to stretch the theory to include masculinity in the dancehall space and the theatrics that are performed to elevate their status within the dancehall space. The men strut into the dancehall “massive and large”, a force to be reckoned, making audacious claims about themselves and their material means.<sup>125</sup> Men perform according to the scripts passed down and modelled by a patriarchal society which elevates one type of masculinity

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<sup>119</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

<sup>120</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 519.

<sup>121</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

<sup>122</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

<sup>123</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 520.

<sup>124</sup> Butler, “Performative Acts,” 521.

<sup>125</sup> Massive and large is a Jamaican expression meaning larger than life.

over others. These scripts are inculcated then practiced in a hyperactive and exaggerated manner in the dancehall scene.

Although Limonious reinterprets the artificial personas and reinforces the patriarchal culture, he exposes flawed and contradictory ideas of masculinity through his artwork. Masculinity is validated through women's interest, behaviour and men's interaction with each other. This is evident in the dancehall scene, where men act out an aggressive masculinity based on deep-rooted cultural values. "Gender was intentional and performative" as illustrated in Limonious's oeuvre. All levels of masculinity are played out and appropriated by the people in dancehall to present a certain image related to the culture: toughness, aggressiveness, camaraderie and sexual dominance. Jamaican men adhere to the dominant, political and religious structures through their behaviour and practices; the body acts through its "relation to deeply entrenched expectations of gender existence."<sup>126</sup> The aggressiveness is socially constructed and the raucous behaviours expected. For example, men procure women and enact stylized violence aggressively. Although everyone is given the script, the script is interpreted differently. Hence there is no one way to perform masculinity, which is evident in Limonious's work.

Limonious depicts men who do not always fit into the rigid masculine identity (the he-men who value having multiple women, offspring and social posturing) but this did not mean the men he depicts are overtly homosexual. Not every male aspires to be aggressive

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<sup>126</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts," 524.

skirt chasers and uphold Jamaica's socio-cultural values rooted in hegemonic masculinity. As suggested by Butler's work on the performativity and malleability of gender, the script can be reinterpreted and challenged through various avenues such as performance and dress. Although Limonious do not portray any gay figures, it is important to address dancehall's passionate rejection of homosexuality. Still, effeminate and homosexual men challenge traditional masculinity, breaking the "heterosexual contract" that guarantees reproduction and kinship.<sup>127</sup> Instead of denouncing Jamaican homophobia and violence in the community, Cecil Gutzmore's article "*Casting The First Stone! Policing of Homo/Sexuality in Jamaican Culture*" seeks to identify the constraints that encourage discrimination and violence. Gutzmore investigated "five homophobic imperatives – religious fundamentalism, heterosexual naturalism, legalism, cultural nationalism and child protection."<sup>128</sup> In religion, pastors preach that homosexuality is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22); hell and brimstone await you. Dancehall artistes such as Beenie Man, Buju Banton and TOK have made it their mantra to condemn these "unnatural" behaviours and justify violence against homosexuals.<sup>129</sup> This righteousness is reserved only for the poor gays, though; rich gay men are not targeted the same way and are allowed to pursue careers and opportunities without interference.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Butler, "Performative Acts," 524.

<sup>128</sup> Cecil Gutzmore, "Casting The First Stone! Policing of Homo/Sexuality in Jamaican Culture," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6, no.1 (2004): 118.

<sup>129</sup> Gutzmore points out that although there have been some killings of leaders, for the most part they are not targeted as much as disenfranchised poor men.

<sup>130</sup> Gutzmore, "Casting The First Stone," 123.

## **Femininity- The evolution of the female role in dancehall**

The women inveigled their way into the male dominated dancehall space with their exuberant erotic performance and their scandalous dress. In this sense, men and women could serve as a foil for each other's theatrics, and the scene allowed for a clever repartee between the sexes. However, it must be recognized that the men wielded power through performance, money, dress, and sexual prowess, the men prove that they "run tings," and had far more alternatives and flexibility than the dancehall women. The women had to carve out a space for themselves in a male dominated environment and did so with fashion, style and sensual performances.

Limonious acknowledges the mutually dependent relationship by representing both the men's efforts and the women's engagement in his artwork. Unlike the varying types of male behavior and relationships that occur in the dancehall space, Limonious's display of female types and relationships are limited. Most of his female figures are sketched with bodacious bottoms and buxom breasts. The women are depicted as either competitors for the man's attention and resources, or as good girls.

In this section, I will focus first on how Limonious depicts women competing with each other for financial security, and then examine how classism becomes relevant in the comparison between the notion of the respectable woman vs. the immoral woman. Limonious features some women who overtly and aggressively wielding their sexuality, while others are depicted with a subtle sexuality- gentrified and proper. I will therefore address how sexual powers are wielded for survival and social mobility. Learning and performing femininity includes sexualization and sexual aggressiveness, which are imperative to capture male

attention. However, I want to argue that it is also a means to assert agency and power.<sup>131</sup> The contradicting definitions, of the virtuous woman and the immoral woman are apparent. The lines become blurred and individual tastes interfere with the traditional ideas embedded in Christian and Rastafarian philosophies.<sup>132</sup>

On *Ride the Rhythm*'s (1985) front cover Limonious illustrates a group of exuberant, animated men gathering boisterously to watch horse-racing; adrenaline is pumping as they cheer and root for their chosen horses. In this environment, the braggadocious men trash talk and posture (Fig. 27). Limonious illustrates them with exaggerated facial expressions to match their passion for the races as they bond and interact. However, on the back cover, these men are depicted in a nighttime dancehall scene, where masculinity should be reinforced but is undermined by Limonious's minimalist treatment of the male figures.

*"Riding the Rhythm"* takes on a different connotation; a line-up of 9 couples dancing, pressed close and their arms wrapped around each other, the women are "riding" the men provocatively (Fig. 28). Limonious purposely angles the women's prominent, curvaceous buttocks for viewers to appreciate, giving only cursory attention to the men's presence.<sup>133</sup> Most of the men are half-hidden behind the women. Limonious draws hearts over each woman, suggesting that the motivation for being there is different for the men than for the woman. His fluid sketching captures this intimate but public display of affection; uniformity of

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<sup>131</sup> Bibi Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities: Survival and Imagination in Jamaican Dancehall Culture," *Fashion Theory*, 10, no. 3 (April 2015): 462.

<sup>132</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 462.

<sup>133</sup> Horse racing is the most popular past time for Jamaican men. Songs were made to mourn the passing of a popular horse. The Pioneers' ode to horse *Long Shot Kick the Bucket* (1969) is one example.

colour reveals a lack of individuality of the women, suggesting that there is a similarity of motivation for each. Although the setting has changed from the horse-race to the dancehall, the element of winning is still there. The horse-faced man in the foreground, again a play on riding, comments that the men “rule” (are in control) but Limonious undermines the man’s comment and observation by positioning the women in front of the men, and this is confirmed by the mawga (slim) figural treatment of the men’s physiques.

