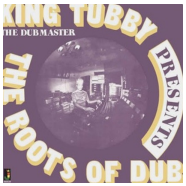
DUB REGGAE.

The long read: a crate of five records, the people who made them, and how a Kingston sound system habit became a way of listening.

A CONVERSATION WITH DAN FINN & CRUSTY DUB

SUN 15 NOV 2026 · 3–5 PM · FLYING COLOURS, 63 VULTURE ST, WEST END











WHERE IT STARTED

Dub began in late-1960s Jamaica, at open-air sound system dances in downtown Kingston. Rocksteady had replaced ska in the dance halls. Sound system owners asked producers for instrumental versions of hits, with the vocals taken out, so deejays, called toasters, had room to talk over the top. One story says sound system man Ruddy Redwood got a vocal-less acetate by accident and used it at his dances; sources present it as legend. By 1970 nearly every B-side carried a “Version”.

THE DESK BECOMES AN INSTRUMENT

Osbourne Ruddock, King Tubby, was born in Kingston in 1941. He formed his sound system, Tubby’s Hometown Hi-Fi, in 1958 and from 1968 cut discs for producer Duke Reid. Asked for versions, he first removed the vocals with the faders, then found he could rework the instrumental with the mixer and effects. That is usually described as the start of dub. He opened a studio in Waterhouse in 1971, and by 1972 his system was one of the island’s leading ones.

THE FIRST DUB ALBUMS

Which album was first is argued. The 1973 contenders are Blackboard Jungle Dub (Lee Perry and King Tubby), Aquarius Dub (Herman Chin Loy), Java Dub (Errol “ET” Thompson) and The Message – Dub Wise (Prince Buster). Perry’s record, issued as “Upsetters 14 Dub”, is described as the first in stereo and the first with reverb; Wikipedia calls the first-album claim speculative.

LISTEN FOR

The drop-out. The band vanishes and comes back.

The echo tail. One hit, left hanging in the room.

The bass. Up front, because the speakers were built for it.

The version. The same song again, with the voice taken out.



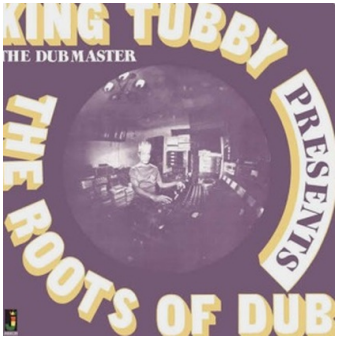
14 DUB BLACKBOARD JUNGLE

The Upsetters

Lee Perry's 1973 dub album, issued as "Upsetters 14 Dub". Some say it was the first dub album and the first in stereo; the claim is disputed.

- Released in 1973 on Perry's Upsetter label under the name "Upsetters 14 Dub". Later pressings as Blackboard Jungle Dub have a different track list.
- Fourteen tracks, 44 minutes. Perry and King Tubby are credited as engineers; sources we found do not say who mixed which track.
- Players include Aston "Family Man" Barrett and Lloyd Parks on bass, Carlton Barrett on drums, Winston Wright on organ and Augustus Pablo on melodica. "Dreamland Skank", "Mooving Skank" and "Kaya Skank" are credited to the Wailers.
- It is described as the first dub album, the first in stereo and the first with reverb. Wikipedia calls the first-album claim speculative, and four albums are contested for that title.
- Reported as a pressing of only 300 copies, Jamaica only. That figure comes from a page flagged as needing better citations, so treat it as a claim.

Listen for: The organ and melodica sitting on top of rhythm tracks that keep dropping in and out.



THE ROOTS OF DUB

King Tubby

King Tubby's mixes of Bunny Lee's rhythm tracks, built for the sound system dance.

- Released in 1975. A companion LP, Dub From The Roots, came out in the same period.
- The mixes are of Bunny Lee-produced rhythm tracks. Tubby mixed and cut this exclusive music to acetate (dubplate) for his own sound system.
- Effects named by VP Records: phasing, high-pass filtering, echo and reverb, isolating and recombining the drums, bass, horns and vocals.
- The rhythms were first made by singers including Cornel Campbell, Johnny Clarke and Linval Thompson, many drawn from Studio One, Treasure Isle or High Note. Bass is played by Family Man Barrett, Fully Fullwood and a young Robbie Shakespeare.
- Emcees including U Roy, I Roy, Big Youth, Jah Stitch and Prince Jazzbo worked over these rhythms. Steve Barrow is quoted: Tubby "gave the world new ears" to listen to music.
- We could not confirm the original label from the pages we read, so none is named here.

Listen for: A single drum hit left to echo, then the whole band snapping back.



KING TUBBY MEETS ROCKERS UPTOWN

Augustus Pablo & King Tubby

Pablo's melodica and Tubby's desk. The title track began as a 1974 single.

- The title track came out as a 45 in 1974 on Mango. It is a dub version of Jacob Miller's "Baby I Love You So", also produced by Pablo. The album followed in 1976, on several labels.
- The musicians were recorded at Randy's studio in Kingston. Pablo then took the tapes to King Tubby for mixing. Tubby and Errol Thompson are credited as mixing engineers.
- Players: Pablo (melodica, piano, clavinet, organ), Robbie Shakespeare and Family Man Barrett (bass), Carlton Barrett (drums), Earl "Chinna" Smith (guitar), Dirty Harry Hall (tenor sax), Bobby Ellis (trumpet), Vin Gordon (trombone).
- Side one opens with "Keep On Dubbing"; the title track is on side two. All tracks are credited to Pablo.
- Reception: Mojo ranked it second on its 2024 list of the 50 best reggae albums, and NME placed it 96th on its 1985 list of the greatest albums. The title track is on Rolling Stone's 500 greatest songs list, at 266.
- The sleeve is a photo of Pablo in front of a portrait of Haile Selassie (photographer Michael Scudder, design by Glen Osborne). Artwork varied between labels.

