

## Hard Sting to dead, hard Sting to change

Tomorrow, we will know how Sting 2015 has fared, with a line-up that is a far cry from what has been served up in recent years. The date - Boxing Day - is the same. The venue - Jamworld in Portmore, St Catherine - is the same. But the names are oh so different.

For many years, Sting has created categories for giants and divas, pretty faces and bad boys. Now, there is an overall theme, 'From Then Til Now', which sums up the composition of the line-up. However, with much publicised falling out between the organisers, Supreme Promotions, and several of the bigger names which have traversed much of the 32-year period the concert is covering, there are some notable absentees. So, obviously there is no Ninja Man (who has made it clear that without Gully Bop there, he will not be performing), Bounty Killer or Sizzla (who was banned after the 30th staging in 2013). If Lady Saw had been on the line-up, she would have cancelled anyway. Of the outstanding Sting performers who have been with the event for an extended period, Beenie Man and, to a lesser extent, Elephant Man are among the very few on the bill who can claim serious pulling power with the younger folk at this moment. There has been a late move to include Ninja Man, Gully Bop and Merciless, following their encounter at 'Ghetto Splash' and Ninja's resolve to not be at Sting 2015 unless Gully Bop was also performing. And while I am not aware of the breakdown of Sting audiences by age, from what I have observed over some years and dancehall's general appeal to a younger generation, it is youngsters who comprise much of those who go through the annual marathon at Jamworld. So will the mature crowd turn out to compensate for missing youngsters - or add to those younger folk for whom Sting is an institution, making for a bumper audience? Will the older dancehall folk give Sting a miss and the line-up nullify the effect of Sting as an institution, so that the Sunday morning breaks on very few people at Jamworld? It may not have been this dramatic, but in the couple years I have been covering the event, I have seen Sting try to change its hardcore image before and suffer the consequences. It tends to come after a big 'clash' year and the resulting fallout. And let us not forget that ahead of Sting 30, there was a public promise to turn the microphone off on anyone who breached the stated performance regulations. It did not happen. Same for the stated intention to change Sting from its bad-boy ways. That did not happen either. How do you change an event that is renowned for its ultra-hardcore edge, an attribute it has played up over many years (although I am an enthusiastic supporter of not having clashes this year with a set of youngsters who have replaced wit with wickedness and craft with the crass). Sting is like a person who has presented a public persona through its teens and 20s and is now attempting to change in its 30s. It's going to be hard, but never count out Sting. It hard fe dead - and it hard fe change. Salute's exemption There were a few chuckles when Justice Minister Mark Golding handed Rebel Salute founder Tony Rebel the official marijuana exemption at the launch of the 2016 event last Thursday at the Marriott Courtyard in New Kingston. And Golding did say that what has transpired at Salute informally can now take place legitimately. There is heavy marijuana use at the Rebel Salute festival, just as there is at any other stage show I have attended and political party conference I have heard about. Over time, I have witnessed only one instance of the police attempting to take marijuana from a vendor and this was when we were on the slope at the back of the former Port Kaiser venue, waiting for that year's renewal to get underway. More to the point, Queen Ifrica is a key member of the Salute organising entity and at the launch, she performed a marijuana song. While the focus was largely on Keep it to Yourself, lest we forget here is a transcript of the final moments of Queen Ifrica's Grand Gala 2013 performance when the microphone was turned off on her, She was talking about the productive use of marijuana: "And before I leave tonight, National Stadium are you feeling irie?... Take it down low, take it down low. And before I go, I just want to say this directly to the mother Prime Minister tonight. We live in a world where we look and see that everywhere else around the world is legalising and lifting the ban on marijuana. So we saying tonight, we need to legalise marijuana for economical benefits from Jamaica. Right now. And make we country grow, cause everybody else a dweet." (Words indistinct, as microphone muffled). "Look into it and think about it." (Microphone gradually turned down). To hear it yourself, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89BCZpYFwVc>. She was publicly criticised by the Ministry of Youth and Culture, which organised the Gala. And a mere 30 months later, the same Jamaican Government is saying it is OK to use marijuana at Rebel Salute. Isn't it amazing how quickly we can forget those who were penalised for maintaining their stance on an issue, when what they were advocating is accepted?