Definition: reggae from Philip's Encyclopedia

Form of West Indian popular music. It first achieved prominence in the mid-1960s, growing out of rock-steady and ska. It is characterized by a repetitive back beat. Modern variations include ragga and lover's rock. Bob Marley was largely responsible for bringing reggae to a worldwide audience.

Summary Article: What is reggae music?
from The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Background

Reggae music comes from Jamaica, an island in the Caribbean Ocean. It is believed to have started in the 1950s, invented by young people who wanted to find their own style of music. They called this style of music mento, and, mixed with American blues sounds – trumpets and drums – they produced an unusual style of music called ska. Eventually, during the 1960s, the style evolved, through rock music influence, into what we now describe as reggae. A particularly popular offshoot of reggae is ska, which is very fast and jerky.

Full answer

Characteristics

- **beat** The musical emphasis in reggae music is where the beat falls. Much of Western music puts an accent on the first beat of the bar. However, reggae music **accent the off-beat**, the second beat of the bar.

- **reggae band** A reggae band usually includes a lead singer, possibly also some backing singers, along with drums, guitars, and sometimes keyboards.

Rastafarianism As reggae developed in the 1960s, it was heavily influenced by two of the Jamaican churches, and in particular the Rastafarian movement. Many reggae lyrics contain religious references that relate to Rastafarianism, for example using the words ‘Zion’ and ‘Babylon’.

Musicians There have been many famous reggae artists. However, the most famous is probably Bob Marley (1945–1981), and his band, the Wailers. Reggae music was already popular in Jamaica, but artists such as Bob Marley were able to make the style popular in other countries and widen reggae’s audience. During the 1970s, Bob Marley’s music was very popular in Britain. Many of his songs, such as ‘No Woman, No Cry’, ‘Three Little Birds’, ‘I Shot the Sheriff’, and ‘Redemption Song’, are now considered popular classics.

Influence Reggae is still extremely important in Jamaica and is enjoyed by people all over the world. Reggae has influenced new popular music genres such as hip-hop, drum and bass, and some dance music.

In short

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Reggae music comes from Jamaica. It developed from a style of music that emerged in the 1950s and was influenced by various sounds, including American blues, ska, and rock, until it came to be known as reggae in the 1960s.

Reggae music is characterized by an emphasis on the second beat of the bar and usually involves singing accompanied by drums, guitar, and sometimes keyboard.

Reggae lyrics often reflect the influence of Rastafarianism.

One of the most famous reggae musicians was Bob Marley, who popularized the style beyond Jamaica.

Reggae has subsequently influenced other types of popular music, including hip-hop and drum and bass.

**articles**

Marley, Bob

reggae

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