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**Listening Session: Seeing Through Flames:
The Strangeness of the Dub by Edward George**

Edward George 01:08

We ready two more minutes. Okay, let's have two minutes of silence

Edward George 01:19

No no silence is good. Silence is good we are ready I take it then. Yes. Good evening. My name is Edward George. Welcome to a live edition of the Strangeness of Dub, the title of which is Sound System International. In Jamaica in the 1940s record players were a luxury item that few could afford and portable transistor radios had not yet been invented. Jamaica was a quiet place and then one day came the sound of music blaring from a lone loudspeaker from a local storefront. Soon the speakers were multiplied and made louder attached as they were to large radios or record players. They played the music of the day the American music of the day jazz and rhythm and blues mostly big band jazz. The new thing the r&b thing can be summed up by music like this.

Edward George 05:08

Fats Domino with The Fat Man released on Imperial records in 1949. By that time the radio sets and record plays have been replaced by the first sound systems and customers were going to the shops and bars just to hear records like The Fat Man. Fast forward to 1952. The sound systems are a world of their own, with a huge audience made up of the working poor of Jamaica, Jamaica or Kingston's ghettos. There are a lot of sounds but the biggest and most popular is Tom the Great Sebastian is run by a hardware store owner a Chinese Jamaican by the name of Tom Wong.

Transcript

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Vincent George Forbes was Tom the Great Sebastian selector. In 1954, he migrated to England and started his own sound system Duke Vin.

Edward George 06:04

Eastern Standard Time shut up Eastern Standard Time by Don Drummond featuring the Skatalites a Duke Reid recording from 1964 and one of the first major Ska tunes to gain an audience outside of Jamaica. thanks in no small part to be in no small part, through the efforts of Duke Vin and his sound system, which had a residency in central London's Flamingo Club played a lot of West London dances shebeens, town halls, parties across the city when Duke Vin came to London, he was accompanied by his friend Wilbert Campbell, who also had a sound system Count Suckle and in 1964, suckled started one of the first black nightclubs in Paddington called the Q club. Because it was rare because it was early because he was a pioneer it soon became a kind of a hub a central point for sound system culture in London, especially because it was in central London, the kind of tunes that you probably would have heard say around 1967 the kinds of things like this. Remember this tune we'll be coming back to it later

Edward George 12:16

From 1967 Let Them Try Studio One pressure from Alton Ellis the soul of Jamaica, I think he was called by Clement Dodd. If you were black and born in London in say 1960 that tune that you've just heard and again like I said you'll hear it again in a different context later on. That tune would have been part of the background sound to your growing up. It would have been the kind of tune that your mum and dad's might have danced to at the Q Club because it was your parents music, it wasn't yours. You would have been part of the first generation of black teenagers who are either born in Britain or arrived at a very early age and you have you would have created a nationwide sound system culture whose most popular, heaviest and influential exponents were sounds like Sir Coxson, Jah Sufferer and a Likkle youth sound Jah Shaka Hi Fi. Staying with Coxson for a minute, born in 1945 Lloyd Blackford came to London in 1962. While still in his teens, he formed Coxson. He sounds no relation to Clement Coxson Dodd more of him later, in 1968, with his selector Festus, Sir Coxson presented Jamaican music as if they were its finest ambassadors and they were. They were the first sound system to tour

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Europe hence the extended name Sir Coxson Outernational. They had multiple residencies in London's West End, and had close ties with top Jamaican producers like Clement Dodd, and that meant that they got new music long before other sounds. They were also the first sounds to have played the music of Burning Spear. When Winston Rodney was still recording Studio One and has yet to become famous in Jamaica or anywhere else. He only had one album to his name at the time, it's called Rocking Time. If I can cue this with a vague level of professionalism. We should be able to have a listen Hold on 123 There you go.