On another vinyl album cover *Hot Things* by Various Artistes (c.1993), Limonious shows four women in a variety of revealing poses, (Fig. 29). Each woman is provocatively dressed and positioned. The show of availability entices the men. All the women are staring boldly and directly at the viewer, seeking visibility and acknowledgement. Their body language does not show shame and is unapologetic. They are advertised as hot things, revealing how these women are commodified and consumed in this market. The women are presented as sexual goods to be procured through negotiations.

On *Reggae for the World In Dub Featuring Joe Lick Shot (1986)* (a compilation of instrumental works by Various Artistes), Limonious illustrates the positive image of a curvaceous female attendee. On the front cover, a woman wearing a red wide-brimmed hat is the dominant character but of great interest are the featured elements of a traditional dancehall scene. (Fig. 30) The two entwined couples represent typical early dancehall characters. The album cover is further rounded out with depictions of the dancehall artiste and the sound system. The back cover features a voluptuous female figure who suggests presence, body and power (Fig. 31). She ironically wears a hat that says Jombo (Jumbo) and on spherical

shape of her thighs, Limonious writes about her “massive” size but that is not an insult in Jamaican culture where men enjoy curvaceous, buxom women and women are quite proud of their physique and celebrate it.<sup>134</sup> Limonious allows the woman’s sexuality and power to dominate the scene, bringing to the fore the powerful role of women in shaping Jamaican culture. Again, Limonious presents the woman’s frame overpowering this “mamby-pamby”<sup>135</sup> man; his face is buried between her breasts, and his minuscule frame is sandwiched between her robust thighs. So miniature and insignificant is this man’s presence, Limonious doesn’t bother depicting his legs. Theft is treated in a hilarious manner as the man on the edge is stealing from the man with the cigarette who, in return, is stealing from the coupled man who is also stealing from the woman. The voluptuous woman sees the theft and comments that there is only one dollar in the man’s pocket, leave it alone.<sup>136</sup> It is a serious commentary on a parasitic behaviour within the culture; stealing is a survival strategy.

The previous album covers highlight the use of sexuality for emotional and economic survival. I now want to turn to Judith Butler’s “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics” because she connects gender performativity to social and economic status, and the idea of precarity, referring to those who are susceptible to injury, violence and displacement (in other words, those that do not qualify for recognition and are forgotten within nation-states).<sup>137</sup> Butler argues that the failure of nations is evident when specific members of the population are

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<sup>134</sup> Hope, *Inna Di Dancehall*, 41. Hope speaks to this phenomenon of ample sized women and perception.

<sup>135</sup> Mamby-pamby means that the man is less than the ideal masculine figure.

<sup>136</sup> This is the English translation for what is written on the woman’s right thigh “only one dalla ina the man packet, lef it.”

<sup>137</sup> Judith Butler. “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics.” AIBR. Revista De Antropología Iberoamericana, 4, no. 03 (2009): 1.



more vulnerable to being displaced, starved, plunged into poverty and experience violence on the streets or from the police.<sup>138</sup> The violence and mistreatment stem from a weak state. The failings of “social and economic networks” that are supposed to protect the population at large adds to the precarity of the disenfranchised.<sup>139</sup> The lower income class lives in a state of marginalization their lives are not deemed valuable and are easily expendable because the state can act with impunity knowing that there’s a lack of accountability. Butler argues that precarity is linked to gender norms; those who do not abide by these norms are subject to more violence and stigma.<sup>140</sup> She further articulates that “gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics, who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance, who will be failed to be protected by the law.... Who will be stigmatized; who will be the objects of fascination and consumer pleasure?”<sup>141</sup> These questions pertain to various marginalized groups, including transgender and queer people, feminists and sex workers. I extend this argument to include women in dancehall spaces because meaningful resources are not allocated to inner-city communities, therefore these women have to create innovative ways of informal survival system that is understood, replicated and justified. Not having access to resources opens them up to violence. The most obvious means is to perform in public spaces, to capture a man’s attention. However, these women present themselves in public places, and sexual politics

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<sup>138</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 2.

<sup>139</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 2.

<sup>140</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 2.

<sup>141</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 2.

decide whether they are worthy of protection.<sup>142</sup> The dancehall women are peripheral operators; their hyper-sexual, erotic manner breaks from traditional gender norms, therefore there is no urgency to protect them and facilitate a path to economic independence. The controlling, dominant culture looks on in disdain, justifying the treatment of these women or watching the erotic performances with great desire. But to state that these women are powerless would be a false assumption. Butler argues that as subjects they are not sovereign but socially produced agents who rely on “reproduction of powers.”<sup>143</sup> These women rely on reproducing and establish their limited powers through enactment.<sup>144</sup> Their power is not traditional; it is performance gone askew, producing new destabilizing effects, but their mis-performance of gender norms perpetuates their precarity.<sup>145</sup> The only power achieved and maybe the only power necessary are within the dancehall. What Butler describes as recognizeability, Sonia Stanley Niaah in “‘Slackness Personified’ Historicized and De-legitimized,” defines as cultural spaces escaping mapping or representation and visibility.<sup>146</sup> Dancehall women are not formally recognized and legitimized, because mainstream culture neglects the intricacies and unspoken syntax of their culture space.<sup>147</sup> Their power is recognized and acknowledged only when it seeps into the community at large. At times, this mainstream culture may be challenged directly by dancehall culture.

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<sup>142</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 2.

<sup>143</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 3.

<sup>144</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 3.

<sup>145</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity,” 4.

<sup>146</sup> Niaah, “Slackness Personified,” 2.

<sup>147</sup> Niaah, “Slackness Personified,” 2

In the previous artworks, Limonious reveals one aspect of the relationship between the dancehall women and men, sexual currency borne out of financial need. However, on other album covers, Limonious sketches another type of woman in the dancehall space: the virtuous woman, a far more conservative image. On Little John's *True Confession* (1984), a man and woman are in a close embrace as they gaze into each other's eyes (Fig. 32), but the female figure does not wear outlandish clothing or make-up.

In *Mother's Choice* (Various Artistes 1997) Limonious takes us completely out of the dancehall space and into the realm of sacred marriage union (Fig. 33). Absent are the slackness, skantly dressed women with protruding and exposed behinds. Limonious illustrates a tuxedo-clad man possessively holding his traditionally dressed bride adorned in a full white, demure wedding gown and veil. Limonious covers her body but gives a hint of her voluptuous shape with quick lines that accentuate her breasts and curves, revealing a desired physique.

