

Back to Africa

The continent of Africa has always been a cherished place for many Jamaicans, particularly those whose foreparents were brought forcibly to this part of the world.

Through cultural forces including the work of Rastafari and the power of reggae, the African continent has been maintained positively in the psyche of many a Jamaican.

Over the year, cultural reggae acts, especially those who ascribe to the tenets of Rastafari have maintained the link with 'The Motherland', however today, young dancehall artistes are making inroads into the African market.

Names like Mavado, Vegas, Elephant Man and up-and-coming acts including Wasp, Denyque and Darrio have been making stops in Africa in recent months as they continue to spread their music.

Controversial deejay Mavado grabbed headlines a few weeks ago during his first trip to Ghana in West Africa. The 'man from the gullyside' told journalists in the Ghanaian capital Accra, that he may settle in that country in the near future. He was quoted in online reports saying "Ghana reminds me of home," adding that he may settle in Ghana in the near future as soon as he gets a piece of land.

According to publicist Olimatta Taal, who was raised in Ghana it is that "feeling of home" effect which grabs a number of reggae acts when they arrive on the African continent. Taal who has facilitated tours and visits of Africa for a number of artistes including Sizzla, Junior Kelly and Fantan Mojah, notes that many artistes are struck by the similarities in African and Jamaica that they immediately feel a connection.

She adds that the disconnect also occurs from the viewpoint of Africans, and meeting with these Jamaican brothers and sisters serves to re-inforce the bond. "That historical connection between Africans at home and abroad has been lost in some instances, but maintained on another level through the music. Music has built a bond between Jamaica and Africa and the work of artistes, past and present, is a great unifying force.

Zimbabwe, which over 30 years ago witnessed the mysticism of the King of Reggae Bob Marley, remains a popular spot for touring reggae acts.

Just last weekend, dancehall fans were left with mixed reviews following a concert featuring Jamaican dancehall act, Mr Vegas. Newspaper reports out of that country indicate that patrons walked out on the artiste's performance, which was described by some as being boring. However, interviews with some patrons offered opposing opinions, indicating that some members of the audience may not appreciate the genre of dancehall.

Like Mavado, Vegas also indicated a love for the African continent, likening it to Jamaica reportedly stating: "If I could, I would stay here forever since I enjoyed my stay."

Following the Vegas show, Clint Robinson, the promoter of the event, reportedly told journalists that Mavado from will be heading to Harare for a performance on December 16.

Robinsons is quoted as saying he believed Zimbabweans could identify better with Jamaicans as compared to other stars from other countries hence his decision to bring in Jamaican artistes.

Meanwhile, the energy god himself, Elephant Man also seems set for gigs in Africa.

A statement from the deejay indicates that he has two events in Africa next month. The first will be in Uganda on December 2, and the other in Kigali, Rwanda on December 3. This follows shows in Zimbabwe earlier this year.

And Konshens has also had his taste of Africa. The young act and his protégé Darrio, recently returned to Jamaica after a stop in Nairobi, Kenya.

"Performing for thousands of fans in the motherland was electrifying. We were well received and I do believe that every artiste should get this experience at some point in their career," Darrio states.

Singjay Wasp was also excited about a two-week stint on the African continent with fellow entertainers, Cocoa Tea, Beres Hammond, Fantan Mojah and Giovanni. That tour formed part of the Lager Beer Summer Festival and saw Wasp and his compatriots making stops in Harare, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg, South Africa.

In April of this year singer Denyque made her African debut in Kenya as the host of the Insyder SKIZA CHAT Awards where she was also a nominee.

Her shift from the known cultural reggae acts to the current dancehall crop does not surprise Taal. She notes, "All musical genres have a place in Africa. Whatever is popular in Jamaica filters through to Africa thanks to technology. The

Internet makes everything quicker so it was bound to happen." She adds, "Furthermore, every general will seek out what is popular at that time."