

David Rodigan

Reggae-DJ-Legend David Rodigan in Aarau :

„These songs are with me until I leave this planet“

David Rodigan is of Scottish-Irish parentage and grew up in different European and African countries. The theatre and music enthusiast took over England's only Reggae show as a presenter in 1978. Since then he has built up a unique collection of Reggae records. Today, the 52 year old is still one of the hottest DJs - on air as well as in London clubs as a resident, and as a guest DJ worldwide. ‚Live‘ talked to him about rhythm, collector's passion, and consumption of marijuana.

Q:

How did it all start? Were you a professional radio journalist when you started your show, or did you join the radio as a DJ and a reggae fan?

David Rodigan:

I joined the radio as a reggae fan; I had a little training in radio, but not very much. When I left school I went to study drama and afterwards

started working in a theatre. But all this time I was collecting reggae. In 1978 there was a show on BBC Radio London and I auditioned to present the show, a reggae show, the only one of its kind at the time. And I got the job.

Q:

How did you get into reggae music? Why was it reggae music that attracted you?

D.R.:

At the age of around fifteen, it was discovering black underground music from America and the West Indies which excited us, me and my friends. I was particularly captured by the music of Jamaica, which was then known as Ska. I love the energy, the power of the rhythm, I love the voices, the songs, and there was something completely different about this music, this crazy backbeat, which got me hooked. And I started to buy the records - passionately.

Q:

So you became a collector. How many records do you own?

D.R.:

I've never counted them, thousands. I don't just keep things for the sake of it, but most of the songs from the old years are here until I leave this planet.

Q:

How do you get to know about all of the new records?

D.R.:

I still go to record shops every week and buy records.

Q:

You play all kinds of reggae music. Is there any period or style that is closer to your heart than others?

D.R:

Two periods. The Rock-Steady period is particularly close to me because of its cool, laid back feel, and the vocal harmonies. Also, the early seventies, when reggae kicked in really. This period was particularly exciting and very creative.

Q:

Was there a time in reggae when you thought things were going wrong?

D.R:

Yes, the glorification of gun violence in the early nineties. I saw that as being a departure from the tradition of the music which was a rebel's music, but it wasn't about killing people, it was about saving people.

Q:

What do you think of the current trends in reggae music?

D.R:

It's created primarily two schools of thought; one is the traditional one-drop reggae, and the other is the bashment ragga style. I think essentially we're in a healthy condition. A lot of young people are discovering the music.

Q:

As many of your colleagues you're experiencing problems with your radio show, since music specials seem to have fallen out of fashion. What is your argument in favour of music specials?

D.R:

It is important for specialist areas of music to be given specialist programming times, so the people who understand the music and care about the music are able to hear it.

Q:

Did you ever play any other music than reggae?

D.R:

I only play reggae music in the dancehalls, but on the radio I play hip hop and R'n'B as well, and soulful house, when I find it.

Q:

You have played in Zurich before. What do you know about Swiss audiences?

D.R:

My experience with Swiss audience is that they are very passionate about the music. Last time I was in Zurich the place - Rote Fabrik - was full, and you could see from the look on the people's faces that they cared about the music, that's why they were there.

Q:

Reggae music is often associated with smoking marijuana. In Switzerland very open discussions about legalization are going on at the moment. What do you think about this association and culture?

D.R:

Marijuana should be legalized, I think people should be free to smoke it if they wish. There are dangers attached to the consumption of marijuana, just as there are dangers attached to the consumption of alcohol. People must make up their own mind about what they think they can handle. I don't think the smoking of ganja is necessary for the enjoyment of reggae music; nevertheless I do not pass judgement on people who choose to smoke it.

Interview: Yves Lenzin

Originally appeared in german in 'Live', weekly events magazine, supplement to Aarauer Zeitung, Switzerland, on January 30th 2003.