Religion, being a dominant influence that shapes attitudes and practices in Jamaican culture, is a fitting framework for Anna Kasafi Perkins' article, "Good, Good Goodas Gyll: Deconstructing the Virtuous Woman in Dancehall".<sup>148</sup> Perkins analyzes the importance of the patriarchal gaze in Jamaica because it is crucial to comprehending women's role in dancehall culture and reveals its many contradictions.<sup>149</sup> She examines the scripture Proverbs 31:10-31, often recited at Jamaican weddings to emphasize the proper attributes of a good wife or the virtuous woman.<sup>150</sup> One can imagine the bride in Limonious's artwork being counselled about

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<sup>148</sup> Anna Kasafi Perkins. "Good, Good Goodas Gyll: Deconstructing the Virtuous Woman in Dancehall" in *Reggae From Yaad Traditional and Emerging themes in Jamaican Popular Music* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2015), 164.

<sup>149</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyll," 164.

<sup>150</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyll," 164.

virtuousness and integrity. In the Bible, the goodas gyall (virtuous woman) extolls words of wisdom and seems to lack sexual desire.<sup>151</sup> Emphasis is placed on being able to manage a household; sexual propriety is implied by her commitment to care for her spouse.<sup>152</sup>

The immoral woman embodies opposite traits to the Goodas Gyall. The sketel is attractive, brazen, bold, smells good and promises sexual fulfillment.<sup>153</sup> But in Proverbs, it is actually the, seductive words that the men are additionally cautioned against.<sup>154</sup> For example in Proverbs 2:16- the woman “flatters with her words”; ---- 5:3 “lips drip honey , speech is smoother than oil; and 6:24 warns about the “smooth tongue.”<sup>155</sup> Although this Proverb forewarned of the immoral woman’s diabolical nature, men are not responsible for their own sexual impropriety; this responsibility is placed squarely on the women’s shoulders.<sup>156</sup> Although this gender dynamic may seem simplistic, in dancehall culture relationships between men and women are at times starkly defined. Therefore, if the man goes astray, it is the sketel’s fault. That is evident in Limonious ’work when we see the women are fighting over the man while he remains aloof and disconnected from the skirmishes.<sup>157</sup> He is not part of the mayhem, his disconnection allows everyone to see his desirability; he is a man to be envied and revered while the women appear desperate and aggressive.

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<sup>151</sup> Perkins, “Goodas Gyall,” 169.

<sup>152</sup> Perkins, “Goodas Gyall,” 169.

<sup>153</sup> Perkins, “ Goodas Gyall,” 170. These attributes are taken from the book of Proverbs.

<sup>154</sup> Perkins, “Goodas Gyall,” 169.

<sup>155</sup> Perkins, “ Goodas Gyall,” 169.

<sup>156</sup> Perkins, “ Goodas Gyall,” 170.

<sup>157</sup> Leroy Smart’s album mentioned in Masculinity section.

However, upon closer reflection, the gyall and sketel are not polar opposites; beautiful skin and an attractive body are attributes possessed by the immoral woman in Proverbs.<sup>158</sup> Perkins identifies the goodas gyall vs. sketel opposition in dancehall, but asserts that the image of the Goodas gyall is imaginary because it re-objectifies women while feeding men's desires.<sup>159</sup> Perkins argues that although there may be liberating elements for women in dancehall, the "lyrical images and performance" dominate women and reduce them to mindless displays for the male gaze.<sup>160</sup>

In contrast, Carolyn Cooper reads the overt sexual performance by working class Jamaican woman as liberating, "a glorious celebration of full-bodied female sexuality," that is not recognized in up-town culture where Eurocentric values are upheld.<sup>161</sup> Although they are considered Goodas, they are ridding themselves of the Christian tenets that restrict their sexual presence and controls what is considered proper behaviour.<sup>162</sup> Cooper revisualizes the dancehall performance as a "female fertility rite."<sup>163</sup> The women straddle the fence of respectability and slackness—able to be both Goodas and Non-Goodas but without the recriminations. As the women dominate the space, the men are shoved to the side and become spectators in the very space that they created.<sup>164</sup> The performances of dancehall women are similar to dancehall music that come out of the ghettos and at first are rejected, but

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<sup>158</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 173.

<sup>159</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 172.

<sup>160</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 180.

<sup>161</sup> Carolyn Cooper. *Sound Clash Jamaican Dancehall Culture At Large* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 86.

<sup>162</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 180.

<sup>163</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 180.

<sup>164</sup> Perkins, "Goodas Gyall," 180.

have filtered into the culture at large. They have become influencers of mainstream culture, therefore finding legitimacy. The sketel's hypersexual dances are replicated and practiced around the world in dancehall competitions in far flung places like Italy and Japan.<sup>165</sup>

Fashion's contribution to the dancehall culture cannot be trivialized because it provides a visual commentary on Jamaican's preoccupation with style. Steven O. Buckridge's work on Jamaican slave dress and Bibi Bakare Yusef's research on contemporary dancehall fashion explore adornment and fashion in the dancehall space. The pride and empowerment through dress can be traced to the African enslaved women brought to Jamaica. Buckridge investigates the cultural retention and adaptation of "Africanisms" to the current environment.<sup>166</sup>

Historically, dress has been essential to enslaved Black women and can be interpreted as a form of resistance and as a means of cultural retention. Despite working labouriously in the plantation fields and caring for their households at night, enslaved women take the time to learn from Indigenous peoples about how to use varying plant fibres and pigments to dye clothing, create cloth and produce lace out of tree bark.<sup>167</sup> The Black enslaved women transform the coarse fabrics distributed by slaveowners by dyeing them, "nicing" them up to preserve their African heritage.<sup>168</sup> It is important to look good, "make fashion."<sup>169</sup> From their homeland, they bring practised techniques such as spinning and weaving to create cloths and

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<sup>165</sup> Dancehall Queen competitions are held around the world.

<sup>166</sup> Steven O. Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," *Caribbean Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2003): 61.

<sup>167</sup> Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," 62.

<sup>168</sup> Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," 63.

<sup>169</sup> Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," 63.

textiles.<sup>170</sup> They take great pride in self-care; grooming and hygiene, making their own soap, since bathing regularly is of equal importance.<sup>171</sup> Dressing up for special occasions, festivities, church and market day becomes part of their routine. Clothing, fashion, and grooming is still significant to Jamaican people especially in their dancehall spaces. Buckridge's research on the enslaved Black women's investment in their appearance connects to the need for fashion and adornment in dancehall culture during the 1980's and 1990's is examined by Bibi Bakare-Yusef's in "Fabricating identities: survival and the imagination in Jamaican dancehall culture." Bakare Yusef develops three processes to explain the dancehall phenomenon.<sup>172</sup> First, she analyzes how dancehall attire disrupts the traditional ideas of beauty and aesthetics established by Europeans and black elites in Jamaica. Second, she discusses how the adornment practices reveal a "woman's response to a limit situation" borne out of daily survival. Rather than having a victim mentality, these women exhibit an intensified need for excess. Third, she examines how dancehall is influenced by global systems, adopted and appropriated by these women. They look beyond local shores for inspiration.

