

Saluting the Crown Prince of Reggae

ARGUABLY, he is loved in reggae like no other. And from a child prodigy to the elevation of the Crown Prince of Reggae, Dennis Emanuel Brown undoubtedly developed a commanding and durable sound that made him one of Jamaica's most popular artistes of all times.

Monday, the start of Reggae Month, will mark the 53rd birthday of this amazing singer who was born on February 1, 1959, and made his journey to the 'Promised Land', 11 years ago on July 1, 1999, at 40 years of age. Amazingly, the Promised Land is one of the vintage recordings for which Brown is famous. Renown for his modesty, humility and unpretentiousness, D Brown, as he is affectionately called, has produced as many classics as anyone else, if not more. The self-effacing 'boy-wonder' who began his career at the tender age of 11 has a special place among reggae's many child stars. As he grew older, he lived up to his Joseph spiritual lineage (as recorded in Genesis 49:22), fulfilling in his musical works like that of the Biblical patriot. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well whose branches run over the wall..." From his 'Lips of Wine' flowed not only another vintage of the same name, but others like Old Man River, If I Follow My Heart, No Man Is An Island, Silhouettes, Wolf And Leopards, Little Green Apples, Perhaps, Wichita Lineman, Money In My Pocket, Revolution and countless others which will be played between today (Sunday) and tomorrow in downtown Kingston. That is because the restoration process of reggae's capital city is poised to get a kick-start with the Celebration of Dennis Brown's Birthday in Downtown Kingston. Beginning at 12:00 noon and ending tomorrow (Monday, February 1) at 2:00 am, friends, fans and colleagues of the late reggae legend will gather on Orange Street between Charles Street and North Street to have a festive time. D Brown was a product of downtown Kingston living for many years at 135 Orange Street, commonly called Big Yard. The festivities will take the form of a street fair, with vendors from the neighbourhood selling art, craft and food items. Music will be provided by the legendary Soultone sound system with selector Witty Henry, and guest selectors Roy Black, Bunny Goodison, Michael Barnett, Jimmy "Solo" Howard, and invited special guest selector Mayor Desmond McKenzie, who is reputed to have the most extensive collection of Dennis Brown's records. Live performances are expected from Ken Boothe, Beres Hammond, Gregory Isaacs, Marcia Griffiths, John Holt, George Nooks, Freddy McGregor and many others, with Tommy Cowan the emcee and backing band Lloyd Parkes and We the People. At midnight there will be a cake-cutting ceremony with tributes paid to the Crown Prince's musical contribution to the strength of Jamaican music. Invited guest speakers are the Honourable Olivia "Babsy" Grange, Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, and Mayor McKenzie. Also paying tributes are Junior Lincoln, chairman of the Dennis Brown Trust, Trevor "Leggo" Douglas of Leggo Recording Studio and a close friend of Brown representing the music industry, and Julian "Jingles" Reynolds, chairman of Sounds & Pressure. The event will serve to kick-off Reggae Month and is organised by the Dennis Brown Trust, Jamaica Reggae Industry Association (JARIA), and Sounds & Pressure, an organisation committed to the restoration of downtown Kingston as a vibrant cultural centre, and in particular Orange Street, also known as Beat Street, the music Mecca of the 1950s, '60s and '70s.