

## Pon de Dancefloor: Jamaican Dancehall in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

The history of Jamaican music includes Roots, Mento, Ska, Rocksteady and Reggae styles - setting the stage for the origination of the Dancehall genre in the early 1980s. While a wide range of ethnographic literature has been published on these musical foundations, few publications exist on the evolution of Dancehall in Jamaica. Dancehall has expanded in the past 10-15 years due to increasing effects of collaboration between American and Jamaican artists and DJs along with the ease of musical transmission through technology. In this ethnographic research, I have studied the evolution of Dancehall to create a portrayal of musical trends leading to the predominance of Dancehall in Jamaica. I collected data over 10 days of fieldwork in Portland, Jamaica in June of 2015. The music played by four club DJs was chosen as the focus of study because of its influence on Portland's musical culture. Data consisted of observational field notes and 10 hours of audio recordings of local DJs in club settings. Audio recordings were analyzed for traditional beats, song length, production year, language choice, and added effects. Field notes were used as a secondary source to confirm/disconfirm the emerging musical themes from across these DJs. Findings have been compared to the existing literature to create an updated trajectory of musical trends within Dancehall. Along with contributions to the field of ethnomusicology, this research can be used in music education in informal music learning on a domestic and international level. While this research can be used to form the foundations of a music education program in Jamaica, it can also be incorporated in the world music curriculum in traditional programs.

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## Applications To Teaching – Secondary General Music

This research can be used to create a lesson plan focusing on World Music in a Secondary General Music class. The following resources are suggestions for adapting a lesson plan.

### Examples of Songs from Across Ska, Rocksteady, Reggae and Dancehall

Easy Snappin' (1960) – Theophilus Beckford  
Sammy Dead Oh (1964) – Monty Morris  
Take it Easy (1967) – Hopeton Lewis  
Rivers of Babylon (1970) – The Melodians  
No Woman No Cry (1975) – Bob Marley  
Rub a Dub Style (1979) – Michigan and Smiley  
Unmetered Taxi (1983) - Sly and Robbie  
Ring the Alarm (1985) – Tenor Saw  
Border Clash (1990) – Ninja Man  
Murder She Wrote (1992) – Chaka Demus & Pliers  
Destiny (1997) – Buju Banton  
I'm Still in Love With You (2002) – Sean Paul  
Bonafide Girl (2007) – Shaggy  
Yuh Love (2009) – Vybz Kartel  
L.O.V.E.Y.O.U. (2012) – I-Octane  
Kotch (2013) – RDX  
One Drop (2013) – QQ

### Various Extension Activities:

- Have students pick a specific time period and genre and find examples of Jamaican folk music in recordings
- Have students put together their own Jamaican timeline with examples of music from ska, rocksteady, reggae, and dancehall
- If your school has iPads available, various DJ apps are available on the app store, have students deejay their own mixes using a combination of modern dancehall tunes. Have students explain various techniques they used in mixing.
- Have students look into societal and cultural issues in Jamaica and how various genres approach these issues