

# SETTING

## TIME AND PLACE



## TIME:

1972–78

## PLACE:

Jamaica and London—and, briefly, Ethiopia

### ACT ONE

- Scene 1 '75 Benefit Concert, Kingston, JA
- Scene 2 '77 56 Hope Rd., Kingston, JA
- Scene 3 '76 Office of the Prime Minister, JA
- Scene 4 '76 Rehearsal room, 56 Hope Rd., JA
- Scene 5 '72 Chris Blackwell's office, Island Records, London
- Scene 6 '72 Basing Street Studios, London
- Scene 7 Open Time, Open Stage
- Scene 8 '76 Grounds/Rehearsal room, 56 Hope Rd., JA
- Scene 9 '76 Rehearsal room/Grounds, JA
- Scene 10 '76 Strawberry Hill, JA
- Scene 11 '76 Smile Jamaica Concert, National Heroes Park, Kingston, JA

### ACT TWO

- Scene 1 '77 Oakley Street Apartment, London
- Scene 2 '77 Oakley Street Apartment, London
- Scene 3 '77 Montage: soccer match, night club, disco
- Scene 4 '77 Oakley Street Apartment and studio, London
- Scene 5 '77 Rasta Nyabinghi Ceremony, London
- Scene 6 '78 On Tour
- Scene 7 '78 Video shoot, Keskidee Centre, London
- Scene 8 '78 Lalibela, in the mountains of Ethiopia
- Scene 9 '78 Flying to Kingston, JA
- Scene 10 '78 Desolate hillside, Kingston, JA
- Scene 11 '78 56 Hope Rd., JA
- Scene 12 '78 One Love Peace Concert, National Stadium, Kingston, JA

Locations and order subject to change.



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Above: Trench Town; Kingstown sights; mobile record shack; Bob Marley.  
Below: London sights, skinheads, and punks.







# BOB MARLEY 1945 ★ 1981

By Gavin Witt, Production Dramaturg

In 1976, the newly independent nation of Jamaica found itself convulsed by political violence. Amid this maelstrom, many eyes turned hopefully to a young musical firebrand—a hometown boy made good, with his roots still planted deep in the local soil. Someone who, by accident or by choice, seemed to stand apart from the fray; a political and musical rebel, steadily evolving from a more traditional, more local outlook to a more revolutionary, more global one.

This was hardly an inevitable outcome. Born in 1945 to a young Jamaican mother and a much older British officer who very shortly decamped, young

Robert Nesta Marley was fending for himself at five. The family eventually moved from the countryside to Trench Town, one of Kingston’s notorious tenement yards—a place Marley would immortalize by name, and as the “Concrete Jungle” that it was. Surviving, let alone thriving, in those brutal blocks gained him the nickname Tuff Gong. It also helped forge the outlook and sympathies that shaped his life and music, and cemented many of the relationships of his later years.

Music became an escape in many ways, and after a short stint as a welder’s apprentice, teenage Marley began

to write, play, and record. Slowly for years, then more swiftly at last, success followed success. The Wailing Wailers trio grew into the larger Bob Marley and the Wailers. Alchemy struck in 1972 when they linked up with producer Chris Blackwell and his Island Records label. International tours, and record deals, came fast and furious.

By the waning months of 1976, before the “Smile Jamaica” concert that was supposed to heal Jamaica’s rifts and rivalries, the group played to cheering throngs around the world, started to chart consistently, and joined the likes of The Jackson 5 and Stevie Wonder on stage. Their reggae sound was

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sun-splashed Caribbean and of a worldwide movement. The man at the mic was hailed for his musical achievements—writing as much as playing—but also for speaking for the “sufferahs,” voicing for the voiceless, calling the powerful to account.

Then, with the first days of 1977, Marley vanished from view—holed up in secret in a borrowed London flat, in a very different kind of concrete jungle. But even this only fueled higher heights. The attack that had nearly killed him was dubbed an assassination attempt, and garnered breathless headlines fit for a leader. His eventual return was hailed by triumphant throngs.

It was, in short, a remarkable journey. Marley recorded his first single at 16 and had his first hit, “Simmer Down,” at 18. He was on the cover of *Rolling Stone* at 31. And in 1981, a mere 36, he was gone—felled by cancer, inducted into Jamaica’s Order of Merit, and buried with all the pomp of a state funeral. ●

To learn more about Bob Marley and his life visit [centerstage.org/marley](http://centerstage.org/marley).

# What Did He Say? A Glossary

Here’s a handy guide to some of the Rasta terms and Jamaican patois you’ll hear in *Marley*.

## RASTA:

short for Rastafari, denoting the followers of Rastafari ways as well as the belief itself. The name comes from Ras (prince or chief) Tafari, the original name of Emperor Haile Selassie, whom Rastas revere as divine.

