

Who Created The 'Original Version'

"This station rules the nation with version!" declared Ewart 'U Roy' Beckford, OD on his way-back-in-the-day tune (somewhere between 1969 and 1970.)

That original declaration has been copied and 'sampled'; a number of times in various versions, the most popular of which was by the short-lived group Musical Youth in 'Pass the Dutchie' — their version of the Mighty Diamonds' 'Pass the Cutchie'.

Still, when it comes to version, we Jamaicans run things. We can cut a version of a version from any version and make it more original than the original. Yeah man, but as those English youths (musical Youth) proved, the version thing works both ways. So while we are busy making versions of other people's things, is same way other people busy making versions of our things.

The weird thing though, is that sometimes the people who copy our things end up making more money and fame off the version than we could ever make from the original. You want example? Check UB40's version of Creator's Kingston Town or Bony M's version of The Melodians' Rivers of Babylon or Mick Jagger's versions of Half Pint's Winsome and Eric Donaldson's Cherry oh Baby.

And hear the next thing 'bout versions now: some recorded versions or performed renditions actually end up being so popular, that people forget to give credit to the original. Of course, there are times when credit is given to a version at the expense of the original and it has less to do with the quality of the rendition and more to do with plain old ignorance. Like the time I overheard this man singing the praises of popular Rising Stars contestant Noddy Virtue, exclaiming "a so mi know say Noddy is a big star, mi just hear di famous Jimmy Cliff a sing over Noddy tune weh name the Rebel In Me." Poor him and Noddy! Actually, Noddy does a passionate and exciting version, but I personally prefer Mr. Cliff's original.

Total Eclipse of The Original

There are a few reggae versions though, that in my humble opinion totally eclipse the overseas originals in terms of appeal. These include Benji Myaz version of I Love You Higher, Frankie Paul's version of Sarah and Dennis Brown's version of Silhouettes. Ah bwoy, Silhouettes brings back memories! I remember an era when our music, whether version or original, had more substance and soul and guttural truth. And I sense contemporary versions of that in the music of people like Junior Kelly, Chuck Fender, Tarrus Riley and quite a few others.

Sadly, they are not the majority. Nah sah! We still have nuff man a yard who are delinquents posing as musicians; and some of them busy trying to massacre reggae music with their bling, misogyny and violence. At the same time there are artistes from outside Jamaica who, strongly influenced by our music, are creating works that have genuine echoes of the real old time thing - the original version. You should check out an Ethiopian reggae singer called Johnny Ragga, or a Rasta Band from the Virgin Islands called Midnite.

And you have people like Gentleman from Germany and Alberosie from Italy who go way beyond version or imitation; they've completely assimilated Jamaican music, language and culture. Some wise or otherwise quotable person once said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Source : Blakka Ellis blakkaellis@gmail.com