Bakari-Yusef criticizes dancehall researchers' principle focus on the patriarchal control over the industry—lyrical content, sound systems and the economics of the music, and their neglect of women's unique contribution to the dancehall culture – their adornment and flashy styles.<sup>173</sup> She rejects the notion that clothing is superficial and holds little meaning and argues

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<sup>170</sup> Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," 64.

<sup>171</sup> Buckridge, "The Role of Plant Substances in Jamaican Dress," 67.

<sup>172</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 467.

<sup>173</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 461.

that lower income women use clothing as self-identity and as an assertion of agency.<sup>174</sup> The creative embodied practices allowed them to address violence, sorrow and social anxieties.<sup>175</sup> Through their elaborate, salacious attire, they have recorded history, cultural shifts, economic and technological changes.<sup>176</sup> Clothing is also used as a visual vehicle to challenge upper society's view of the lower class 'morality and sexual expression. Although life is drab and hard during the day, in the dancehall, the poor and working-class people can physically reinvent themselves, thereby preserving a sense of self and dignity. Dressing up can also offer spiritual and emotional refuge, at least for a few hours, where people can reimagine their lives.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, dancehall music—a dynamic, pulsing bass-driven genre exploded onto the music scene in inner-city Kingston Jamaica in the 1980's. It was a deep, direct musical response to societal neglect and classism. This music was accompanied by an equally impactful visual art found on the album covers of dancehall music. Wilfred Limonious, a graphic artist, was appointed to be the visual storyteller, a complimentary artistic force. This thesis has attempted to shine a light on Wilfred Limonious's art, in order to show that his comic imagery was an important part of dancehall culture. Wilfred Limonious's artworks highlighted the explosive energy, fantastical violence, erotic displays, remaking of self and the rejuvenation of soul. Limonious effectively depicted the daily inner-city living with a humour that did not disrespect

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<sup>174</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 462.

<sup>175</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 462.

<sup>176</sup> Bakare-Yusef, "Fabricating Identities," 462.



marginalized people who were predominantly his subjects. His art captured key elements of the dancehall —not only the hardship and struggles but also the fun, swagger and hypersexuality— all motifs of the dancehall attendees. His illustrations on vinyl record sleeves allowed me to examine gender performativity within the dancehall space and understand the complexities of this evolving, dynamic genre. Limonious featured various types of masculine figures that could be encountered in the dancehall space and revealed women’s limited but important contributions to the culture. It also exposed vulnerabilities.

Although album covers are not considered high art, Limonious’s work is an important visual historical documentation of a pivotal period in the development of Jamaican culture featuring people who normally would not be central subjects in high art. It tells important stories about inner-city Kingston that may never have been told or realized beyond their neighbourhood. His art gives international audience who have never visited Kingston a peek into the culture that is not readily accessible. Limonious’s album covers challenge the traditional definition of what merits inclusion in the lexicon of art and worthy of study. It is a timely endeavor given the current climate of curiosity and respect for non-Eurocentric art.

I believe that new technologies and lack of musical mentorship have contributed to the dilution of dancehall as a genre, undermining its connection to its roots. In a recent interview on BBC radio, old school dancehall artist Buju Banton states emphatically that the future of dancehall is in trouble.<sup>177</sup> The sound system culture that is intrinsic to dancehall music is

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<sup>177</sup> Buju Banton, “Buju Banton speaks to the international media for the first time since his return for an in-depth interview at Gargamel Studios” interview by Seani B, BBC 1Xtra, March 16, 2020, audio-video, 46:59, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW2EfXFFfRM&t=1029s>.

ignored by the new artistes. Banton accuses the new artistes of failing to grow the music by not honing their craft which means that they have to be lyrically capable and sharp to sing on any riddim. They cannot “ride the riddims.” But Banton also astutely observes that technologies have “dispossessed” us of our music. That is to say collectors do not own any tangible items; the music is in the cloud. Although he is speaking about the music itself, it also applies to album illustrations as well. Evolving from albums to CD’s then music media libraries have diminished the importance of album art. There is no tactile or visual interaction with the albums. Digitized music eliminates a vital experiential dimension of dancehall music and has canceled an important means of communication among the poor. Just as dancehall came out of reggae, maybe dancehall will continue to undergo new metamorphoses and find new ways to engage, honour and reflect the marginalized segments of Jamaican society.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

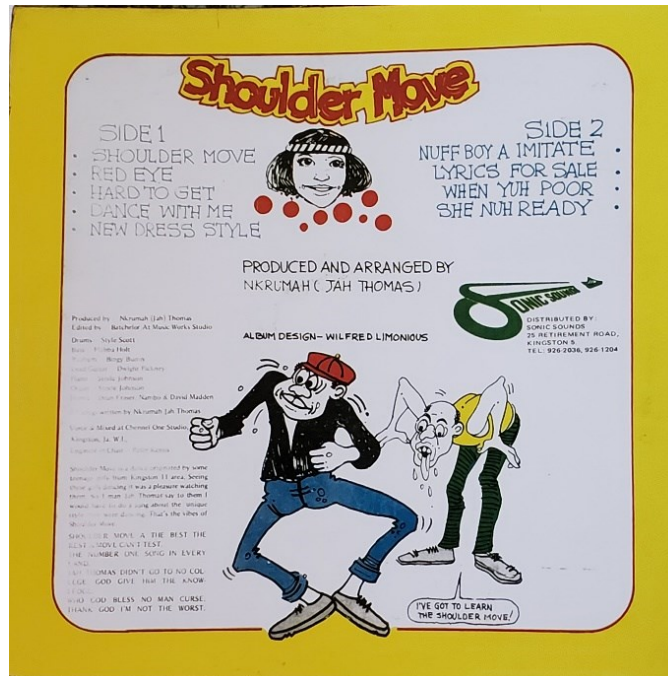
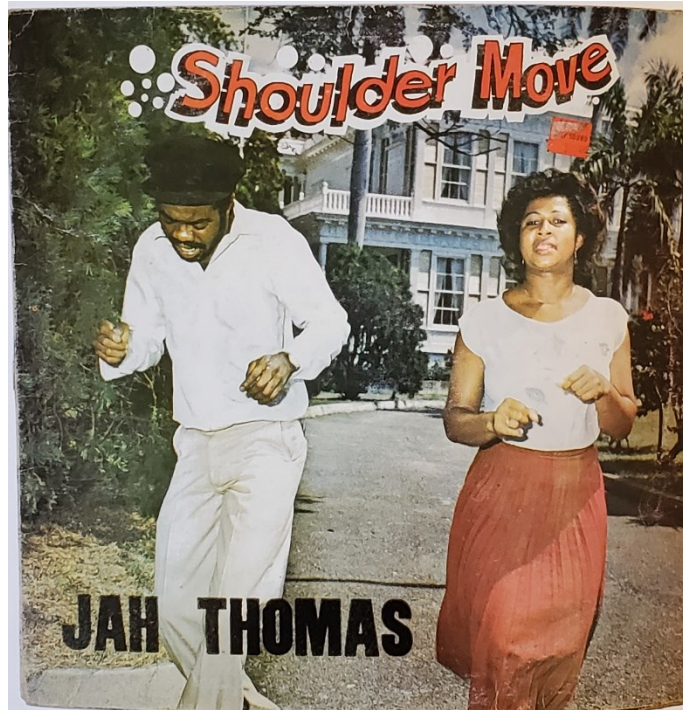