**a (ah):** can mean many things from: a, to, in, of, is, it, the, will, etc. Works as preposition, verb, and more.

**Babylon:** the world, particularly the capitalist consumer world of the West. As distinct from **Zion**, the promised land of Ethiopia.

**bloodclatt, rasclatt, bomboclatt:** expletives used as intensifiers, exclamations, or profanity; derived from associating clatt (from “cloth”) with various orifices, front and back. Bloodclatt also evokes the cloth used to wipe the bloody backs of slaves after a whipping. These terms also shorten into expletives like “bombo,” “ras,” or “ratted,” and “bomboclatt” also gets used for bum or rear.

**bredren:** brethren, friends. The Rasta version is **ldren(s)**.

**dem:** literally, them; but used more generally in place of that, those, these, etc.

**dread or dreadies:** you guys, you all; from the dreadlocks worn by many Rastas.

**fi:** to (as in have fi = have to), or for (wait fi you=wait for you).

**gwan:** going to. Hence also **wha’ gwan:** what’s going on, what’s up?

**gong:** boss, chief.

**I:** reflecting the central Rasta tenet of oneness, **I and I** can mean we, or me myself; **the I** can mean you or oneself.

**irie:** alright, good.

**J.A.:** Jamaica.

**Jah:** God; from Jahweh (Yahweh).

**likkle:** little.

**mash up:** destroyed.

**overstand:** alternative for understand, avoiding the submission and suppression of “under.”

**pickney:** small child or children (from pickaninny).

**reggae:** ostensibly from “raggy” (ie, scruffy), for the music and the lifestyle around it that evolved in the Sixties out of earlier Ska, Rocksteady, and other island music mixed with elements of soul and rock.



**seen:** I hear you, I understand, okay; can also function as the question, do you get it, do you understand?

**skip, skipper:** boss, chief.

**yahso:** right here.

**you nah mean:** you know what I mean.



# HEAVY MANNERS



By Gavin Witt,  
Production Dramaturg

**Jamaica** prides itself on an identity as one of the biggest small islands in the world—not by land mass, but by virtue of an outsized impact. For centuries the pawn of European empires, exploited for its natural resources and a labor force of indentured servants and slaves, the Caribbean island nevertheless has punched consistently above its ostensible weight.

In the mid-1970s, Jamaica again found itself on the world stage, not so happily.

A mere decade into independent nationhood, Jamaicans elected a Prime Minister who, declaring for Democratic Socialism, also pursued policies of internationalism that made common cause with Fidel Castro's Cuba, with Communist China and the USSR, and with independence movements throughout Africa. In the aftermath of the Cuban revolution and the ensuing missile crisis, playing out just hours from the US mainland, these moves rattled policy-makers in Washington.

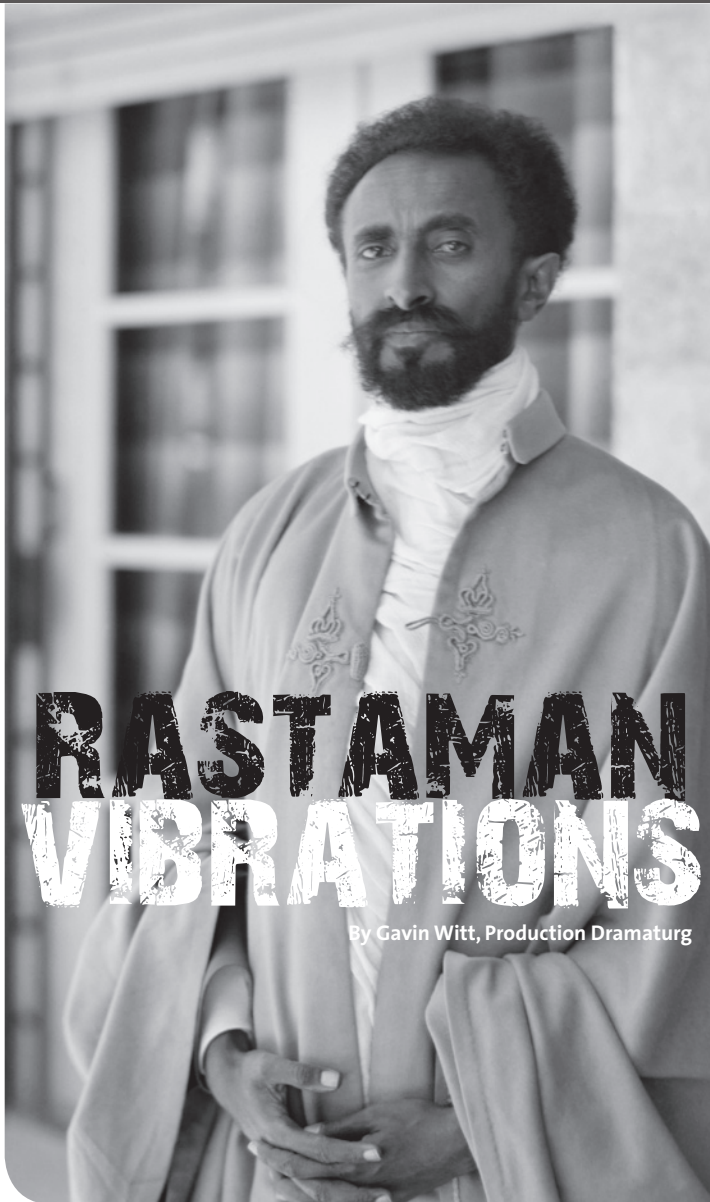
The result was, in policy and in practice, destabilization of the sort regularly practiced in that era. Through the CIA and other shadowy associations, drugs, guns, and money poured into the hands of the pro-American and business-friendly opposition and the street gangs who supported them. The binary language of the Cold War inflamed Jamaican political discourse, demonizing one side or the other in global, starkly Manichean terms.