Edward George 17:19

Burning Spear from 1974 with Rocking Time on Studio One I probably between 1974 and 1988 was the kind of like golden age of black British sound systems. I think there were probably say around 1979 over 300 Sound Systems in Britain alone, but by, say 1999 pirate radio started taking the place and the role of sound systems and many a sound system called it a day while others struggle to make sense of the new digitally produced music coming from Jamaica and the UK. Jah Shaka Sound System prevailed. The sound embraced the new music and attracted new audiences between the late 1980s and say the mid to late 1990s Shaka had a residency at the Rocket in North London, and I use that residency to showcase Jamaican and British dubplates super obscure roots tunes that you'll have a hard time finding even now, and regular releases on his own label Jah Shaka music and live dub mixing. If you ever get the opportunity to go to Jah Shaka Sound System and you haven't go. In that period what the sound more or less did was create the model or the template for dub and roots rock reggae production and sound system culture in Europe and that culture that model is pretty much existent up until now. What I'm going to play you now is from a series of dub albums I get in 95 96 called Dub Salute. This is from Volume 2 its called Jah Shaka Featuring Icho Candy. This track is called if it comes up right Love Is The Key Dub

Edward George 19:31

these things are sent to try me I swear Icho Candy Dub Is The Key Why does this keep happening? From a flyer dated August 11 1973. A DJ Kool Herc Party Back to School Jam 9 til 4 admission 25 cents ladies 50 cents fellas given by Kool Herc was special guests, Coco that's MC Coke La

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Rock Cindy C Kool Herc's sister Cindy Campbell, Klark K MC Clark Kent and Timmy T that's the MC Timmy Tim. That back to school jam was held in the community recreation room at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue and Sedgwick Avenue is widely regarded as the birthplace of hip hop, and it was presided over by a young graffiti artists turn DJ Clive Campbell aka Kool Herc. The UK wasn't the only place where sound system culture was taking off. Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1955 Clive Campbell was 12 when his family moved to the Bronx in 67 Campbell's that Keith was a musician he had a lot of records and a lot of sound equipment. Soon, the young DJ Kool Herc was throwing his own parties with his own sound system, which first was no more than the guitar amplifier, a couple of turntables and tunes that more or less went like this

Edward George 29:49

Apache by the Incredible Bongo Band, when DJ Kool Herc undefined isolated the percussive break from that tune, and mix it with another tune by the Incredible Bongo Band called Bongo Rock, cutting the brakes back and forth. He created extended drum brakes and hip hop was born. Legend has it that DJ Kool Herc's MC Coke La Rock was more than the foundation hip hop MC. He was the first ever MC. In a 1983 interview with journalist Troy L. Smith for the hip hop Journal, the foundation Coke La Rock said he left hip hop in 1979 and he started hanging out at the Paradise Garage. Paradise Garage he said had the best sound system in New York and Smith says Larry Levan and Coke La Rock says right there you go, Larry Levan for Coke La Rock, Larry Levan DJ Remix sir and co-inventor of house music was like this. He was the sound of the Paradise Garage. Paradise Garage had the best sound system in New York thanks to a sound system designer and builder by the name of Richard Long of Richard Long Associates designers of custom built sound systems. Richard Long wasn't from the Jamaican sound system continuum that more or less begins with Tom the Great Sebastian. Nor was he part of the history of black migration through which Jamaican sound systems were disseminated in the UK and the US. What he had in common with that continuum was a concern with and the knowledge of how to make recorded music sound heavy, clear and powerful. He also designed the space of the Paradise Garage and of clubs in general, so that they would bring out the best in his sound systems. According to Larry Levan fellow DJ David DiPino talking about the sound of Richard Long sound system,

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he said, Look, the walls were all treated with fiberglass. So as the ceiling, when the lights went on, there was nothing pretty about the dance floor and when the lights went off, it was just a black box but it was so treated with sound. Sorry it was treated so that sound got absorbed on one wall and didn't go back and forth. There was no bounce, there was no echo. The fiberglass in the ceiling was positioned in certain angles to make V shapes to create horns. Richard would come in every Friday with this little machine that created pink noise, and he cued the sound system and then through the night, the garage would get very hot because there was no air conditioning, and you had 3000 people dancing, he had exhaust and inflow, but the sound would change as the speakers heated up, and as the room got more crowded, so Larry would go behind the amplifiers and tweak them all night. The sound system sounded as good at 12 o'clock, with 2 people dancing on the floor, as it did at 5 o'clock in the morning, with 2000 people on the floor, and at 10 o'clock in the morning, with maybe 4000 people on the floor. This might all sound a little bit techie. The context for Long's innovation is the before and after effects of the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Before the riots, dancing with a man in a bar could get you arrested for disorderly conduct and since bars were regularly raided by the police, the Stonewall Inn was one of the few bars where dancing took place. Steady the Stonewall Riots marks are kind of coming out that had a cultural correlate in a passion for the sound of music in the newly emboldened safe spaces of queer club culture. Richard Long and Larry Levan collaborative queering of The sound of music is one of the cornerstones of house music put it another way sound was the medium of Long and Levan queering of dance culture. The importance of community was the message of that medium. Well, I'm going to try and play you now is Larry Levan's dubwise remix of MFSB's Love is the Message I love it when it works.

