

## **Clinton Fearon**

*Jamaican reggae*

Tacoma, Washington

A member of the legendary Gladiators, one of the most popular vocal groups to emerge from Jamaica in the formative years of reggae, singer/songwriter/bassist Clinton Fearon has been bringing roots reggae music to audiences across the globe for close to four decades. Emerging from the island of Jamaica in the 1960s, reggae captivated the world with its musical calls for justice, freedom and equality, and messages of hope and redemption. Clinton's vibrant voice and powerful songs continue to remind listeners that reggae has always been more than a musical style.

Clinton Fearon grew up in Jamaica at a time when different musical and historical streams were converging to create what is now popularly known as reggae. The reggae beat, slow and steady like the human heartbeat, has roots in the island's indigenous folk percussion and the religious drumming known as *nyahbingi*. *Mento*, a Jamaican folk music closely related to Trinidadian calypso, also contributed to the development of reggae. Finally, reggae drew from two popular homegrown dance styles that preceded it, ska and rock steady, both influenced by American R&B and jump blues.

The development of reggae is intertwined with the history of Rastafarianism, a spiritual, social, and political movement that began to develop among the island's poor during the 1930s. Rastas, as they came to be known, believed in the divine nature of Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, and helped to revitalize pan-African nationalism throughout Jamaica. In the volatile political climate of the 1960s, reggae music fused with Rasta consciousness and became the representative musical outlet for expressing the hopes and fears of the Jamaican people.

Fearon was an active participant in Jamaica's burgeoning reggae scene. As an early member of The Gladiators, which he joined in 1969 as both a bass player and harmony singer, Fearon appeared on recordings of many of the groups most well-known songs, including "Freedom Train" and "Downtown Rebel," the latter of which was recorded at the famous Studio One with Clement "Sir Coxsone" Dodd. Fearon's talent for songwriting attracted the attention of legendary producer Joe Gibbs, who recorded many of Fearon's original songs on a 1974 Gladiators album. Lee "Scratch" Perry, impressed with his commanding bass playing, also hired Fearon as a house musician for his Black Ark Studio.

In 1986, on the heels of a Gladiators tour, Fearon remained in Seattle to undertake a musical project. Its success eventually prompted a permanent move to the Pacific Northwest. Fearon started his own band to showcase his original songs, and has released several well-received solo albums. His most recent offering is *Vision*, a musical meditation on love and spirituality. With his passionate singing and socially-conscious lyrics, Clinton remains a righteous and powerful force in roots reggae music.