

DANCE HALL FOREVER

Negril to Kingston, Kingston to Paris, Paris to New York, New York to Miami, Miami to Los Angeles...

This is a story of an old and new Jamaica and its culture; dancehall culture. Lee "Scratch" Perry and Akeem Smith bring us into their worlds and show how their respective visions transcend time and borders. Their practices speak a universal language—a language of finding common ground in all walks of life.

*Wink you wink and think you think
Drunk you drunk and punk you punk
Funk you funk and drunk you drunk
But when you drunk don't drive!
Having a party tonight
Its gonna last all night
Shotgun will be there
Pop gun, jazz gun will be there
Repentance
Jah's party
It will be
A shotgun party
A pop gun party
All night
Alright*

"WE'RE HAVING A PARTY" by LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY

IMAGERY: Courtesy of the artists, Nick Sethi,
Mireille Perry, Aaron Bondaroff, Maxwell
Wolf, Dem Passwords, Red Bull Arts



Essay & Interview KATJA HORVAT
Creative Direction NICK SETHI & KATJA HORVAT
Collages NICK SETHI



One's perspective stems from one's own socialization and culturalization. Dancehall is the expression of the culture shaped by a distinctive Jamaican identity that (re)acts as a preserved memory of African traditions of music and dance. The genre has had an intrinsically unique journey, which started in the late '70s following, or more so, replacing reggae. Being rejected by the elite since its birth—the elite that promoted the maintenance of Eurocentric ideals—dancehall was deemed (and remains) immoral, rather than being accepted as something so radically different from the paradigms of the “white” world. Dancehall functions in a context shaped by profound disenfranchisement, and serves as a voice for the voiceless. Donna P. Hope, professor and socio-cultural analyst at the Institute of Caribbean Studies at the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, defines dancehall culture as a “space for the cultural creation and dissemination of symbols and ideologies that reflect the lived realities of its adherents, particularly those from the inner cities of Jamaica. Dancehall culture actively creates a space for its “affectors” (creators of dancehall culture) and its “affectees” (consumers of dancehall culture) to take control of their own representation, contest conventional relationships of power, and exercise some level of cultural, social, and even political autonomy.”

Serving as a catalyst to eliminate the ideas of constraint, and provide alternative systems to the lower class by occupying and penetrating the space, this alienated artifact of Jamaican culture is in need of some major reconsideration. Dancehall is ghetto to music; that is where it comes from, and most of the artists are ghetto artists. It could almost be looked at as a ghetto theater; the theater of the streets, as opposed to being portrayed in a degrading manner—fed with “outside” expectations of appropriate cultural codes and beliefs

of how people should act, talk, behave, etc. Dancehall goes beyond the expression of music, it is a lifestyle, and it is vital to remember, it is a choice. Writer and researcher Rubie Clarke, writes in her essay, *Dancehall Forever*, “Through the music and within the dancehall space, that is at once physical and conceptual, the ‘dancehall identity’ and ideology explicitly and implicitly challenges the conventional ideals of ‘reservedness’ and ‘respectability’”. Various labels as ‘slack, vulgar, misogynistic, aggressive



and infantile’ dancehall is condemned by those who purposefully situate themselves outside of or against it as ‘low culture’. Dancehall is then the site of a culture-clash and so becomes ‘not only important to poor blacks but central to society as a whole because Jamaicans of all races and classes define themselves in relation to it.’” (Stolzoff, 2020).

Dancehall functions as a field of cultural production, and with the majority of adherents coming from poor back-

grounds, dancehall is for many the only place where they can claim and demand their power, and solidify a higher, more respected position within a community. Through dance, they can construct a space and a site of resistance explicitly of their own, one that is celebratory and powerful, one that liberates them from the repressive values of a hegemonic culture. Clark continues to say, “The most prominent themes in dancehall discourse focus on relationships, eroticism, sex-play and gender politics, which Donna Hope cites as specifically

part of ‘a cultural dialogue of gendered identity that draws on the historical and cultural legacies’ that permeate the social, economic and cultural landscape in Jamaica.” With men, their sexual dominance acts as both a vessel and symbol of real power that identifies and solidifies male status within a community and society at large. With women, it’s about owning the space—demanding and getting what they want and need. It is about claiming ownership over their body, their sexuality. Women are strong characters in dancehall, and even though they are hypersexualized, Dancehall Queens are not submissive, they are in charge and through their movement they almost protest against a gendered experience and cultural tradition embedded in Jamaican culture.