Fig. 1 and 2. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Jah Thomas, *Shoulder Move* (1983).  
Front and back covers.

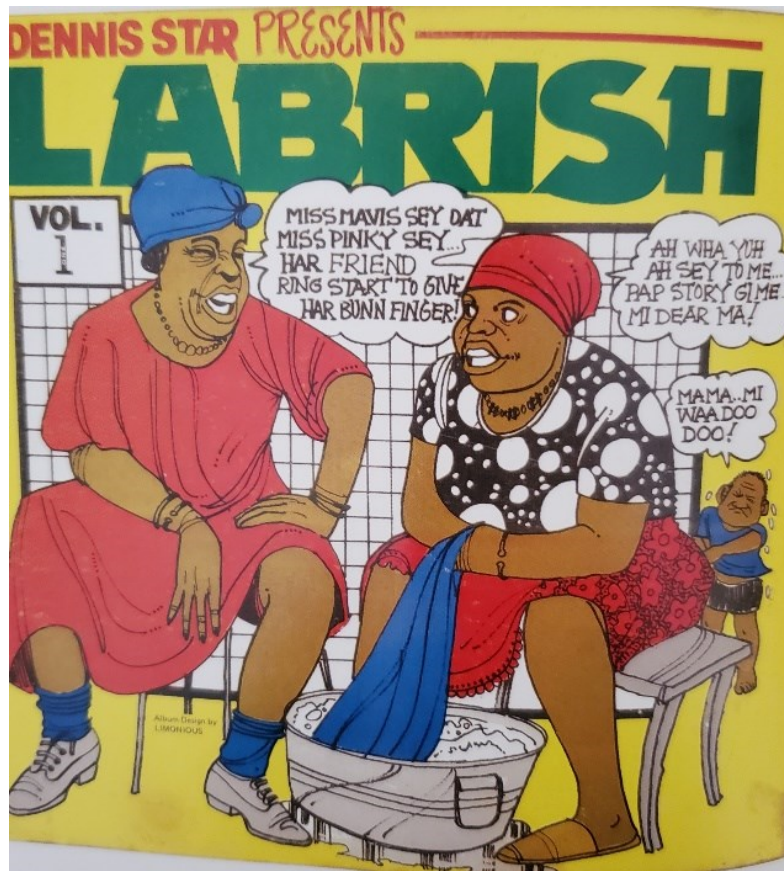


Fig. 3. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Dennis Star Presents *Labrish* Volume 1 (1987).  
Front vinyl album cover.





Fig. 4 and 5. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artistes, *Original Stalag 17-18 and 19* (c. 1985). Front and back covers.

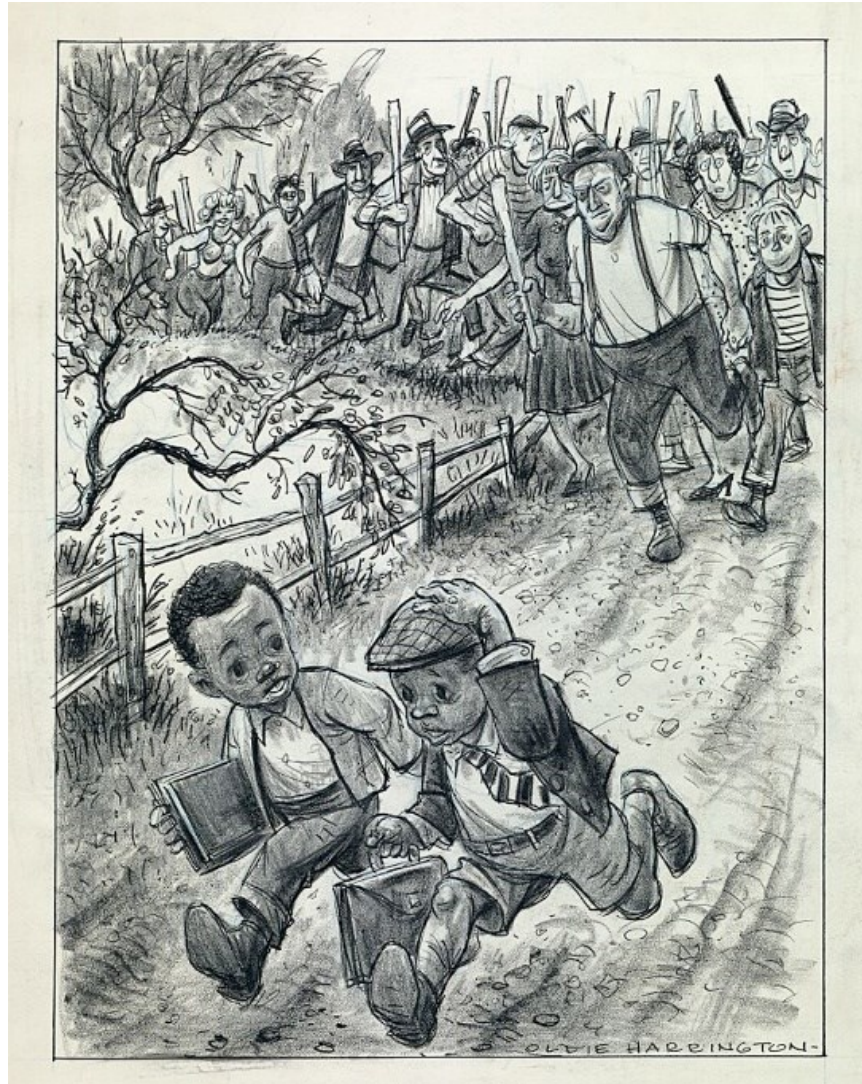


Fig. 6. Ollie Harrington. Cartoon strip. "Dark laughter. Now I aint so sure I wanna get educated. " September 21, 1963.