Rooted in the early evolution of political activity in Kingston and across the island, two primary parties had emerged: the JLP (Jamaica Labour Party) under the leadership of Edward Seaga and the PNP (People's National Party) under the leadership of Michael Manley. The former leaned Right, the latter Left; one advocated business-oriented capitalism, the other socialist policies; one aligned with the US and Europe, one with the Soviet Union and African nationalism. This ideological clash found fruitful terrain in homegrown partisan divides, and exploded in murderous violence in the bloody geography of the streets. In a fashion reminiscent of New York's brutal machine politics of the 19th Century, or the sectarian battles of Ireland's Troubles, party allegiances defined neighborhoods, separated blocks, even divided households.

To garner support, the parties bulldozed shantytowns and slums, erecting instead housing blocks, hospitals, and other facilities; these, and jobs, came in exchange for votes and loyalty. These neighborhoods, known as Garrisons, also housed often-violent gangs known as Posses, who enforced their will and ensured votes. Led by "dons," Posses gradually became self-sustaining gangs in their own right, aligned with neighborhoods and parties. Trenchtown was the heart of PNP turf, while Tivoli Gardens claimed the JLP. In the months preceding the 1976 General Election, party Posses were slaughtering each other—and those caught in the crossfire. The government declared a State of Emergency and put the country under what were termed "Heavy Manners."

A third strand wove tightly alongside these other two: the music and message of Reggae superstar and international activist Bob Marley. This narrow thread became the perilous tightrope that Marley had to walk, negotiating his commitment to the common people, his personal faith, his growing eminence in the music industry, and his perceived role as a spokesperson for many causes. Ultimately, these strands would tangle and nearly tear apart. ●





“Then I hear the words of the Rastaman say, Babylon you throne gone down, come down.”

As central as the politics and violence of Jamaica’s 1976 electoral campaign were to Bob Marley’s exodus and return, equally vital were his Rastafari faith and identity. They formed an important component of his musical identity, as well as the spiritual journey of which that was only a part.

**Rastafari**, or **rasta**, originated in Jamaica in the 1930s, building on Eastern, African Christianity.

Rastafari derives from the birth name and title of **Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia: Ras** (Prince or Chief) **Tafari Mekkonen**.

Rastas revere Selassie as God’s new Messiah, born in a direct line of descent from Biblical King Solomon by way of his union with the Queen of Sheba; hailed as “**Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah**,” he joins a pantheon that includes Biblical prophets as well as modern prophet **Marcus Garvey**.

Rasta beliefs draw on many tenets and elements of the Old and New Testaments, filtered through an African lens, rooted in Coptic and Ethiopian Christianity and informed by island traditions.

Rastafari consider themselves Children of God, or **Jah** (from Jahweh), and look to Ethiopia as both motherland and spiritual destination, “**Zion**.” Opposed to this is the corrupting, seducing world of Western influences (possessions, money, drink, etc), known collectively as “**Babylon**.”

Rastafari ceremonies are generally led by an Elder, and consider the smoking of marijuana (ganja, or herb) part of the holy rites, passed communally in a vessel known as a chalice.

Rastafari focus on physical simplicity and spiritual purity, including a simple way of life and an **ital** diet—typically avoiding processed foods, salt, meats, alcohol, caffeine or other stimulants. True to Biblical injunctions and the story of Samson, Rastas often allow their hair to grow naturally in signature **dreadlocks** (prompting the nomenclature **dread** or **dreadies**).

To emphasize a oneness with all God’s creation and one another across the Diaspora, Rastas focus on the idea of “**the I**.” Others are often called “the I” in lieu of the more distancing “you,” and “we” becomes “**I and I**.”

In accordance with this, as well as to reclaim a language free from colonial mastery, Rastafari generally embrace a modified vocabulary known as **lyaric**, which includes adjustments to avoid or identify the corrupting forces of Babylon. For instance, *understand* becomes **overstand**. *Hello* (because “Hell” is “low”) gives way to other greetings, and politics become **politricks**. ●



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