Everyone has testimony to share, especially when it comes to dancehall. For some that message is translated through their body,

while others negotiate and define their message through a lyrical and musically stylistic conquest. Lee “Scratch” Perry—producer, songwriter, singer, artist, ultimate space traveler, Rastaman, The Mighty Upsetter—has engineered, manipulated, and reshaped the sound of Jamaican, and global music, as we know it today. His invention of dub music, a critical link between reggae and dancehall, has influenced everything from hip hop to early punk music. His role is of



maverick, the musical genius, producing music, most notably for Bob Marley and The Wailers, Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Beastie Boys, Paul and Linda McCartney, and more. Dipping into various genres and connecting them all back to dub, makes Perry the grandfather of modern dance music. He sits at the very top of dancehall music, together with the likes of Yellowman, Chaka Demus & Pliers, Shinehead, and Sugar Minott, mostly through his invention, mixing, and producing songs such as *Scientific Dancehall*, *Dancehall Kung Fu*, and *Disco Devil*,

respected designers inside and outside the dancehall community. Ouch Collective became a sensation throughout the '90s, dressing Queens of dancehall such as Macka Diamond and Lady Saw. Paula Ouch has also been featured in movies like *Dancehall Queen* (1997) and Hype Williams's *Belly* (1998).

Smith started researching and documenting the depths of dancehall roughly fifteen years ago. His interest is primarily the role of women within the culture, and how their contributions stand at the very center of the movement's legacy.

of Jamaican dancehall. His concerns are broader and more nuanced. He views the dancehall both as a ritualistic site and as a reclamation of identity and empowerment. For him, dancehall exists as its own ecstatic ecosystem, one in which attitude is currency." *No Gyal* archives the scene's community from roughly 1983 to 2000, and is a well-versed testament of time. Smith often says this show/research project is made for the future; for other generations to tap into the legacy of dancehall. The second presentation of *No Gyal Can Test* will debut at Red



forever inspiring the sound clashes of his many musical disciples.

While Perry's musical genius is what left an undeniable imprint on the progress of sound through reggae, dub, and dancehall, Akeem Smith is a new voice, who maintains a pivotal role in preserving and archiving the visual aspect of dancehall culture. Smith, a Kingston-born, New York-based stylist, designer, consultant, and artist, is the scion, godson, and nephew of Paula Ouch, founder of House of Ouch—one of the most infamous and

Compiling a vast selection of images, combining documentary footage, found footage, flyers, garments, architectural artifacts, Smith created *No Gyal Can Test*, an ongoing project of exhibitions, installations, sculpture, photography and videos that unite his observations. They explore past and present representations of the community, issues of racism, political oppression, and gender identity. As said by Max Wolf (curator of *No Gyal Can Test*, "One thing Smith isn't interested in is presenting a definitive account

Bull Arts Detroit Artist Residency in April 2021, delivering even more additional (found) footage than the first iteration, which premiered last autumn in New York City.

END

AKEEM SMITH

• NO GYAL CAN TEST •

KATJA HORVAT Let's just go in right away. My first recollection of *No Gyal Can Test* goes way back to 2012, I can't fully remember what it was, was it a party? But I do know Shayne [Oliver, founder and creative director of Hood By Air] DJed.

AKEEM SMITH It was Shayne, yes, and Venus X, and DJ Physical Therapy. That was my first and only fundraiser. I just needed some money to go to Jamaica and start collecting the materials.

HORVAT Buy your way in!

SMITH Jamaica is very economically driven. Even though I didn't make that much money that time, I made enough, and I wanted the people to see the value in their archive—that I wasn't trying to swindle them, and that I thought what they had and their story was worth a lot. On the island, they're constantly reminded that dancehall is sort of this negative thing.

HORVAT Even after all these years?

SMITH Even after all these years, for sure. A hundred thousand percent, even more now, to be honest.

HORVAT It's insane that it has had such an indelible influence on music and culture at large, but where it actually comes from, its legacy goes unappreciated.

SMITH I think dancehall has given the country a lot of cultural currency that's allowed them to be respected globally—other than the Olympics. It's just a shame that it's still seen as a negative thing, but in my art and practice it is not my mission to sway anyone's points of view.