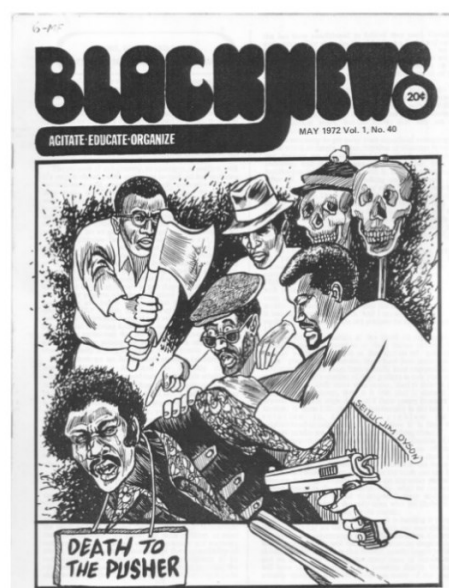


Fig. 7 and 8. Jim 'Seitu' Dyson. *Black News*, magazine, April and May 1970 issues. Front covers.





Fig. 9. Jim 'Seitu' Dyson. Artwork for vinyl album cover. The Last Poets, *Chastisement* (1972). Front vinyl album cover.



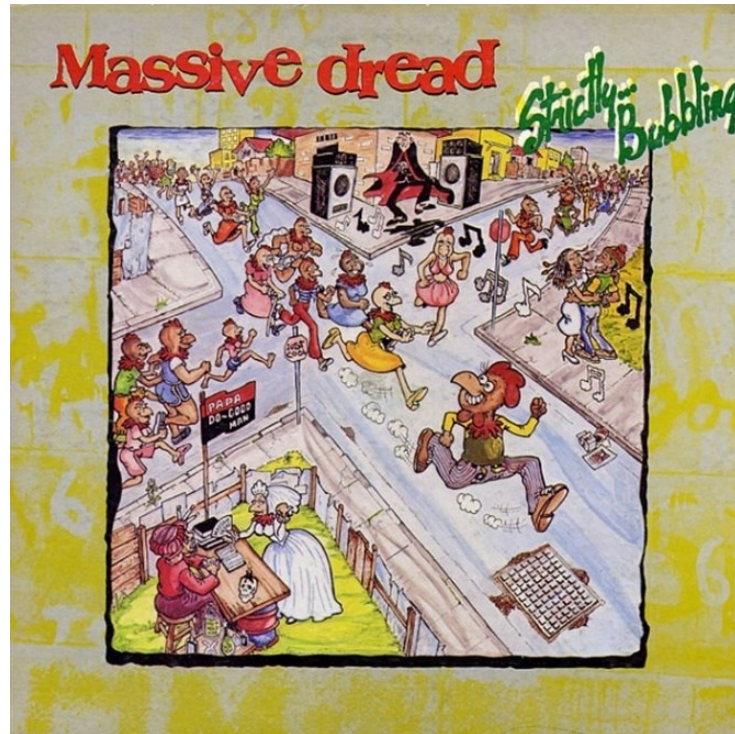


Fig. 10. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Orville "Bagga" Case, *Massive dread Strictly Bubbling* (1982). Front album cover.



Fig. 11. Robert Crumb. Artwork vinyl album cover. Big Brother and the Holding Company which features Janis Joplin *Cheap Thrills* (1968). Front album cover.





Fig. 12. Robert Crumb. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artists, *The Music Never Stopped: Roots of the Grateful Dead* (1995). Front cover.



Fig. 13. Robert Crumb, cartoon. Zap Comix #2. *Angelfood McSpade* (July 1968).





Fig. 14. Robert Crumb. Comic strip. The San Francisco Comicbook Company, *Mr. Natural* No. 2, October 1971.

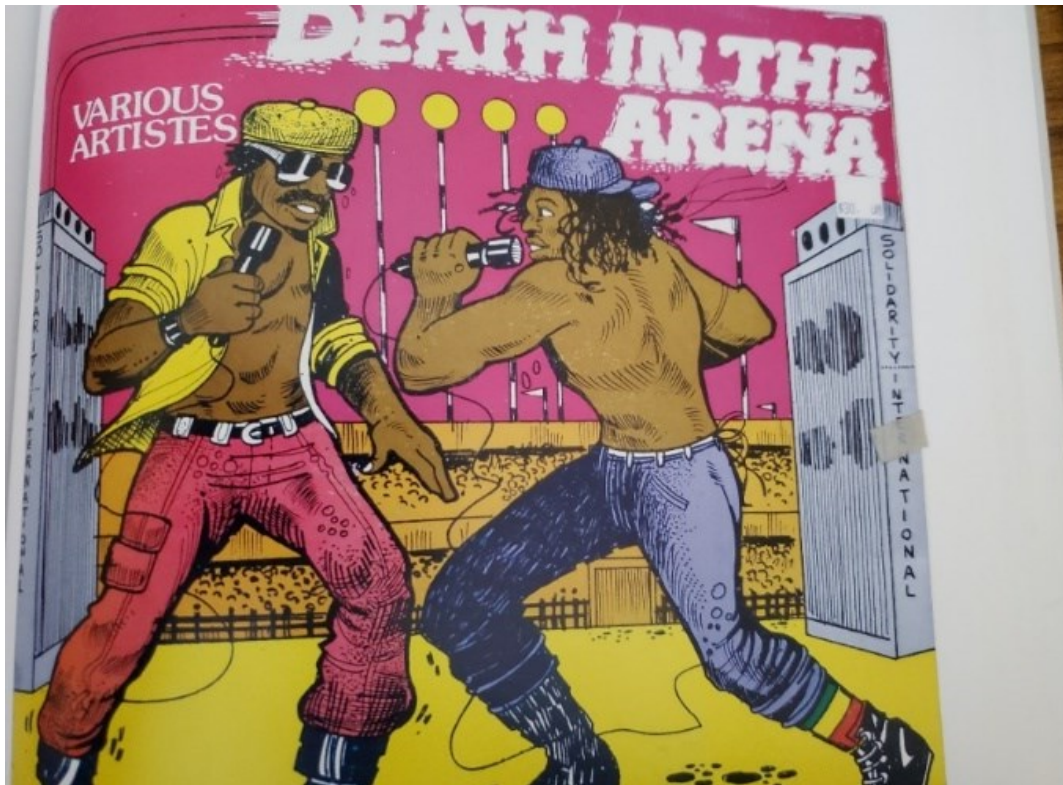


Fig. 15. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artistes, *Death In the Arena* (1987). Front cover.