Edward George 45:38

Love is the Message the Larry Levan dubwise remix, there is a documentary that I think you should know about. It's called The Founding Fathers of Hip Hop, by two guys by the name of Lawrence Ron Lawrence and Hassan Pore and it offers a lot of anecdotal and material evidence that the evolution of hip hop was an organic process, with DJs and MCs developing the form in relative isolation from each other. Something that DJs had in common was the track you've just heard Love

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is the Message was the track that they would use to prove their skills at mixing, cutting, scratching and extending beats. So it could be heard as a kind of musical connection between the invention of hip hop and the invention of house music. What's interesting for our story is that that record was played on sound systems and sound systems were the film tells us big in Brooklyn, big in Queens, The Disco Twins, Infinity Machine and NuSounds they were the heaviest but the template. The foundation if you want was a sound based in Queens called King Charles. King Charles came to America from Jamaica in 1968. What he brought with him was the memory of having seen and heard a sound called King Tubby's Hometown Hi Fi. Now the film doesn't say when exactly King Charles saw King Tubby sound but if you do the math, if he came to America in 68, that means that he would have seen King Tubby sound system before the King invented the remix or if you prefer dub, or before he at least recorded any of his dub mixes through which the remix was born. I'll be coming back to King Tubby later on time permitting but first is a coincidence in Jamaica in the mid 1950s, when sound systems were being developed through pioneers like Tom the Great Sebastian, something similar was happening in South America in Colombia. In the poor, predominantly black communities of Colombia's coastal cities, which are the poorest parts of Colombia. Sound Systems with names like el Grande Fidel started out a small affairs but grew into powerful bass heavy sound systems or picos cause P I C O S. That's what they call them in Columbia sound systems, and they named them after the pickup the stylus on a turntable, and the Pico's prided themselves on playing strictly vinyl. Pico's started out playing mostly salsa, but when salsa lost its rhythmic edge and merchant seamen or sailors started bringing records in from from Africa and from the Caribbean.

Edward George 48:36

Musica Africa that was the generic term for music from the African diaspora. That all became part of the ruling sound of the Picos in Barrio Nueva Colombia, Norma Zuniga's Pico, El Son Africa or Africano the African sound started playing Congolese Nigerian and Kenyan music as early in 1975. Let me see if I can do this professionally from Kenya these are the The Elgonets.

Edward George 54:25

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A Kasanga 7 inch single all the way from Kenya circa 1975 The Elgonets with Awinja as no doubt played on Norma Zuniga's Pico, El Son Africano. I wonder if the Pico's identification with Africa through music was a way of giving black Colombians a sense of presence in a 1920 paper for Auto Italia, title Sound Systems World Beats and Diasporan Identity in Cartagena, Colombia, Deborah Pacini Hernandez, who's the associate professor of anthropology at Tufts University says Columbia has an official ideology that perpetuates the myth that Columbia's Columbia is primarily by cultural mestizo and indigenous rather than multiracial and multicultural, which effectively excludes black people from the culture the country's national identity. Colombia has a long history, Hernandez, says of actively disparaging its African population and their culture. The social status of Colombian sound systems and music Africana began to change in the early 1990s. Not without opposition Picos and Musica Africana became part of Colombian mainstream through bootlegs radio festival mixes by the Picos of their top tunes or block parties. By the early noughties, or the early 20th century, Picos and vinyl are undergoing something of a resurgence, and we're getting attention from national meet international media. I think what really makes picos truly unique in the dissemination of sound systems is the pioneering pan African approach to music selection. In 2020, when Hernandez went to Columbia's coastal city of Cartagena, she found that African Colombians were rocking, she says to soukous from West Africa, mbaqanga from South Africa, zouk from Martinique and Guadeloupe, soca from Trinidad and reggae and dance hall from Jamaica.. Which you might say to yourself is all kinds of well, the question is, if I can get my computer to work, where is the dub