HORVAT Do you think religion and, let's say some socially "acceptable" norms have anything to do with it?

SMITH Yes and no. Dancehall is a nocturnal economy, so it's become a scapegoat for certain arguments.

HORVAT Portrayal of women is also a sensitive topic when it comes to dancehall—not necessarily on the ground but more so when it comes to what others think of it: a whole degrading debacle.

SMITH Globalization is a thing, and some site specific cultural customs aren't for everyone. I think it's super relative. People on the outside make assumptions. I see the dancehall space as this primal space, equivalent to nature, some behaviors are a mating call. The video piece in *Soursop* honors that. The women in the videos are performing acts, self-caressing; they are appreciating their bodies.

HORVAT You've been working on this

project for fifteen years now? Has researching dancehall, the women in it, fashion, etc., influenced the way you work as a stylist and a designer?

SMITH I've never tried to bring dancehall to fashion or anything like that, so no.

HORVAT Okay, a lot has been written about where the name [of the show] comes from, but I want to know why you even went with it in the first place?

SMITH The name/saying was written behind a photo that my dad had. It was just a normal photo of one of his ex-lovers sitting in her bed. As to why this name, it was not even my idea to go with it, to be honest, it was Shayne's, and this goes back to 2009. I liked *No Gyal Can Test*, but I wasn't confident in it. And he was like, *Oh my god girl, you should just name it this, it's like already here*. My motto, though, has always been to not look too hard for inspiration. I think it's always right in front of you. I don't feel you have to dig too hard to be inspired.

HORVAT A big thread through *No Gyal* is House of Ouch. You grew up with them, Paula [Ouch] is your aunt and godmother, did their/her world shape yours?

SMITH Not in a way you would think. What did shape me was how they came up





with ideas. When I was a kid, I really wanted to be a broadcaster. Dancehall, for me at that time, I thought it was cool, but I never thought it was something I wanted to do. With some dancehall people, you would see them and they would look like a million bucks at a party, and then you see them like two days later, you wouldn't believe that it's that same person. So, it always felt like a mirage, and I wanted something more, something that felt like real wealth.

HORVAT That reminds me of drag balls; the ball fit versus real life.

SMITH I guess you can draw the comparison but I would compare it more to *RuPaul's Drag Race*. And I'm talking about men and women. They made such an effort. I think it had a countereffect on me, because now I want to look like a bum, but a bum with money. That's how dancehall affected me, it shaped my taste but not my world. It also shaped how I view women.

HORVAT Has it shaped how you dress women?

SMITH No. When I do styling work, I think, what would I dress like if I looked like you. That's more of how I like to approach styling. Like, what would I wear if I had your body?

HORVAT So, to go back to dancehall. Who was more celebrated in this on the ground, men or women? Because through the research that I was doing, I could find a bunch of stuff on people like Bogle or Colo Colo but not so much on women specifically. I mean, there are Queens like Carlene or Patra, Lady Saw, etc., but the representation just somehow lingers more on the men's side.

SMITH I don't know the exact answer for that but I assume that it's just so patriarchal here. I think men acted more as the spokespeople for dancehall back then, but maybe that's going to change. Let's see.

HORVAT You think there's still time?

SMITH Well maybe, a lot of the men that used to party in dancehall in the era that I highlight have transitioned [died]. Maybe something changes as far as knowing who

was giving these unknown subjects of Black history a space. Whenever there's an opportunity for the dancehall patrons to speak, I give them that opportunity—to talk about how they feel, to be seen. I'd rather continue having them be a part of the speaking engagements.

HORVAT Everything is always better when it comes from the source.

SMITH Exactly. It's better if it comes from them, rather than me saying how this is affecting me, or them, or whoever that may be. And I'm also not the dancehall academia like that—I like the anthropological part most.

HORVAT What about the whole anthropological system of it interests you the most?



SMITH You know, we always look at old pictures, especially working as a design consultant/stylist. You're always researching images of people, places, things and a part of the job is world-building, so our imaginations run wild. There aren't a lot of first-person narratives when it comes to Black history and that is really important to me. It is about direct representation, not a representation of a representation.

HORVAT It can get tricky, though, as you don't always have the privilege to access the source. So, when it comes to that, you are holding onto a narrative that comes from some other narrative. I studied cultural anthropology and there were moments when I wanted to cover something, but I felt like an

imposter, as it was not my story to tell, or even touch sometimes.