Fig. 16 and 17. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Michael Palmer, *We Rule* (1985). Front and back covers.

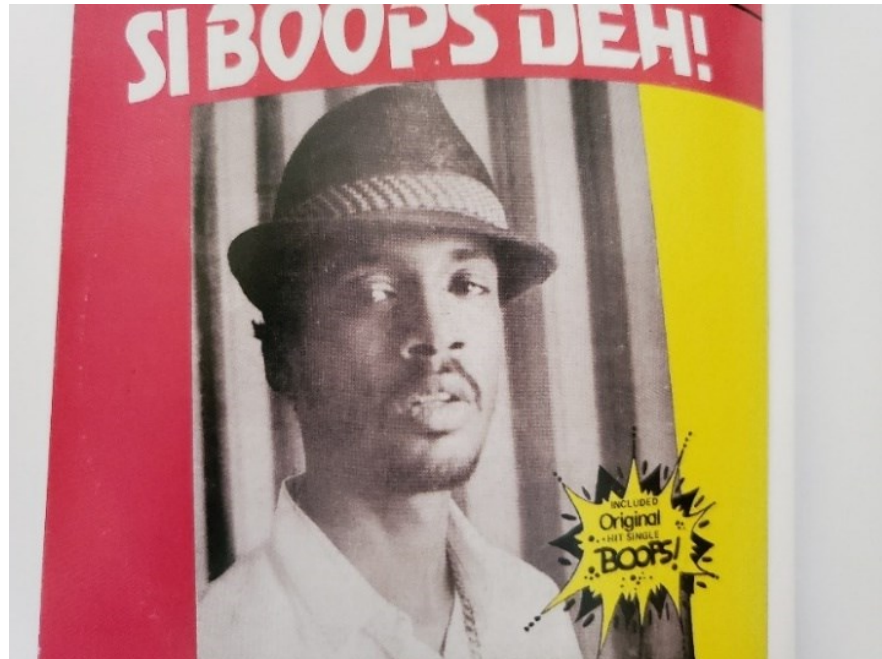


Fig. 18 and 19. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Super Cat, *Si Boops Deh!* (c.1985). Front and back covers.



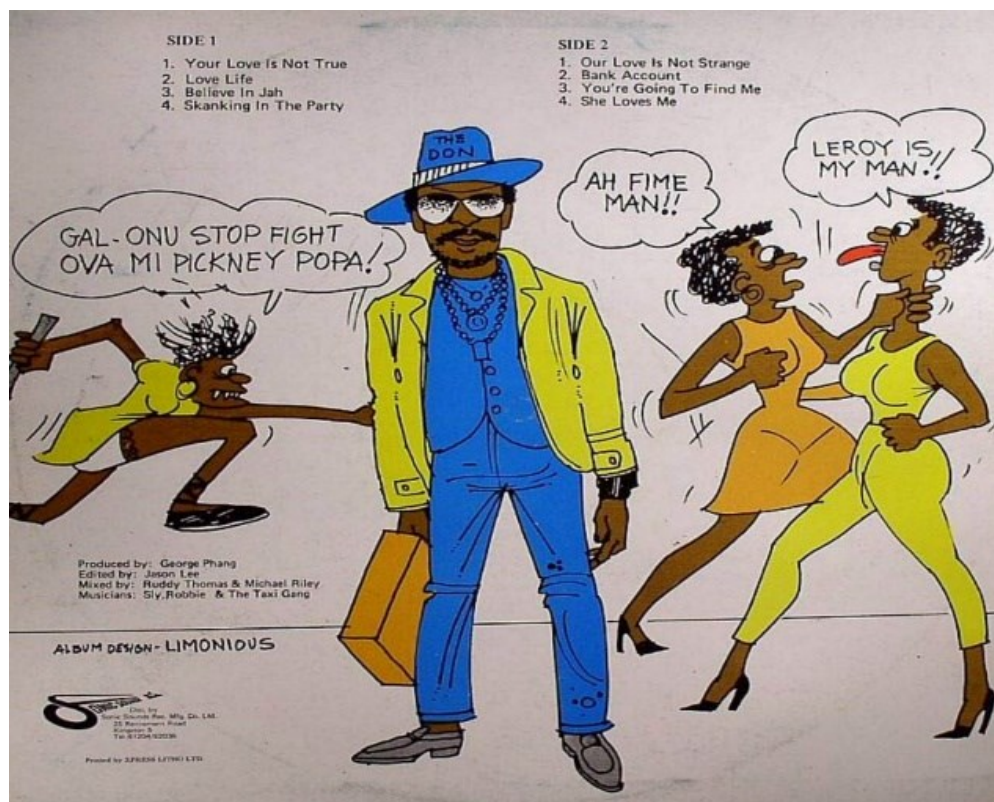


Fig. 20 and 21. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Leroy Smart, *Bank Account* (1985). Front and back covers.

