

# The Evolution of Jamaican Music

If you are like many people, the first person who comes to mind when thinking of Jamaican music is Bob Marley. However, Jamaican music transcends well beyond this one musical legend.

Jamaica has a strong history in music stretching back to its roots, which was primarily based on drum beats and chants with a touch of European influence. Today, Jamaican music encompasses not only these roots but the influence of many genres of music, and serves as an influence in its own right for many international artistes. Without Jamaica, the world would never have known the sounds of Ska, Reggae or even Hip-Hop, all of which originated on this tiny island in the West Indies. Even before Ska, many will argue that the origins of Jamaican music could be heard from the rural areas with sounds of folk music. This folk music was then followed by the first recorded Jamaican music -- Mento -- which includes the work of pioneers such as Stanley Motta. In fact, mento bands can still be found performing in hotels throughout the island. The renowned Sir Coxson Dodd was one of the influential figures in the early years of the sound system. Jazz was also a popular music form in Jamaica, and many well-known jazz musicians hailed from Jamaica such as Joe Harriott, Ernest Ranglin and Monty Alexander. In the late 1950s, Ska had its debut with some of the first songs being Oh Carolina by the Folkes brothers, the very popular My Boy Lollipop by Millie Small and Simmer Down by the Wailers in 1963. Some renowned Jamaican musicians such as Toots Hibbert and Bob Marley got their start with this genre of music. Ska was not only embraced by the Jamaican community but was well received in the United States and the United Kingdom. Around this time, there was much introduction of Jamaican music to overseas markets and Chris Blackwell's Island Records was one such label that was instrumental in promoting Jamaican music to the international scene. In the mid-1960s Rocksteady had emerged and was a precursor to Reggae music and musicians, such as Alton Ellis and Desmond Dekker, who brought Rocksteady hits to the scene. Reggae was the next phase in the development of our music. Known as the music of Jamaica, its development was aided by some of the above-mentioned. Reggae crossed the boundaries from the sprawling slums of Trench Town to Buckingham Palace where Prince Charles is a fan. This genre gave the world its first and only megastar in Bob Marley, whose album, Exodus, was voted "Album of the Century" by the US publication Time magazine and the hit single, One Love, "Song of the Century". Other acts such as Toots and the Maytals, Gregory Isaacs, Third World and Chalice are remembered as some of the successful artistes of this period. Jamaican music, however, didn't die when Marley did, it continues today with the likes of Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Shaggy, Buju Banton and Sean Paul. These artistes keep Jamaican music as a global force and continue to inspire generations of young musicians. Whether it's Marley's son Ziggy Marley singing the theme song to the children's TV show Arthur, or chart-topping pop star Sean Kingston. These days Jamaican music is everywhere, ensuring our little island will continue to be a big influence for many years to come.