SMITH I get that, but you also gotta let it go. I don't mind looking like an imposter. With the dancehall stuff, people have wondered how I've gotten all this stuff and information; people have indirectly asked me if I'm code-switching, it's been really funny. In translation, some think I'm acting straight, because dancehall is so homophobic, to acquire things...But I would never, ever do that.

HORVAT Homophobia and the macho perception in dancehall, dominance, what males should be, etc., is a whole other conversation. One would think things would change over time, but no.

SMITH Nothing has really changed. It is all so deeply rooted in the political system. It is not just that, though. Dancehall is also used profoundly as an excuse for any violence happening. With COVID right now, in Jamaica—there's been more than a hundred murders since January this year—and they don't have dancehall to blame it on, as there are no events obviously.

HORVAT In the '90s, your godmother [Paula Ouch], also moved to NYC because of all the violence and looting she experienced, right!?

SMITH Correct. Basically, the mafia started to tax their business. If you want to continue operat-

ing your business in Jamaica, you need to pay for your own protection.

HORVAT Was that post or pre-*Belly* (1998)?

SMITH Pre-*Belly*.

HORVAT And then for *Belly*, she came back to Jamaica. What was her role exactly?

SMITH She played Chiquita, who was an assassin.

HORVAT So apart from fashion being pivotal in *No Gyal Can Test* through Ouch, you also brought a fresh element in collaboration with Grace Wales Bonner. You guys worked on the uniforms for the staff. How did that come about?

SMITH With Grace, we always wanted to do something together, but there was never a

right moment until now. Apart from her being absolutely right for this collaboration on its own, she is also personally connected to Jamaica; her mom is English and her dad is Jamaican. So her trajectory and story are a big part of the investigation into the Caribbean diaspora that's taking place inside *No Gyal*, not her family specifically, but many like it.

HORVAT There are a lot of moving parts to this show and everything is very well rounded. From the uniforms with Grace, to the manequin collaboration with Jessi Reaves, to the mock-up housing that was built from the stuff you collected on the island. That said, the videos are really central.

SMITH The two main videos are, *Social Cohesiveness and Memory*. Then there was the *Reconstruction Act*, that's embedded in the sculpture, and then there is *Influenza*. Then, one was called *Queen Street*...

HORVAT Is the latter the one that feels like a dream?

SMITH *Queen Street* documents the first fashion show that I went to—it was my family's fashion show. The way it's edited is sort of how I remember it. It's one of my first memories. So, it's a little bit hazy, and yes, can feel like a dream. You know, memory in general is something very weird because I feel like half of it is what actually happened and then the other half is made up in your head, and I mean that in regards to just about anything, not just this show.

HORVAT Walk me through the editing process.

SMITH To be completely honest, editing came from the curatorial team. I am the maker. That said, there were elements I specifically wanted to highlight, to show the duality of the dancehall world. I wanted to accentuate, to some extent, how the Eurocentric version of beauty is still very much present and is so specifically dancehall; the blonde hair, the blue contacts.... So I was more on that, but the show was brought together and mapped out by curators.

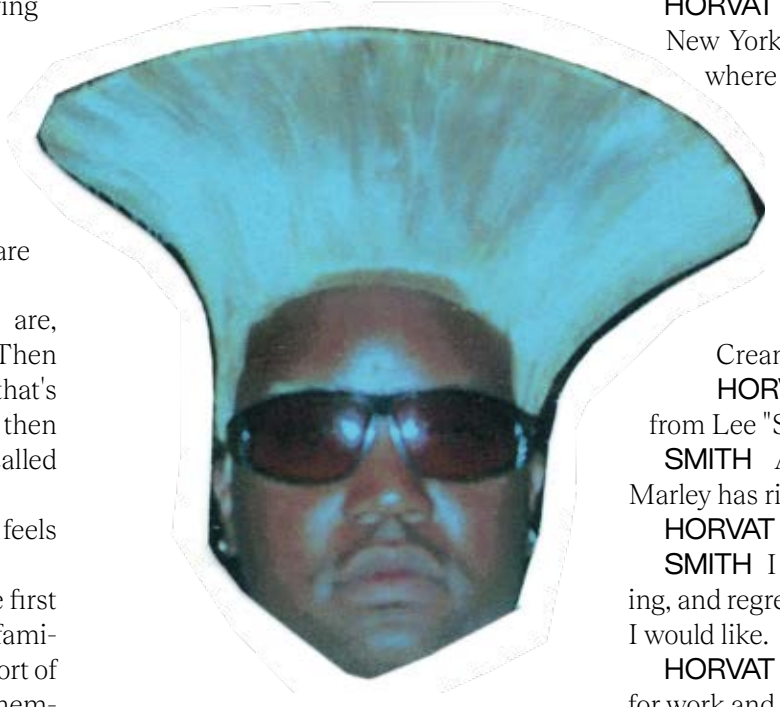
HORVAT So one show is behind you, one is about to open. To think about the story you are trying to tell, what is one thing you want people to get out of it?

