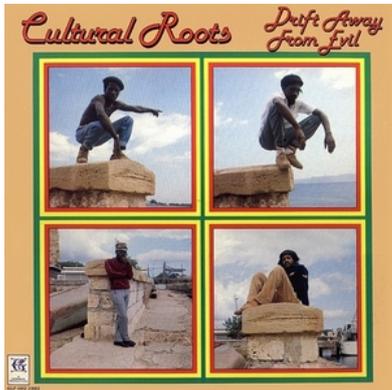


Cultural Roots could have been the biggest reggae vocal trio of all time

But dancehall took over and most of the trio's members vanished from the music scene. Fifteen years later, we tracked down its only original member still traceable, or alive.

by Seb Carayol - May 8th, 2014 – Wax Poetics



Cultural Roots founding member **Wade Dyce**, now living in Salem, Massachusetts, takes his time to ponder when I ask him about the unusual path that led to the life and death of reggae's most elusive outfit. *"We still did what we had to do, and people were still interested in working with us,"* he says. *"But it wasn't... It just wasn't as it was before."*

To this day, the singer of the legendary, elusive trio (sometimes quartet) **Cultural Roots** still has trouble formulating what exactly happened. On paper, the band had everything to become the next **Wailing Souls**, the future **Mighty Diamonds**: a beautiful set of complementary voices and a few solid vocal albums, ranging from 1978 to 1984, riding the finest riddims provided by no less than producers **Donovan Germain** and **Junjo Lawes** (*Revolutionary Sounds*, *Hell A Go Pop*, and the dread and sumptuous *Drift Away from Evil*).

With such heavy-hitting sets under their belts, what went wrong? The symptomatic inability to adapt to modern times that killed so many great roots bands? Not likely—Exhibit A: their monster tune *"Running Back to Me"* (off the eponymously named 1988 LP) on **King Jammy's** digital take of the "Tonight" riddim. So? Maybe, just maybe, they might have come just a hair too late.

Indeed, in the very early '80s, "the dances [were] changing," as **Barrington Levy** once sang. Fast enough to suddenly make the great vocal trios obsolete? "Yeah, in a sense," **Dyce** grins on the other side of Skype. "I think so. When we started, it was fading out. Other kids come out and was doing other stuff."

But the past is the past, and today, **Wade**, now fifty-seven years old, doesn't really hold grudges against things that woulda, coulda, shoulda been. A happy father, he has been living in Salem, Massachusetts, for seventeen years, where he graduated in 2010 as a mental-health specialist, enjoying gigs on the side with the local rock/crossover group **Imojah and the Skylight Band**, led by local musician **Gary Shane** from the Boston power-pop band **the Detour**.

As the only original **Cultural Roots** member still alive (front man **Hubert Brooks** passed away in 2000 in the U.S., from cancer) or traceable, **Wade** could have milked the band's name after it disappeared under the radar. He never did. Hence the difficulty to ever find a lead to hunt him down, based on the sole rumor that the band members *probably* all had moved to the U.S. in the '90s. Sometimes, though, obsession pays off; I had compelled myself to perform a tedious, weekly Google search with each member's name for a year. One bright day in June

2010, **Wade Dyce**'s name finally popped up out of the blue, in an article about **Gary Shane** in über-local newspaper The Newburyport Current.

Once in touch, thanks to **Shane**, a much-suprised **Wade Dyce** started to connect the dots during a Skype conversation I had grown desperate to see happen. *"I moved from Kingston 6 to Kingston 11 when I was eighteen years old,"* he recalls, *"because some of my younger sisters lived there, and my mom had taken off to the Bahamas in search of a better life."* The move led him to run into deep-voiced singer **Norman Gallimore**. Soon the pair befriended **Hubert Brooks**, who was then flexing his musical muscle with **the Gladiators**, filling in on drums or guitar at their rehearsals. After promptly deciding to form a vocal trio, off they went.

Right around the corner lived a certain **Ranchie McLean**, the ace guitarist/bassist/keyboard player, a staple in the hottest studio band of the moment, **the Revolutionaries**. Upon hearing the kids sing him some of the songs they had penned (*"Blackie Blackie"* and an unreleased first version of *"Mr. Bossman,"* **Dyce** recalls), he did decide to produce them, "but nothing ever came out," the singer regrets. Regardless, this helped them meet producer Donovan **Germain** through **Derrick "Gurr" Smith**, a budding producer and notorious "links man." Well before he went on and ruled the dance halls, thanks to his **Penthouse** label, **Donovan Germain** had already put out material by the likes of **Ronnie Davis**, **George Nooks**, and **I-Roy**, but was still a relative newcomer in the game.

Still, a good ear is a good ear. **Germain** immediately took the kids under his wing and provided their first break. *"I gave them their name because I thought 'Cultural Roots' fit what they were about, so I would want to presume I was the first person to record them,"* he nods today, in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. It didn't take long before the producer simultaneously released their first two albums, *Revolutionary Sounds* and its dub counterpart. Then he brought in a new member for the band, **Everton Drummond**, as it started recording its cornerstone tunes for a third album: *"Mr. Bossman"*, *"Drift Away from Evil"*, *"Devil-Ites"*, *"Ghetto People"*, or the powerful *"World of Illusion"*, which, once covered by **Jooxie Nice** and mixed by **Gussie P** in the '90s, became one of the heaviest London-based **Jah Shaka** Sound System's favorite dubplates.