Edward George 1:01:06

Now, that was Mighty Massa Break Down the Babylon and there's a dub that I don't have time to play, which is still worth checking out. As played I'm told by Aba Shanti and Jah Shaka but not strictly speaking from the African diaspora. So there's no telling whether Columbia's Picos would have played it or not. And it's actually from the sound system that that diaspora. I don't know if you know who Mighty Massa is. He's a fellow from Japan. He owns a Mighty Massa sound system, which was formed in 1994 and credited with bringing the being the first Jamaican sound system to model itself on that template. That roots rock

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reggae dub template that Shaka and latterly Aba Shanti developed to perfection. In the 2019 interview, Mighty Massa told Japanese online magazine Eyeshadow that he'd seen Joey Jay's Good Time sound system and Jazzie B's Soul II Soul sound system in 1998, and he visited Jamaica in 1992 but when he tried to cut dubplates in Jamaica, he was given dancehall rhythms and a dancehall MC. He figured he'd find out that he beats sorry, he figured he'd find what he wanted in London. Obviously he did not want bashment he started building his own rhythms. He took those to the UK to be mastered and cut as dubplates at Jah Tubbys in London, if you ever need that plates, go to either Music House in Tottenham, or Jah Tubbys. In the late 1990s. The best of Japan's dancehall sound systems followed the Jamaican model of dancehall style and presentation to the letter and the best if not the baddest sounds the dancehall sound system was of 1999 in Japan, Mighty Crown., let me start that again. The name of the best, if not the baddest, dancehall sound system in the world, as of 1999, was from Yokohama, Japan, Mighty Crown. It happened One Night in Brooklyn, from a flyer this Irish and Chin Entertainment World Clash 1999. It's not where you are from, it's where you represent. Saturday October 9th, Columbus Day Weekend, Club Warehouse, 1370 Ralph Avenue, Brooklyn New York, featuring 98 world champion, representing the world, Kilimanjaro. Bass Odyssey, Tony Matterhorn. Representing Japan, Mighty Crown. This is how they did it. I haven't played any sound tape so far has been vinyl, MP4's, and so on and so forth. So from the closing round of World 1999 World clash, here is some sound system type business. If you've got sensitive ears, if you're a little bit cheery and a little bit wary of foul language, cover your ears now. What we're going to do is we're going to join the clash as Tony Matterhorn has just been eliminated and it's Kilimanjaro versus Mighty Crown in the tune for tune dubplate fragment for dubplate fragments showdown. Listen out if you will, for Mighty Crowns wonderful Jamaican accents.

Edward George 1:10:00

and that is Mighty Crown became the biggest sound system on the planet. Mighty Crown won the clash with the Alton Ellis. That tune knock the wind out of Trooper. Why? Kilimanjaro never really played Rocksteady in a Clash. That was a YouTube comment from a guy called PowerShell Sound System. That Alton Ellis tune was a dubplate of that

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1967 Studio One tune Let Them Try that I played you a little while ago. Mighty Crowns knowledge of that tune, and their retooling of its rock steady rhythm to hit Kilimanjaro's Ricky Trooper where his hearing fell short had a limit of sorts. It was the beginning of a Japanese dance or cultural explosion, and a dancehall industry that by 19, sorry by 2005 saw dancehall music in Japan's pop mainstream. Mighty Crowns first festival was in 2005, Yokohama Reggae Sai attracted 30,000 people. I think the dissemination of sound system culture of sound systems is a global phenomenon of or grand organic criss crossing lines of rhythm and approaches to the rhythm of collectivity and collaboration of the movement of sound in dub, through opening and close spaces of the migration of technologies of sound of songs and spaces in songs of memories, old and new, have forced and coerced human migration to maybe dark and dangerous places and perhaps even memories or at least hopes of settlement. I think that was the idea. The concept if you like, behind and within the grooves and in the almost empty spaces in the mixes in King Tubby and Clancy Eccles is dub album sound system international dub album from that album, these if all goes well, are King Tubby and The Dynamites. Give me one second.