SMITH I hope they can somehow connect what they are seeing to something in their lives. You don't have to come from this world to connect or feel things. I would love for peo-

ple to see value in something that maybe they didn't deem as valuable before.

HORVAT I think you are onto something. It's definitely not the type of show that leaves you dry. Anyhow, if you could pick one song that would serve as the soundtrack to your life, which one would it be?

SMITH Oh, Peaches "Fuck The Pain Away."



HORVAT If you could be any character from a film or a TV series, which one would you be?

SMITH I think Scooby Doo because he never actually spoke. He hasn't said a word yet he is still such an icon.

HORVAT He's a mute protagonist. [laughs]

SMITH Doesn't say a word yet he leads it all. Everyone seems to like this character for a reason they don't actually know. And I see myself in that way. I think people like me for reasons they don't even know.

HORVAT If you could only watch one movie for the rest of your life, which one would it be?

SMITH If I could just continue watching dancehall parties from the '70s to now, that would be good.

HORVAT What's your favorite memory as a child from Jamaica?

SMITH In my family, we're all part of different socioeconomic pockets, and I used to love being in the ghetto because that's where all the excitement was. There was always something going on. You never had a moment to yourself, but I loved that. I miss when that didn't bother me. Now, it kind of

does, but there was a point in time when all the drama was fun.

HORVAT What's your favorite memory from New York?

SMITH I haven't had it yet. It's coming.

HORVAT What do you want to be twenty years from now? Where do you see yourself?

SMITH Hopefully just healthy and still working.

HORVAT Do you want to live in Jamaica, New York, or do you see yourself somewhere else?

SMITH No, hell no. I don't know where I'm going to live, but hopefully I'm not bound to a place.

HORVAT What's your favorite flavor?

SMITH I like Great Nut Ice Cream.

HORVAT What's your favorite song from Lee "Scratch" Perry?

SMITH Anything that he claims Bob Marley has ripped off.

HORVAT What do you fear?

SMITH I fear being older, and reminiscing, and regretting not having as much fun as I would like.

HORVAT Where do you get your energy for work and for life?

SMITH Reality television.

HORVAT What's the best life advice that someone has ever given to you?

SMITH I don't know—*keep on going. Don't stop.*

HORVAT Do you ever want to retire?

SMITH No, I'm going to be like Cicely Tyson for sure. Like a thousand percent. She died three or four days after she did the Kelly Ripa interview. Still dolled up. Two weeks prior she was on set filming something. Yeah, that's my hope. Oh, I guess my goal is also to not be jaded.

HORVAT Are you scared of that?

SMITH Yeah, I'm scared of being jaded. I don't think I'm gonna be, though because I make an effort to not be.

No Gyal Can Test *will be on view at Red Bull Arts Detroit from April 16-July 30, 2021.*



LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY AND AKEEM SMITH in CONVERSATION

Akeem Smith traveled back to Kingston, Jamaica at the end of last year, to continue his research for *No Gyal Can Test*. At the same time, The Mighty Upsetter, Lee "Scratch" Perry also known as, "Flashing lightning. Positive vibration and miracle dresser. Magic emperor Rastafari. Lords of Lords. Kings of Kings. The conquering lion of the tribe of Judas. Elect of God. Light of the world. Earth's rightful ruler. Man with one hundred and five four thousands hands. Man with one hundred and five four thousands plans. Music Papa. Words Mama. Ishishi wonderland, a Jah the lion most high. Genesis to Jah revelation; open Jah live the Lion of Judas. Master of ceremony!" returned to Jamaica, trading the mountains of Switzerland for the coast of Negril. What better time than now to have the past meet the future, in the present. Perry and Smith, with the help of Perry's wife Mireille, and Autre's editor, Oliver Kupper, sat down to discuss faith, goals and dreams...and more.





