

Bob Marley

(Robin Scott)

Bob Marley was a Jamaican singer, guitarist and songwriter who achieved international stardom.



What are the origins of Reggae?

The origins of Reggae start with African music as the people of Jamaica are descendants of the African slaves who were brought to the island. African music is based around rhythm patterns, and rhythm and beat are the most important features of Reggae. Also there is the influence of other Caribbean music such as Calypso and the associated instruments such as steel drums which can be heard on Bob Marley songs such as ‘One Love.’

When did Reggae begin?

Reggae developed in the 1960s, and later in 1968 Bob Marley took the Ska music of the shantytowns in Kingston, Jamaica, slowed the tempo and introduced a much heavier bass whilst retaining the strong upbeat. Ska music has similar typical offbeat rhythms, but is less melodic than Reggae.

What is the structure of Reggae?

Reggae structure is not complicated – there are usually only 3 chords, which are chords 1, 4 and 5. This is the same as the 12 Bar Blues, but the chords do not go in a set pattern, like Blues.

The chords are played on the 2nd and 4th beats of the bar, and the drums on the 1st and 3rd beats. This gives a typical Reggae sound.

There is usually a bass riff. The bass line is very important in Reggae and is turned up loud in the mix. The bass riff is also usually syncopated.

Bob Marley and the Wailers

Bob Marley was learning the welding trade in Kingston when he formed his first harmony group, the Rudeboys, in 1961. The group later became known as the Wailers. The Wailers included vocalists Bunny Livingston and Peter Tosh, both of whom later embarked on successful solo careers. The group's early

recordings were in a style called ska, a hybrid of New Orleans rhythm and blues and Jamaican mento. Mento was the first of the reggae styles. By the late 1960s, influences from United States rhythm and blues, Jamaican folk rhythm, and dub were synthesized into the rock-steady and poppa-top styles, and Marley emerged as a rising talent in this new genre of Jamaican music.

How was Bob Marley Associated with religion and black politics?

In 1967 he converted from Christianity to Rastafarianism, a religion that has had a profound influence on reggae music. The Rastafarian movement of this period, among other beliefs, recognized Haile Selassie I, king of Ethiopia, as the living God; praised the spiritual effects of marijuana; and endorsed black racial superiority. Influenced by the Rastafarian movement, Marley's music contains elements of spiritualism and mysticism. Some songs call for personal freedom through revolution, while others embrace carefree attitudes toward life or convey stories of love. Marley and the Wailers recorded *Catch a Fire* (1972), *Burnin'* (1973), *Natty Dread* (1975), and *Live* (1975), among other albums. During the 1970s, amid great political and economic turmoil in Jamaica, Marley cultivated a rebel image. An increasingly political figure, he survived a 1976 assassination attempt at his home in Jamaica. He subsequently went to Europe and experienced a new degree of popular success in England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and West Germany. *Rastaman Vibrations* (1976) and a United States tour brought him unmatched success with American reggae fans, and his popularity was furthered with *Exodus* (1977), *Babylon by Bus* (1978), *Kaya* (1978), *Uprising* (1980), and reissues of earlier work.

During his lifetime, Marley's music came to be closely associated with the movement toward black political independence, a movement prominent in several African and South American countries at the time. His music has remained highly popular, and for many it has continued to symbolize the hopes of the downtrodden for a better life outside urban slums. The clarity, conviction, and sincerity of Marley's performances, and his unique, melodic style of song writing, have influenced many pop-music artists, including songwriter Stevie Wonder and rock guitarist Eric Clapton.

How has Reggae influenced music?

Reggae has had massive influences on pop music. With regard to the music of the 80s, Reggae did not become widely known in Britain until Eric Clapton recorded a cover version on Bob Marley's "I shot the sheriff" in 1974. Within a few years, groups such as the Clash, the Police and Madness were drawing on ideas from Reggae. The music of Sting has sometimes been described as 'white Reggae.' More recent influences can be detected in the music of Ragga artists such as Shaggy.