

Reggae's Gone Country album drops Aug 30

VP Records and Warner Music Nashville are proud to announce the release of 'Reggae's Gone Country' on August 30, a seamless musical dialogue between Kingston and Nashville that connects the roots of both genres

The ground-breaking compilation features classic country hits covered by Jamaica's top musicians (Beres Hammond, Tarrus Riley, Tessanne Chin, Etana, Luciano, Sly & Robbie) as well as supporting vocals provided by original recording artist and country icon Larry Gatlin of The Gatlin Brothers.

Check out the American Songwriter premiere of Busy Signal's take on Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler": <http://www.americansongwriter.com/2011/07/exclusive-hear-the-gambler-from-reggaes-gone-country/>

Country music devotee Cristy Barber, Vice President of Marketing and Promotions at VP Records, the world's largest reggae label, and a Grammy nominated producer for the 2003 dancehall reggae-hip hop compilation album Def Jamaica, envisioned this project two years ago and teamed up on lead production with John Rich of the multi-platinum selling country duo Big & Rich and the winner of this year's Celebrity Apprentice, and the acclaimed Jamaican saxophonist and top reggae producer Dean Fraser.

"Reggae's Gone Country is taking some of Jamaica's favorite classic American country songs and putting their beats and whole instrumentation around it while still having that root of country... It is this crazy cool idea," says John Rich.

American country music and Jamaican reggae share many similarities. Both genres are rife with love-gone-wrong songs, romanticized gritty outlaw tales and expressions of unwavering spiritual devotion providing guidance through daily struggles, each delivered in their distinctive regional voices, the molasses thick Jamaican patois heard on many reggae tracks and country's indelible southern twang.

Country has been a part of the island's musical catalog for years. "Everyone from 20-year-old kids to their grandparents listen to country in Jamaica. People are always so shocked when I say this, but the music plays such an important role in the Caribbean," states Cristy Barber.

Romain Virgo, 21-year-old reggae singer and 2007 Rising Stars winner (Jamaica's equivalent to American Idol), adds, "Country Western music is something that I grew up listening to. You look for it every Saturday morning. These are the songs that we play to get us in the work mood and those songs would carry you right through the day."

'Reggae's Gone Country' opens with Virgo's rendition of the Gatlin Brothers' 1979 hit "California," with Larry Gatlin himself contributing vocals. Duane Stephenson also puts his distinctive stamp on "Suspicious," the late Eddie Rabbit's mega country-pop hit from 1979. Dancehall reggae artist Busy Signal, more often associated with spitting out rapid-fire rhymes, offers an inspiringly sung rendition of Kenny Rogers' country-pop Grammy Award winning blockbuster "The Gambler." The two young Jamaican songstresses, Etana and Tessanne Chin, shine in their respective renditions of Patsy Cline's "Crazy," and Crystal Gayle's "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue."

The majority of the album was recorded at Kingston's Grafton and the Marley owned Tuff Gong Studios. The tracks were mixed by Errol and Shane Brown, then sent to Nashville where they were embellished with country instrumentation by legendary pedal steel player Mike Johnson and Jonathan Yudkin on fiddle/ banjo with John Rich overseeing the production at Fireside Studios, formerly owned by the late country legend Porter Wagoner.

Barber hopes that the heartfelt renditions of country classics heard on 'Reggae's Gone Country' will introduce and educate music fans everywhere to the talent that exists in Jamaica. "There are people who love Bob Marley or Jimmy Cliff but don't know how great Tarrus Riley is or what a Tessanne Chin can do or this 21-year-old kid Romain Virgo," notes Barber. "That's what this is about, people might know Sly and Robbie but don't sleep on the skills of Dean Fraser, Errol Brown or other talent down there. With the music industry where it is now, we need more people at the reggae party and I am really hoping this album will give more exposure to the genre."