AKEEM SMITH Mi dey yah. What's going about life in Jamaica now versus a few decades ago?

LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY I wonder what's happening. Me see the world change.

SMITH You were just living in Switzerland. How has the cultural transition been for you?

PERRY In Switzerland you no have no problem, like beggars. You have nobody to bother you in Switzerland for money—for food, to buy shoes, and things like that. So, it's a different culture from here. The people love to work. So, for me, less problem. I have less people to feed. So me have a cool heart. But in Jamaica me have a competition heart. I wonder who's coming next, who's best.

SMITH Trust me, I understand. I did my first solo exhibition in New York and a lot of it was based off of dancehall visual aesthetics from the '80s-2001, and what's been interesting throughout getting this archive and doing a study of how people used to party, is seeing how Jamaican parties and the streets have morphed and changed. I've just been interviewing old dancehall women and men. More partygoers, not the musicians.

PERRY We need a judgment party.

SMITH Would that be the name of it or is that the concept?

PERRY I'm talking about a judgment party. A long time we've been having meeting party and winning party and I was thinking in time, God come and set us all free. So I'm thinking about a judgment party. I'm looking for my bless-up. I've been working so long... I've been around my blessed sins. And me know that sins cannot be blessed. Sin cannot be blessed so I'll give her my bless-up. So I need a judge to say well, "This is judgment, pam pam and we are here to charge who's to be charged for righteousness, who will be charged for un-righteousness." Some will be charged for shooting. Some will be charged for shooting birds. Some will be charged for killing animal, killing goats..."

SMITH What do you think you'll be charged for?

PERRY I will be charged for paralyzing vampires. I will be charged for crippling vampire, crippling bad mind. [laughs]

SMITH When was the last time you've been to a dancehall party?

MIREILLE PERRY (to Perry) Do you still like Vybz Kartel [Jamaican reggae dancehall musician and convicted murderer]? We forgot to say happy birthday...tell them you still like him.

PERRY Forever. We have Bob (Vybz) Kartel well secured forever, ever. He's very good, very lovely. And a soldier who come to jail or whatsoever but him still have the Kartel. I don't think that the dancehall can judge him. Me love him.

OLIVER KUPPER Maybe you guys can talk about life in Jamaica now versus a few decades ago.

PERRY Well, the people who don't scorn them shit are the people who will get to Heaven. The people who don't scorn their piss, don't scorn their spit, and don't scorn their shit, those people are surely going to Heaven to sit beside the beauty and majesty, God.

M. PERRY They're asking about how things have changed in Jamaica.

PERRY How things change...too much cocaine. That's why it change. They should not have the coke nor the caine. And if they have no coke and they have no pain...you wouldn't have to take any joke and can't reign. Because God must reign. And God must conquer pain. And God must not take coke. And God should not take cocaine. Maybe if Bob [Marley] wasn't doing that he would be still alive. And actually I never know he was doing that...I never know Bob was taking cocaine but me hear the thing now.

SMITH Back when I was younger, society allowed you to sort of flaunt your upward mobility, like fancy jewelry. Now, you're not encouraged to show that—you might get robbed.

PERRY Any time we forget the bird section, we will forget everything. Because the bird, you have to get the spirit, they'll tell you they have no spirit, they are not alive. Me also have to love the cat. We must love the dog too. And him love the rat.

SMITH In Jamaica, a few days ago, a woman got killed in church.

PERRY In church?

M. PERRY The guy was sitting behind her and he shoot her.

PERRY For example, nothing will happen without a reason, they can be saying death is coming to the church now...

SMITH It was a family dispute.

PERRY Jealousy cause everything, jealousy...another one reaching somewhere the other one not reaching anywhere, he gonna be jealous of flying away.

SMITH Have you ever been jealous of someone?

PERRY Nobody at all. I don't think.

SMITH Is God jealous?

PERRY Yeah. God have all the money and God take money back and burn it.

SMITH Have you always been this religious?

PERRY In the church of God his name. Church of God cannot backwards anything. [singing] *Christ is built on a solid rock. Christ is my cock. Jesus is my cock. My cock is hard like a solid rock.* You understand me?

SMITH Yeah, I understand.

KUPPER Lee, I read that you like to shit in champagne glasses and then hide them around the house. Is that true?