Edward George 1:16:03

King Tubby and The Dynamites, the Clancy Eccles All Stars from the album Sound System International Dub LP. I like the idea that dub itself can take the way of conceptual thinking, but also contains within itself conceptual thinking such as the dissemination of dub, which by 76 would have already happened. If you think about it dub going for a more sound system culture going from Jamaica, happening in South South America at the same time in the mid 1950s, reaching over to the UK around about the same time and then spreading out through the likes initially Sir Coxson Outernational. So you could argue I think that what King Tubby and Clancy Eccles and The Dynamites were doing, collectively, consciously or not isn't really the point, they were already establishing the idea of an international sound system culture, just through that LP, I want to leave you with something a little bit more recent that really picks up and runs with the idea of an international sound system culture that does indeed lead us back to dub with staying in. In the Americas. It's from Brazil, where a sound system culture has been flourishing since at least the 1970s. Now, since around 2010, sound

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systems like just Shaka and Aba Shanti. They more or less given Brazil, its most vibrant, generative model of sound reproduction in a country with well over 100 sound systems. It's a guy by the name of Yold Delius he's writing in soundsandcolors.com and he gives a really good reason for this proliferation, especially of roots and dub sound systems and he suggested the popularity of reggae in Brazil goes back to the legacy in Brazil, of its slave owning past. African Brazil's Brazilians, living in crowded favelas related to roots rock records themes of poverty, inequality, and its affirmation of African pride in the face of racism. Because of the similarities they felt between their own experience and those of Jamaica's working poor. After the shift from a military government to civilian rule in the 1980s, many African Brazilians became quite vocal about the discrimination they continue to experience and they embrace the message in the music such as we've heard by Burning Spear and of Joseph Hill culture who I should have played but haven't as a respite from and as a response to what Delius calls Brazil's cordial racism. I love that phrase cordial racism. The identification with roots rock reggae intensified in the late 1980s, with the centennial of Brazil's abolition of slavery in 1888. Too many African Brazilians felt that too little had changed and maybe it's no wonder then that roots and dub sound systems are among the most popular sound systems in Brazil and in fact, Brazil's reigning reggae sound system is called Digital Dubs. This is from the album Instrumental Dubs in a Dub Plate Style, Volume 1, let me see if iv'e got it all cued up

Edward George 1:19:34

this is nic I hate you tunes I say Itunes Digitaldubs Sax ti Instinto featuring from South London Digistep,

Edward George 1:24:41

that has more or less been the Strangeness of Dub in Notting with myself Edward George what we've done is we've gone from the beginnings of sound system culture. Strangely enough a really hybrid Caribbean kind of enterprise started by a Chinese Jamaican taken up by African, Caribbean Jamaican jazz fiends and blues fiends turned into something completely different when it comes to Britain gets taken up globally on the one hand through the efforts of Lloyd Coxon, who gives a broad sense because he helps to co invent lovers rock it's really worth

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keeping that in mind as well, because a broad sense of the possibilities of the music, but it's the excesses the sonic extremes of the sound system format, as exemplified by Jah Shaka. That really gives us his global idea this kind of derridean if you want dissemination of sound system culture. So just to wrap things up, I want to play you another sound tape, actually another fragment from a sound tape. This is Jah Shaka playing the The Fasimbas, one of his house bands, and hopefully, I'll cue it up properly die Itunes die. Why will they not die? Why is it with these people? Pay them your money? Okay, let's see if this works. Still not going? I am never ever doing itunes again. Okay, let's see if we can get, this should be no its not fuck it. Take it from me. I've been doing radio for years and I've never used itunes. Now I decide to pay money for music. This is what it gets me. I don't know how I'm going to do this. I'm going to bin it. Give me a minute. I've paid a tenner for this and I'm chucking it away just for you. God Okay, the signal still bloody there. Okay, there you go. All right, we've got 3 and a half minutes this is 5 minutes so we're gonna go 2 hours to 2 minutes sorry, 2 minutes over time. The mighty Jah Shaka sound system Ooh silence righteous tears. Right last one it is. That has been sound system international I am more or less Edward George thank you for your time, your patience and your consideration