

PENTHOUSE RECORDS



THE JOURNEY CONTINUES



Jamaican Recording Music has the marked distinction of every decade being ruled by a hand full of producers, who have dominated Kingston's music scene along the way, setting the trends and steering the creative processes. The 1990s was no exception and Donovan Germain and his Penthouse Label made sure that this decade of Jamaican music had his special stamp on it. The imprint produced some of the finest recordings and developed a group of vocal performers who have gone on to make indelible marks in popular music internationally.

What has made Donovan Germain a special producer? Well for one, he is a perfectionist, and someone who expects high quality from his efforts. He has a particular sophistication in his productions style, which not only made them world class, but more importantly his particular brand of popular music was reachable to the average music listener in a period when it was easy to make disposable music for the "quick buck". Germain stood tall as a champion of high standards, professionalism, quality and accessible music for Jamaican music aficionados worldwide. Germain, a Kingston College Old Boy, began his career in the 1970s while living in the United States, distributing music and eventually owning Keith's Record Store, located in Brooklyn, New York. Known initially for his love of "Roots Reggae" and "Lovers Rock", Germain began

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recording in Jamaica around 1978. At that time he recorded under several imprint namely Revolutionary Sound, Reggae and Germain. Early success included UK hits in the form of Audrey Hall's "One Dance Won't Do" (1985), Peter Metro & Dominic, "Cockney & Yardie" and "Just Don't Want to be Lonely", Freddy McGregor (1987). These early recordings have the distinctive high quality, which became the hallmark of the Penthouse Sound. Germain recordings from the beginning were seamlessly produced, developing a distinctive high quality sound, in terms of sonic quality, properly voiced and mixed to perfection, utilizing the best studio musicians of the day. This was a sign of what was to come.

Germain relocated to Kingston and opened the Penthouse Recording Studio in 1988 and continued recording Lover's Rock, Reggae and Dancehall on his New Label, Penthouse Records. A few years after, some important moves were made, which helped to propel the Label to international success by the addition of young engineers, Dave and Tony Kelly, who had their start at Tuff Gong and now joined the Staff as Engineers and Producers which also included the supremely talented Steven Stanley. Later a new crew of "prento" Engineers and riddim craftsmen

RECORDS **25** YEARS

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eager for success joined the stable including, Andre "Rookie" Tyrell, Michael "Coolie" Cooper, Andrew Thomas. Regularly utilising the best musicians and engineers of the time, which includes, Steely and Cleve, Sly and Robbie, Firehouse Crew, Steven "Lenky" Marsden Mafia and Fluxy. Germain began to record and groom a small group of artists, namely, Wayne Wonder, Tony Rebel, Jack Radics, Apache Scratchy, Mad Cobra and Cutty Ranks plus a host of other recording artist. While he worked with this group, sticking to his lover's rock roots, he continued to record veterans such as Marcia Griffiths, Beres Hammond, Sanchez and Tony Tuff. During this period, Penthouse recorded several various artist projects, usually on one "Riddim", these included What One Riddim Can Do (1986) Ninja Turtle 1&2 (1991) with the hit "Workie Workie" by Chaka Demus, One Riddim On the Move (1989) featuring "Pon Me Nozzle" Cutty Ranks and "Chaka on the Move", Chaka Demus, Dancehall Masters (1989). Germain first Jamaican hit of note came with deejay Chaka Demus with "Chaka On The Move". However the big break came with the remake of "A Love a Can Feel

Riddim" with the now classic "Tempted To Touch", Beres Hammond leading the way. Songs were written and recorded on the same "Riddim" by Tony Tuff, Jack Radics, Cutty Ranks. Richie Stephens, "Trying To Get To You" and Tony Rebel