M. PERRY He shit in any glass!

PERRY Anything, any glass but it look pretty and that what me want shit in... worship my shit to the limit. Shit is the greatest. There is nothing greater than shit. The only thing next to shit is piss. Piss is next to shit. One is Pisces and one is Isis. I am Pisces. Pisces and my brain is Isis. My brain is Ice Age. Ice is something that go pshhh pull out your cock and piss, open your pussy and piss it go pshhhhh.

M. PERRY Lee, they can't write that.

PERRY And why can't they write that? You must know how life go. Are you afraid that you poop? Everybody know that you poop no matter what kinda person you are.

KUPPER You guys both found painting, and art, and sculpture later on. Can you talk a little bit about how you found your artistic practices?

PERRY Imagination. If first you want to know why a fly fly on you. The fly is hungry and you look attractive, they are flying on you and going to eat you alive. Or they are to fly on you smell your foot and some people have smelly feet like Bunny Lee.

M. PERRY That's how you discover that you have art?

SMITH I know. I thought he was gonna say through God.

M. PERRY How did you discover that you can do art?

PERRY Because me believe in my dream and most of thing that I see me see it in a dream. It's almost close to what me dream. Need an A-minor, D-minor, there make the song perfect. So me see through my dream, see through my shit, my doo doo, and see through my pee pee and hear through my poop and me hear boom doo doo whay ya mean, they no hear me? I love bass and the pum pum-pum pum pum pum bumba bumba. I love sex. And my main instrument is babies. It means all this poom poom. Poom poom poom poom...poom poom poomm. Poom too too toom poom poom... You hear that? That instrument there.

KUPPER Where does the music come from?

PERRY From the heart. From the heart beat. The heart beat boof boof boof-boof, toof-toof toof toof. Something like that. What goes on is like a computer.

KUPPER Do you have a memory of the first time you listened to music and wanted to play music?

PERRY Well, actually my heart keeps on beating music so I'm not too far off from music. We live together in the same structure, my body.

KUPPER When you were little, where did you first hear music? In church? In the streets?

PERRY I am upside down. And the roots, maybe it is my hair...people turn it into locks and me no want to do that. So me want it up on my head like a spider, a money spider-man. Well



"Everything is love and without love nothing can work. Without love, nothing possible."

the music, it come out of a church, the church of God, but some of the people don't know it... before it was a ska. Some people like Coxson, he made ska. And we make rock steady. And we make reggae. Ragamuffin. When somebody try to copy me...when he say ragamuffin. The guy know how to make reggae, and they not tuffin-muffin, they are reggae-muffin. Reggae ragamuffin.

KUPPER What do you think about the people who try to copy your sound and your music?

PERRY The people who love Reggae are righteous people. Sing sing the angels sing... the sweetest song I ever heard. I am Lee in real life. I am the pound, I am the crown, I am the money L\$P, right? And I am the politician destroyer. It's simple...I am the pound, the shilling, and the pence. I am the International Monetary Foundation. I am the rain that come from the sky. And shit is my righteous name. Black Supremacy, theocracy government... Perry Mason. Perry Mason. Perry. Mason. Perry for pyramid and Perry for permit and Perry for hermit. And Perry for what?...Christus. And I am the Pound Lee. L for Pound. And I am the Dollar Scratch. S for Dollar. I am the American Dollar and I am the Egypt pyramid. So I am L\$P. And who are you...that I should be mindful of?

KUPPER When was the last time you took LSD?

PERRY I don't need LSD. I am L\$P. I have no reason to take LSD. I smoke some herbs now. Never, never, never, never.

KUPPER: Can you both talk about your personal style?

SMITH I don't know if I have any personal style per se, but I would say that I do think Jamaica, or within old dancehall culture, the style of dress was very site-specific. You could usually tell if a girl was Jamaican or not. Now, I think not so much, but maybe it has sort of morphed into something else. And I think with the guys too.

PERRY Well, they have beautiful Jamaican look like angel, not fallen angel. A real angel. You have beautiful Black people that are looking fantastic. So when you see one, say "Hi." They look pretty forever. I don't know why they look so pretty. They shouldn't try to be ragamuffin anyhow. I think they're too pretty to be ragamuffin.

SMITH I think that fast fashion maybe has something to do with it. The economics have something to do with it.

