

Offbeat

Exploring Reggae and Syncopation



A. How did Reggae develop?

REGGAE is one of the traditional musical styles from JAMAICA. It developed from :



MENTO

A form of Jamaican **FOLK MUSIC** like **CALYPSO** popular in the 1950's.

SKA

Fast dance music that emerged in the 1950's fusing American R&B with **MENTO** rhythms and featuring **ELECTRIC GUITARS, JAZZY HORN SECTIONS** and characteristic **OFFBEAT RHYTHMS**.

ROCK STEADY

A more vocal style of dance music which used **RIFFS, SIMPLE HARMONIES, OFFBEAT RHYTHMS** and a strong **BASS LINE**.

Reggae was first heard in the UK in the 1950's when immigrants began to settle. During the 1960's, people began importing singles from Jamaica to sell in UK shops. Now, Reggae is known as the national music of Jamaica.

B. Where is Jamaica?



C. What are Reggae Songs About?

Reggae is closely associated with **RASTAFARIANISM** (a religious movement worshipping Haile Selassie as the Messiah and that black people are the chosen people and will eventually return to their African homeland). The **LYRICS** of Reggae songs are strongly influenced by Rastafarianism and are often political including themes such as **LOVE, BROTHERHOOD, PEACE, POVERTY, ANTI-RACISM, OPTIMISM** and **FREEDOM**.

D. Offbeat Rhythms & Syncopation

OFFBEAT RHYTHMS – Rhythms that emphasise or stress the **WEAK BEATS OF A BAR**. In music that is in 4/4 time, the first beat of the bar is the strongest, the third the next strongest and the second and fourth are weaker. Emphasising the second and fourth beats of the bar gives a “missing beat feel” to the rhythm and makes the music sound **OFFBEAT**, often emphasised by the **BASS DRUM** or a **RIM SHOT** (hitting the edge of a **SNARE DRUM**) in much Reggae music.

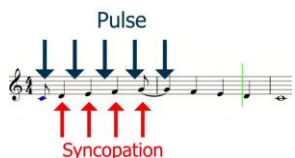
ONBEAT RHYTHM GRID

Pulse/Beat	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
"Onbeat" rhythms (strong beats)	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩

OFFBEAT RHYTHM GRID

Pulse/Beat	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
"Offbeat" rhythms (weak beats)	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩	♩

SYNCOPATION – A way of changing a rhythm by making some notes a bit early, often so they cross over the main beat of the music giving the music a further **OFFBEAT** feel – another common feature of Reggae music.



E. Musical Features of Reggae

OFFBEAT RHYTHMS AND CHORDS (see D)
SYNCOPATED RHYTHMS AND MELODIES (see D)
SUNG LYRICS (see C)
LEAD SINGER often with **BACKING SINGERS** sometimes singing in **CALL AND RESPONSE** (see F3) accompanied by a Reggae band which often features: **BRASS INSTRUMENTS** and **SAXOPHONES, ELECTRIC GUITARS, BASS GUITAR, KEYBOARDS, DRUMS AND PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS. VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL IMPROVISATIONS** (see F2)
MELODIC RIFFS (see F5)
SLOW, RELAXED (“chilled!”) **TEMPO**
4/4 METRE/TIME SIGNATURE
 Most Reggae songs are structured in **VERSE AND CHORUS/POPULAR SONG FORM.**
SIMPLE HARMONIES (see F4)



- LYRICS (MELODY)
- SYNCOPATED RHYTHMS
- RIFFS
- OFFBEAT CHORDS
- BASS LINE RIFFS

THICK TEXTURAL LAYERS (see F9)
 “The Reggae Trifle” is an example of how many Reggae songs are ‘layered’.

F. Reggae Key Words

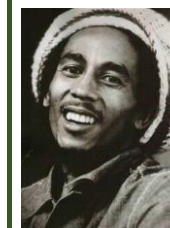
- MELODY** – The main ‘tune’ of a piece of music, often sung by the **LEAD SINGER**.
- IMPROVISATION** – Previously unprepared performance.
- CALL AND RESPONSE** – Similar to a “Question and Answer” often the call sung by the lead singer and answered by the backing singers or instruments (the response) – musical dialogue.
- SIMPLE HARMONIES** – using a limited number of **CHORDS**, mainly **PRIMARY TRIADS** such as the **TONIC, DOMINANT** and **SUBDOMINANT** chords.



- RIFF** – A repeated musical pattern. Often the **BASS GUITAR** plays repeated **MELODIC BASS RIFFS** in Reggae songs.
- BASS/BASS LINE** – The lowest pitched part of a piece of music often played by the **BASS GUITAR** in Reggae which plays an important role.
- CHORD** – 2 or more notes played together in **HARMONY**.
- RHYTHM** – A series of long and short sounds.
- TEXTURE** – Layers of sound combined to make music.

G. Who was Bob Marley?

BOB MARLEY was a famous reggae singer, **SONGWRITER**, and musician who first became famous in his band The Wailers, and later as a **SOLO ARTIST**. He was born Nesta Robert Marley on February 6th, 1945 in Nine Mile, Saint Ann, Jamaica. Although he grew up in poverty, he surrounded himself with music and met some of the future members of The Wailers. Bob Marley became involved in the Rastafarian movement and this influenced his music style greatly. Bob Marley and The Wailers worked with several famous musicians before



becoming famous on their own. His career flourished and he became a cultural icon. He was the first international superstar to have been born in poverty in a Third-World country.