DONOVAN GERMAIN

"Fresh Vegetable" had mega hits on this "Riddim". These recordings had that "Penthouse Stamp" of seamless production values, creative lyrical content and effective marketing. The explosion of Penthouse came with the release of the single "Love Mi Browning" by up and coming young deejay Buju Banton. The young artist burst on the

scene with bravado and controversy over the Dave Kelly penned "Love Mi Browning" which was first intended for Tony Rebel who shunned it, due to the perceived controversy. Issue of colourism and racism reared its ugly head in the aftermath of the songs' release. Germain skilfully averted career demise for Banton by releasing a single "Love Black Woman" in praise of black skinned women. Here, Germain exhibited his grasp of the artist development, public relations and marketing, the

key elements for any successful record company. At that juncture he was not known for recording a lot of dancehall genre or many deejays for that matter, however, Germain had a good eye for talent and knew that he had found someone special. The Penthouse crew now comprised Wayne Wonder, Tony Rebel, Cutty Ranks, Mad Cobra, Twiggi and Buju Banton as marquee acts, with support from the likes of Garnet Silk, Apache Scratchy, Chaka Demus, Terry Ganzie, Beres Hammond Marcia Griffiths and Sanchez. For the next couple of years Germain guided his charges with aplomb, steering them to major success both nationally and internationally. With German at his side steering his career, Buju Banton quickly rise from a young upstart to one the finest artist of his generation. Mr Mention the first album from Buju Banton can be considered one of the best dancehall albums of all times against the background that dancehall albums had not distinguished themselves during that period. Buju Banton's "Mr Mention" was a classic unadulterated pure dancehall at it's finest. Devoid of the cross cultivation and genre bonding that was to be the hallmark of production geared for the international market. As was the case with his sophomore effort, "Voice of Jamaica", guided by Germain, saw Banton exploring a more international feel with collaborations with Busta



BERES HAMMOND

Rhyme, Beres Hammond, Brian and Tony Gold and Wayne Wonder. Buju Banton's ground breaking album "Til Shiloh" facilitated the transition of the artist, then known primarily as a dancehall act, to a neo-roots griot with an amazing hardcore flow that gave the genre some much needed critical acclaim. Tony Rebel, Cutty Ranks and Wayne Wonder also went on to record for Penthouse some of the most enduring recordings of the 1990s. Including "Fresh Vegetable", "Chatty Chatty", "One Day" and "Armour" (Tony Rebel) "Pon Mi Nozzle", "Grizzle", "Dominate" and "the Bomber" (Cutty Ranks) "Eternal Flames", "Saddest Day", "Hold On", "Movie Star", "Bonafide Love" and "Fast Car" (Wayne Wonder) Which laid the foundation for the successes not only in the 1990s but through the beginning of 21st century.

Outstanding albums include "Heads of Government" Mighty Diamonds, "Land of Love" Marcia Griffiths, "A Love Affair" Beres Hammond, "Mr Mention", "Voice of Jamaica", "Til Shiloh" Inna Heights Buju Banton.

At the turn of the 21st century the single "Everyone Falls in Love" Tonto Metro and Devonte exploded and made serious inroad in North America, the single was taken up by Columbia Records who put its marketing juggernaut behind the single. In the 21st century Germain continued with a new crop of artists including the talented Assassin, Zumjay, Jah Mali and LMS; currently he continues to work as

management and producer for the outstanding Romain Virgo, Shuga, Torch, Sherieta, Exco Levi, Dalton Harris and Righteous Child. In the finest tradition of outstanding and high quality music making Donovan Germain and the team have made an indelible contribution to Jamaica's popular music recording history. The Penthouse Label has earned it's place as one of the best imprints in the history of Jamaican recorded music so far establishing a musical legacy that will be the focus of discussions, analysis, intellectual gaze and most importantly, pleasurable listening and dancing. This compilation exemplifies the quality, the strife for perfection, the art of music making in the creative crucible of Kingston and the manifestation of the cultural richness of the Jamaican experience.

Enjoy!!

Dennis Howard Ph.D.