Listen for: The melodica: a breathy, reedy lead that sounds like it is playing in an empty hall.



SUPER APE

Lee “Scratch” Perry & The Upsetters

Recorded at Perry’s Black Ark. Out in Jamaica in July 1976 and on Island in August.

- Jamaican release: Scratch the Super Ape, July 1976, on Perry’s Upsetter label. International release: Super Ape, August 1976, on Island, with a different track order.
- Recorded at the Black Ark in Kingston, which Perry built behind his family home in 1973. It ran on a four-track console, a tape recorder, an Echoplex and a Roland Space Echo; the circuits were designed by King Tubby. The studio closed in 1979.
- Ten tracks, 37 minutes: Zion’s Blood, Croaking Lizard, Black Vest, Underground, Curly Dub, Dread Lion, Three in One, Patience, Dub Along and Super Ape. Perry produced and engineered.
- Players include Boris Gardiner (bass), Earl “Chinna” Smith (guitar), Mikey Boo Richards and Benbow Creary (drums), Keith Sterling (piano), Bobby Ellis, Dirty Harry Hall and Herman Marquis (horns), Vin Gordon (trombone) and Egbert Evans (flute). Prince Jazzbo toasts on “Croaking Lizard”.
- Perry layered sound effects onto each track of a basic four-track machine and recorded with several versions of a song in mind.
- The sleeve was painted by Tony Wright: a giant ape in a Jamaican jungle. The album is in The Rough Guide to Reggae’s 100 essential CDs (1999). A 2013 Record Store Day Black Friday double vinyl added three tracks.

Listen for: Animal sounds and odd effects tucked into the mix, and Prince Jazzbo talking over “Croaking Lizard”.



SCIENTIST RIDS THE WORLD OF THE EVIL CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES

Scientist

A 1981 Greensleeves dub album with horror-movie track titles, mixed at King Tubby's.

- Released in 1981 on Greensleeves (catalogue GREL25). Remastered in 2001 as the 25th title in Greensleeves' Reggae Classics series.
- Producer and arranger: Henry "Junjo" Lawes. Backing band: the Roots Radics. Recorded at Channel One Studios in Kingston, on 13 June 1981. Mixed by Scientist at King Tubby's.
- Scientist's mixes are built on tracks by Michael Prophet, the Wailing Souls, Johnny Osbourne and Wayne Jarrett.
- Ten tracks, 37 minutes: Voodoo Curse, Dance of the Vampires, Blood On His Lips, Cry of the Werewolf, The Mummy's Shroud, The Corpse Rises, Night of the Living Dead, Your Teeth In My Neck, Plague of Zombies and Ghost of Frankenstein.
- The sleeve is by Tony McDermott: cartoon horror, with a boat carrying a sound system through a swamp of vampires, mummies and ghouls.
- Five tracks were used in Grand Theft Auto III, on the game's fictional station K-Jah.

Listen for: Bass that arrives like a weight, and the horror titles read as jokes about the sound itself.

LATE 1960S	Jamaica. At open-air sound system dances in downtown Kingston, owners ask producers for instrumental “versions” of hits, with the vocals taken out, so deejays (toasters) can talk over them.
1968	Osbourne Ruddock, known as King Tubby, begins cutting discs for producer Duke Reid. Asked for versions, he pulls the vocals out with the faders, then finds he can rework the instrumental with the mixer and effects.
1970	By now nearly every B-side carries a “Version”.
1971	Tubby opens a studio in Waterhouse, Kingston. His sound system, Tubby’s Hometown Hi-Fi, dates from 1958.
1973	Lee Perry opens the Black Ark. The first dub albums arrive and which was first is still argued: Blackboard Jungle Dub, Aquarius Dub, Java Dub, The Message – Dub Wise.
1974	“King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown” is released as a 45 on Mango.
1975	The Roots of Dub. Tubby’s sound system is sidelined by violence the same year.
1976	Super Ape (July in Jamaica, August on Island) and the King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown album.
1979	The Black Ark closes.
1981	Scientist Rids the World of the Evil Curse of the Vampires, on Greensleeves.
NOW	“Dub” also means a remix across dance music, from techno and house to grime and dubstep.

What we could not confirm: the original label of The Roots of Dub; who mixed which track on 14 Dub Blackboard Jungle.

Sources: Wikipedia: King Tubby; Black Ark Studios; Super Ape; Upsetters 14 Dub Blackboard Jungle; King Tubbys Meets Rockers Uptown; Scientist Rids the World of the Evil Curse of the Vampires; uDiscover Music: “Dub Music: Exploring The Genre’s Jamaican Origins”; VP Records: “King Tubby’s Iconic The Roots of Dub and Dub From The Roots at 50”; Rock the Bells: “From Jamaica to the Bronx”. Facts as published on the pages above. Where sources disagree or were silent we say so. Open to corrections.