



Story of the Song

'Fresh Vegetable'

Off-the-cuff lyrics create Tony Rebel's first number-one song

January 7, 2018 By Mel Cooke

Tony Rebel recorded *Fresh Vegetable* to satisfy an insistent Penthouse Records producer, **Donovan Germain**. And although **Germain** pressed him for a quarter of a year to put vocals to a rhythm on which **Beres Hammond** had done the enduring ode to a man's irrepressible - but unspoken - attraction to a woman, *Tempted to Touch*, **Rebel** did not have any lyrics prepared when he stepped into the studio at 56 Slipe Road, St Andrew.

"Tempted to Touch was doing very well in New York. **Germain** insisted I go on that rhythm. He is a good producer. He saw that my voice would do well on it" **Rebel** told The Sunday Gleaner. "He insisted for over three months". So just to settle the nagging question, in late 1990, **Tony Rebel** stepped up to the microphone with no lyrics in his hand or head. He did, however, have the bassline to listen to, and **Rebel** points out that it is this low-frequency component of the music that the melody of the song's chorus ("*Me love you like a fresh vegetable / Now tell me if you love Tony Rebel*") sounds like. He also had a theme, **Rebel** telling The Sunday Gleaner, "*as a Rastaman, I wanted to do a love song*".

And he did, from scratch on the spot, none of the lyrics having been performed live or on record before. However, **Tony Rebel** said parts of the lyrics such as "*so, if it is no, I tell you don't say so / But if it is yes, I waan you stay with the best*" came from things that had been said in conversation before.

Germain and engineer **Dave Kelly** were in the studio for the day recording session, and when he had finished doing what he thought was a trial run of *Fresh Vegetable*, **Tony Rebel** was ready to do it again, properly. He never got the chance to.

*"When I was done, I asked them (**Germain** and **Kelly**) if they liked it, and they said yes. **Superman** and **Spiderman** (the superhero nicknames for two studio regulars) were in the passage between the recording booth and the control room. **Superman** said it was a number-one song. I told him he was a hypocrite. I was not smiling," **Tony Rebel** said.*

"Sometimes you do a song, and people in the studio say it is the baddest thing, but in your heart, it does not feel like that".

Superman was right as **Tony Rebel** said *Fresh Vegetable*, released in 1991, "was my first number one and one of my biggest songs ever". It does not hurt that **Rebel** put his name in the chorus, a deliberate strategy as many times disc jockeys would play songs and not say the vocalist's name.

It took a while for the impact to sink in for the performer, though, as even when *Fresh Vegetable* was being played on the radio and persons called him to say his new song was good, initially, **Rebel** was not sure which recording it was. Then he got it live and direct, by audience request.

"About two months later, I went to Montego Bay to do a show. He did the popular tracks - Armour and Mandela Story, among others, and came off the stage without doing Fresh Vegetable. The audience demanded he come back on stage and "the people at the front said "Fresh Vegetable !".

He did it, of course, saw the ecstatic response, and became a believer in the song's hit ability.

Over 25 years since being released, *Fresh Vegetable* has not withered, and the onstage exchange with **Hammond** doing *Tempted to Touch* - and, sometimes, **Rebel** taking on the singer's role - is sometimes part of the live experience, notably at the annual Rebel Salute when **Hammond** is booked for the festival.

"Sometimes I am doing Fresh Vegetable, and he walks out and does Tempted to Touch" Rebel said. At times, it is the other way round. "A mi big bredda" Rebel said of Hammond. It remains part of his live set, Rebel saying that often, the response begins from the rhythm's distinctive hornline. "Even if I do not do it, the people want it" he said.

That late 1990 studio session is not the only daytime recording that has sunk into fertile soil for **Rebel** as his verbalisation of unshakeable faith, *Jah Is By My Side*, was also done during the sunlight hours, though on a very special day. It was recorded on April 21, 1996, the anniversary of **HIM Haile Selassie's** 1966 visit to Jamaica. There was a celebratory motorcade, which **Rebel** did with poet and staple Rebel Salute MC **Mutabaruka**, then "went straight to studio".

"Ever since, I wanted to record on the 21st of April, and I think I did it again last year" Rebel said, that recording titled Smell Blood.



**ERROL CROSSBY
PHOTOGRAPHER**
Tony Rebel in studio.

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Gleaner Writer

TONY REBEL recorded *Fresh Vegetable* to satisfy an insistent Penthouse Records producer, Donovan Germain. And although Germain pressed him for a quarter of a year to put vocals to a rhythm on which Bares Hammond had done the enduring ode to a man's irresistible - but unspoken - attraction to a woman, *Tempted to Touch*, Rebel did not have any lyrics prepared when he stepped into the studio at 56 Shippe Road, St Andrew.

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LIVE AND DIRECT

It took a while for the impact to sink in for the performer, though, as even when *Fresh Vegetable* was being played on the radio and persons called him to say his new song was good, initially, Rebel was not sure which recording it was. Then he got it live and direct, by audience request.

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