As of why the trio needed an additional member, **Wade Dyce** is still unsure today: *"Brooks decided to bring Everton Drummond because, umm, he was an Army person, a [member of the] Coast Guard; he could help with certain things. He stayed for a while and then left to America."* Leaving it at that, he prefers to remember how *"Drift Away from Evil"* came to completion: *"Hubert only had the line 'The Righteous can only stand it,' and I had to take a bathroom break. When I was in there, I came up with 'Drift away from evil or you a go feel it.' Just like that!"* he laughs.

The brilliant album to come out of these sessions was to be the last one with **Germain**. *"He wasn't into the roots thing no more,"* **Dyce** explains. *"He wanted to do other stuff."* The producer has a more prosaic explanation: *"I went living abroad, and as is the custom in the industry, other producers started to request their talent."* The first in line was the equally legendary **Henry "Junjo" Lawes**. *"He came looking for us"* **Dyce** reminisces. *"That's how we did the Hell A Go Pop album for him."*

Mixing **Junjo**'s sound with some of the best vocalists of the time definitely worked. Song after song, from the title song to the breathtaking *"Love Feelings"* (one of the best cuts, ever, upon the **John Holt** riddim, *"Police in Helicopter"*), *Hell A Go Pop* remains one of the top roots albums to come out of Jamaica.

Alas, this cooperation ended up being short-lived too. Partly because **Junjo** decided to favor the home-grown talent he raised to stardom on his **Volcano** sound system (**Barrington Levy**, **Yellowman**), and partly perhaps because **Wade Dyce** stormed out of the band right after *Hell A Go Pop*, in the mid-'80s. “*Personal arguments with **Hubert Brooks**,*” he vaguely explains. To replace **Dyce**, **Brooks** would tap, again, into his childhood affiliates, thus recruiting **Errol Grandison**, who had started the original **Gladiators**, in 1968, with **Albert Griffiths** and **David Webber**.

End of story ? Not quite—true love never dies. By the end of the '80s, according to **Dyce**, **Cultural Roots** was facing a wall: “*They had an album due for **Jammy's** and were stuck at five songs. **Hubert Brooks** asked if I could help. I put **Grandison** into a bit of a check because he thought he was so important, leaving rehearsal when he felt like it... We finished the album, *Running Back to Me*, which was a shady deal because **Jammy** sold it to **Island** without us knowing. Did you notice how there's no photo of the group on the cover? This is why.*”

Having saved the day, **Dyce** wisely put to use the hiatus he had taken from the band by welcoming aboard stellar singer **Devon Russell** in 1989, a friend with whom he had reconnected during his break while doing background vocal work for various studios. At the time, **Devon**, who died in 1997, was not what you would call a rookie, but a legend in his own right, who had both succeeded within bands such as **the Tartans** (along no less than **Prince Lincoln** and **the Congos' Cedric Myton**) and as a solo artist, whether for **Studio One** or on his 1982 monumental *Jah Homebound Train* LP, for producer **Bertram Brown**, to only name his most prominent achievements.

Was the silky-voiced veteran singer about to finally bring stability to the ever-changing lineup ? In a sense, he did. But it didn't last long: shortly after, **Hubert Brooks**, we now know, migrated to the U.S. Following his departure, **Cultural Roots** was never the same. Sure, the **Dyce-Grandison-Russell** trio excelled, and left a burning impression in Europe during their 1990 tour, but some of their chemistry was lost when **Brooks** took off. The last lineup did better than expected, actually, recording a handful of tunes and albums for most notably **Gussie Clarke**, **Hugh “Redman” James**, and the **Sky High** Records crew, over the course of seven years. Yet soon, it was **Dyce's** turn to book his one-way plane ticket to the U.S. In 1995, he set up in Boston, raising a family, jamming with local bands, and recording solo on rare occasions—see the two 12-inches he did for the **Moving On** label, collectors' wet dreams “*Humble*” and “*Money Mare*”.

Enjoying music without its business trappings in mind, **Dyce** then decided to go to college in 2008, a hundred percent unaware of the re-press frenzy around **Cultural Roots' catalog** in the past few years. The passion never left him; he simply had put it on the back burner until local musician **Gary Shane** came about. “*We were in the same class at college and he started singing a **Jah Cure** song,*” **Shane** recalls, “*at recess, in the hallway. It blew my mind. I said, ‘We need to record that in my studio.’*”

Pushed by **Shane**, who got deep into reggae since, **Wade Dyce** is actually, almost involuntarily, putting his foot in the door of music again, through their rock-ish reggae band **Imojah and the Skylight Band**—to the point that, who knows, **Cultural Roots** might some day rise from its ashes. “*Gallimore does steel work on a construction site; I saw him a couple years ago,*” he says. “*Everton Drummond went back to Jamaica, but honestly, I haven't been in touch. I tried to find **Errol Grandison** there twice, but no one knows where he is.*” **Dyce** pauses again. Smiles. And concludes: “*I just need to find two or three girls to sing with. That would be doable.*”