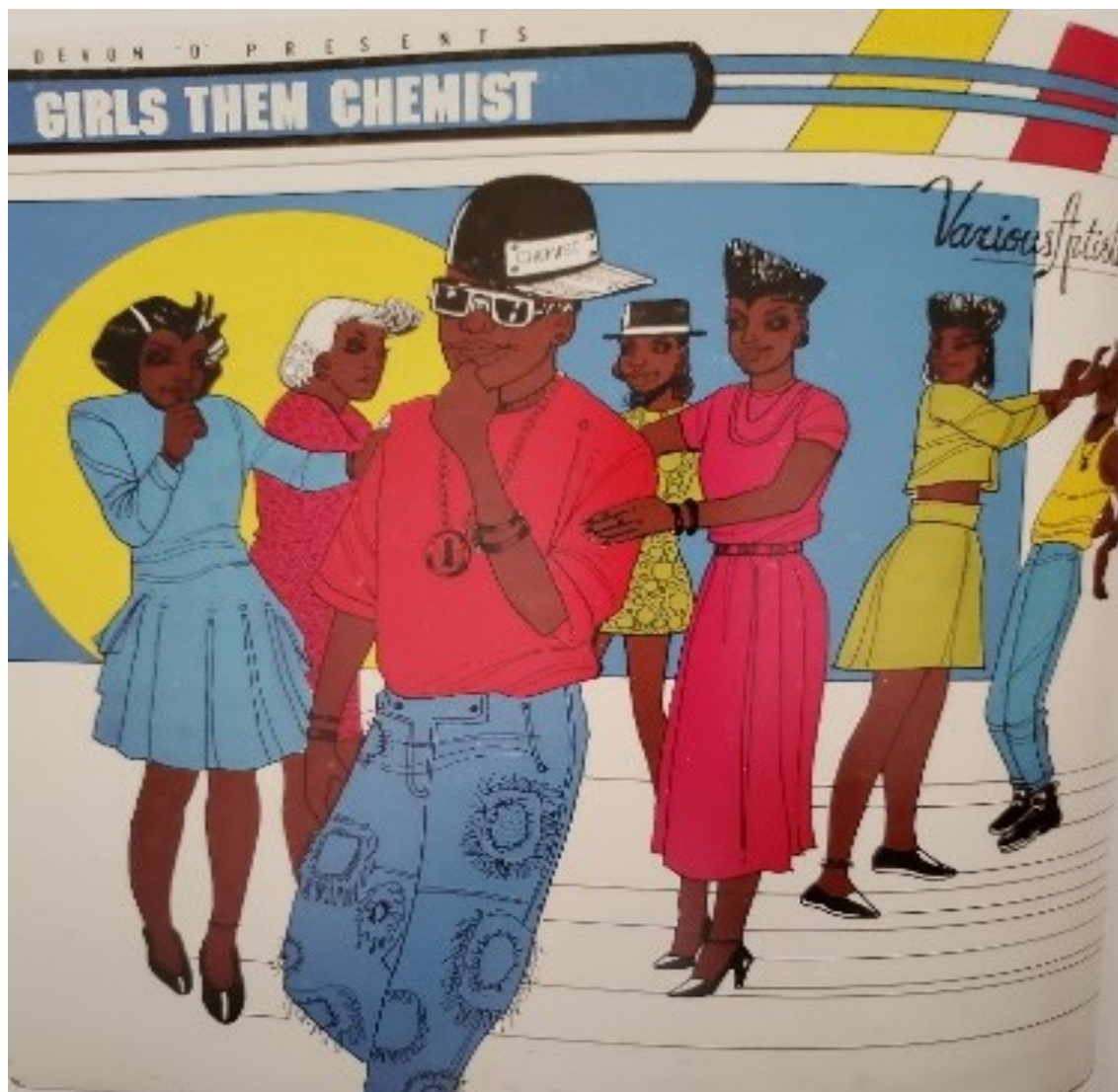


Fig. 22. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover, Devon D Presents *Girls Them Chemist* (c.1992). Front cover.



Fig. 23. CC Associates. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artists *The Harder They Come* (1972).  
Front cover.



Fig. 24. Perry Henzell. Production still 16mm color film. Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come* (1972).





Fig. 25 and 26. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Michael Palmer, *Lick Shot* (c.1984). Front and back covers.

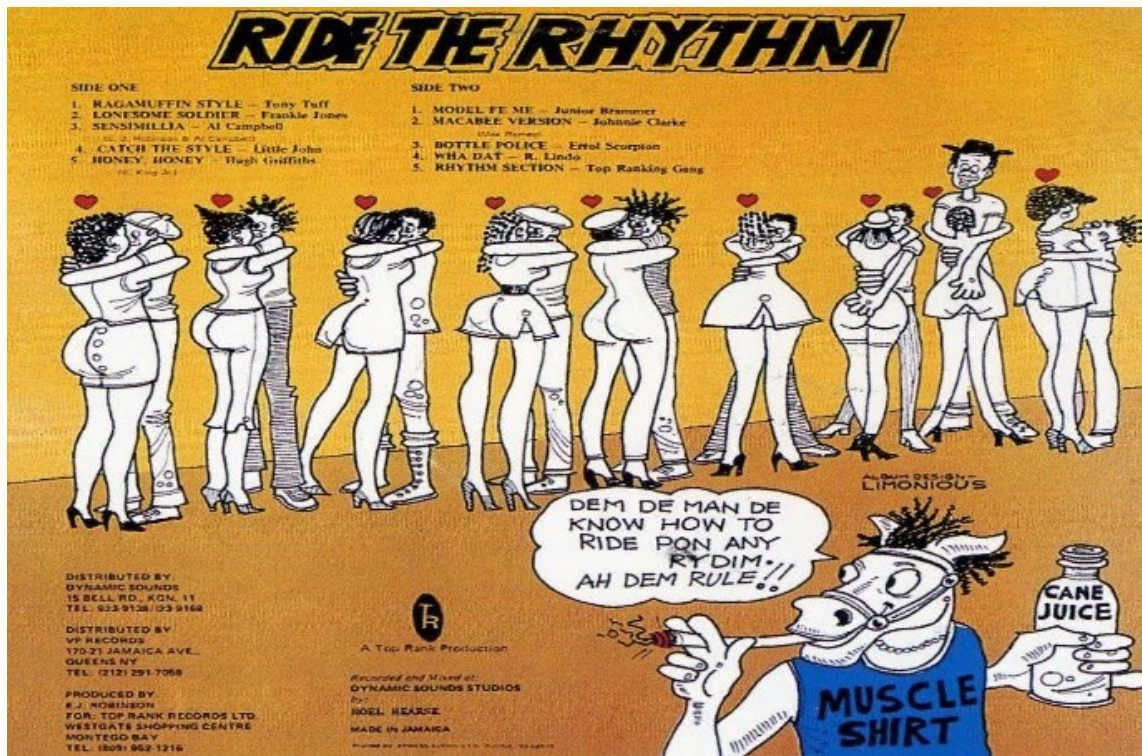


Fig. 27 and 28. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artistes, *Ride the Rhythm* (1985). Front and back covers.





Fig. 29. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artistes, *Hot Things* (c.1993). Front cover.



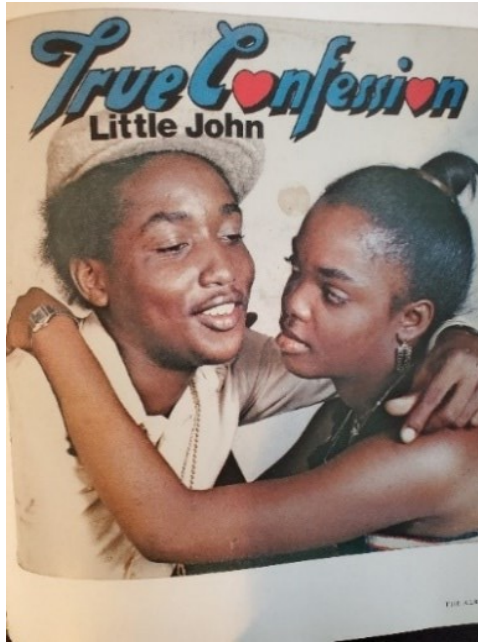


Fig. 32. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Little John, *True Confession* (1984). Front cover.



Fig. 33. Wilfred Limonious. Artwork for vinyl album cover. Various Artistes , *Mother's Choice* (1997). Front and back covers.



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