PERRY They don't have much money now. So them have to dress ragamuffin. The ragamuffin want to take over their beautiful struc-

ture. And turn them into ragfucking, something like that. Raga-rockers. Anyhow, we wish the people change in Jamaica. Wish Jamaica turn to what Jamaica used to be. Better in everything. Better for everything.

SMITH I'm curious to see what the Caribbean mutates into. I don't want it to go back to anything. I'm really looking forward to how it will be in the future. And see what stands the test of time, sonically, visually, and all that.

PERRY Wish to hear less murder, less murder in the dancehall. And wish the dancehall people could come together and change the dancehall into church. Turn the dancehall culture into church culture, and everybody sing, "Hallelujah, glory to his name. Praise the almighty God shit." Forever, forever, forever. Hallelujah, ashkalabash, you must say, "Hallelujah, Jesus Christ my shit. Please save me from the police." And when you hear that you must say, "Jesus Christ almighty, forgive me of my trespasses. Save me from the bird laws." Bunny Lee ask for forgiveness. And Bunny Wailer might be crying from the bird law is watchin Bunny Wailers. Bunny Failure. Bunny Quailer. And Bunny Jailer...but I know what the bird do to Bob Marley wasn't too nice. And it kinda hurt me inside too, to know that happened to Bob Marley, my special agent.

KUPPER Can you guys talk a little bit about your studios in Jamaica.

PERRY The real identifier of the studio is the church of God. And the true identity of my studio, Black Ark Studio, is the church of God. Ashkalabash.

KUPPER Lee, can you talk a little bit about your song "Police & Thieves?"

PERRY Well the song "Police & Thieves" is a reality about the thing that happen in Jamaica. In Jamaica, if you're not paying bribe, you have to pay off some police friend. And give 'em a change now and then for being on your side. It not make sense to fight against the police. If you fight against the police you in bad trouble. You can make peace with the police and ask the police for forgive some of your bad friend that do things also. One favor for another. And we can make thing different here. By changing the words that we are saying, looking for culture word that can bring peace to the people, peace to the nation. Stop robbing each other, and stop killing each other, and stop hating each other. And stop grudging each other, in shit name. Amen.

KUPPER Akeem, can you tell Lee a little bit about your practice?

SMITH In Jamaica, we often have a team of friends and family that are more like a con-

struction crew. We go around and purchase derelict residences and businesses, take them down, and then take them to my aunt's business, which is a concrete place. I do a lot more of the collecting: photos and videos, just stuff that I think supplements certain ideas and concepts that I have in my head. And also things that I see as wasteful, or garbage, I really value. Things that, weirdly enough, as garbage as they may seem, is a part of the brand identity of Jamaica. What's super interesting is that dancehall is so frowned upon in Jamaica, it's literally the go-to whenever the politicians are running for office again.

KUPPER Lee, you were just stuck in Canada for a while—what's the first thing you do when you get back to Jamaica?

PERRY What my wife tell me to do 'cause she's my nurse now so me listen to her sometime. She remember everything. We go to the beach. She's my nurse and my memory. You understand it? Well, love. Everything is love and without love nothing can work. Without love, nothing possible. With love all things are possible. And if you want to be alone, God wouldn't have given you company. If man was to be alone, God wouldn't give him a woman to be their company—so I don't think we were born to be alone. We were born to have a company. A male or a female to make the life run level. What you call justice? Libra. Libra. I'm a Pisces, I'm a fish. 'Cause I can't do without the water. I don't know who can. I don't think anyone can. In some way you must drink water to quench your thirst. And in some way you must have to piss because you couldn't keep the water all your life and don't piss. So you need water, everybody need water.

KUPPER Akeem, can you remember the last dream you had?

SMITH I'm not much of a night-dreamer, I'm a daydreamer. This dream I had maybe a few hours ago. The truck driver understood the streets and the hills that we were on, and his driving, well, I'm a bit more cautious, so I kept falling asleep and having these horrific dreams that we were gonna crash. But for the most part I just see darkness at night. When I close my eyes to sleep it just goes dark. But maybe just seeing darkness could be another version of a dream. We've been conditioned to think that a dream is like this

KUPPER Lee, can you remember the last dream that you had?

PERRY Well, me dream like if me hear, me used to love to go out on the streets for no reason but lay down and wonder what the dream will be. And sometime it come to me to wake me up to tell me, "Don't worry, take it easy, things are gonna happen my way."

END

