

REGGAE

WHAT IS REGGAE?

Reggae is a style of pop music which began in the West Indies in the early 1970s, became very popular in the early 80s and is still a popular style today. Reggae has a highly distinctive sound. It was originally the street music of Kingston, Jamaica, performed by the Rastafarian community (Rastas). Rastas have strong beliefs - they believe in peace, brotherhood and love. They also believe that one day black people will return to their promised land, the country of Ethiopia in Africa. In the beginning, reggae songs commented on these beliefs, and also said something about the struggle which black people had coming to terms with living in what they thought was a corrupt Western Civilisation. As well as having a distinctive sound, reggae bands and solo singers have a distinctive look - they wear their hair in dreadlocks. Bob Marley was a great reggae musician and became the first International reggae star. Other reggae stars who have appeared in the mainstream charts are Eddie Grant and the popular reggae bands Aswad and UB40.

MORE QUESTIONS

7. Name four reggae stars or bands.
8. What does 'off-beat' mean?
9. Which instruments play the chords in reggae?
10. Describe how reggae drummers produce a strong rhythm.
11. What is the name given to the short tunes played on the bass guitar?

BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS

This reggae band from Kingston, Jamaica, achieved International fame in the 70s. Bob Marley wrote all the songs, sang and played the guitar. His songs were earthy, with a strong message which was often political or about Rastafarianism. Their biggest hit was an album called "Rastaman Vibration" which included a song called "War". Further albums were called "Exodus" (1977), "Survival" (1979) and "Uprising" (1980). In September 1980, Marley collapsed with a stroke and was found to have cancer, of which he died in May 1981.



QUESTIONS

1. Where and when did reggae begin?
2. Of which town was it the street music?
3. Which group of people began to perform reggae? Give the full name and the abbreviation.
4. Name four things that these people believe in.
5. What were the early reggae songs about?
6. What is a main feature of a reggae singer's appearance?

WHAT ARE THE MAIN FEATURES OF REGGAE?

The distinctive sound of reggae music is brought about by a very strong "off-beat" rhythm. "Off-beat" means that the 2nd and 4th beats of every bar (reggae always has four beats per bar) are accented (made louder) - not the 1st and 3rd beats, as in most pop music. Chords are played by guitars or keyboards (or both) on the 2nd and 4th beats constantly throughout reggae songs, and to provide an even stronger sense of rhythm, a drummer plays along on a drum kit. These drum kit rhythms are often highly complex and usually feature a high level of syncopation which produces a compelling rhythm to dance to. A bass guitarist is an essential part of a reggae band. The bass player plays a series of short tunes, called "riffs", to add a strong bass line to the music.

EVEN MORE QUESTIONS

12. In which decade did Bob Marley and the Wailers achieve International fame?
13. Write a sentence describing what Marley's songs were like.
14. Name four albums recorded by Bob Marley and the Wailers.
15. When and of what cause did Bob Marley die?