

The positive effects of dancehall music on jamaican culture

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Dancehall as defined by Donna P Hope can either be a culture that is a space for cultural creation and dissemination of symbols and ideologies that reflect and legitimize the lived realities of its adherents, particularly from the inner cities of Jamaica. Or it may be a genre of music native to Jamaica which originated in the inner cities of Kingston around the late 1970's and is considered to be the direct predecessor of rap music. At this time, the music was played in dance halls which was where local sound systems would play "riddims" and a deejay would sing over it.

In the beginning dancehall was just a sparser version of reggae than the roots rock style. Dancehall then gained more popularity around the 80's and 90's and became increasingly characterized by faster rhythms and the key elements of this new dancehall music included the extensive use of Jamaican Patois which is broken English. During this period, the themes of repatriation and Rastafarian movements were displaced by lyrics about dancing, violence and sex. In this essay, I will be arguing that despite being thought about as mostly negatively influential dancehall music does also have its positives. I will show that there are positives through the use of articles and interviews. Some of the positives of dancehall music which have been seen in Jamaican society are: it acts as a relief of stress for the people suffering because of poverty and helps them in a way feel free, it is a medium for economic advancement, it helps people to see what is actually happening in inner city communities and it provides global exposure and recognition meaning the artiste if perform well their music can help them to tour and travel the world and also cause people to come to Jamaica and experience or culture and promote it. Undoubtedly, the music is also very helpful in just unifying all

Jamaicans everywhere no matter the social or economic background and makes them very accepting of their roots and culture.

Without a doubt Dancehall Music does have its negatives which are extremely overwhelming like the fact that it is associated with acts of promoting misogyny and violence. Misogyny is defined as the practice of being prejudice against women. This practice is celebrated in Jamaican society and lyrics about this are plentiful in the songs of many dancehall artistes. Not only are the songs misogynistic but also celebrates the objectification of women for example in the music video for a song called “Weak to You” by Dexta Daps the women are painted gold also in the video the women were literally objectified being portrayed as: chairs, lamps and tables, this was also a prime example of the dehumanization of females. Another form of dehumanization of females in Jamaica comes in the form of a dance known as ‘daggering’ which is a form of popular dance between men and women and described as incorporating dry sex and other forms of frantic movement.

The dance form has been ever present in dancehall culture but over the years has increased in popularity but has been deemed to be a very dangerous form of entertainment. A prominent artist “Marvin the Beast” whose given name is Everton Sang gained fame shot to national attention when he was being investigated by the police after video surfaced that he allegedly assaulted a female during one of his dance routines. However, no charges were laid against him and this shows the popularity and controversy behind this dance form as someone who was not really known or as popular

become viral and very popular over videos of him participating in this form of dancing. According to a study done on the effects of dancehall on adolescents sexual and violent behavior in Jamaica: of 100 respondents 52% of males and 58% females claimed to be sexually active and this data can be related to the increase in STDs and pregnancies.

The music is said to also promote violence, that it is okay to kill or injure and feel no remorse when killing someone. An example of this is in the lyrics of Vybz Kartel's song "Broad Daylight" where he says, 'me murder people inna broad daylight, six pants me walk wid cuz the AK light' this is important as it is an example as to how dancehall artistes promote violent crimes in Jamaican society and to unnecessarily patrol the streets with arms.

According to a study done by A. D Crawford "A public health concern" 19% of males and 13% females demonstrate violence in their schools, in their communities and some in their homes. 7% of the females and 9% of the males were taken to the Principal's office; 3% of the females and 5% of the males were suspended from school. Another problem produced by dancehall is vicious homophobia present in our culture. There are many songs which speak to the killing and dehumanizing of gay people one such song is Buju Banton's Boom Bye Bye where he says "Rude bwoy nah promote no batty man, dem haffi dead" this talks about killing of homosexuals in a very gruesome manner. This problem I believe is so prominent in Jamaica because Jamaicans are very religious and Jamaica is a very religious country and so the bible tends to be used as a means to defend these allegations, so the artistes just bend the bible's text to just benefit themselves for example they

in a song by Sizzla titled “ Nah apologize” he says, “ Inna de Biblical days we use to stone dem to death (Whoa!)” this talks about the homosexuals being stoned in the bible but in dancehall culture they do not talk about not stealing, doing unto others as you have them do onto you and in many instances those things are very much promoted through the artiste’s lyrics.

However, despite the bad reputation given to dancehall music by media and government officials. Dancehall music has many positives which are extremely beneficial to the Jamaican society at large such positives are economic benefits to the country, help give at risk youth a second chance and provides them with jobs, bridges the social divide between uptown and downtown. Dancehall has great economic value, many tourists come to Jamaica to engage in the dancehall culture such as at events like Sumfest where artistes new and old perform for seven days. July 24, 2018 was the recorded largest with more than twenty thousand people showing up with one ticket being one hundred and one us dollars and the VIP tickets being one hundred and fifty-four and two hundred and fifty dollars respectively. Besides the cost of tickets some tourists have to rent villas and book hotel rooms so that they can enjoy the largest reggae and dancehall music event in the world. Another situation in which dancehall is beneficial to the economy is that it helps boost employment this can be seen with television stations HYPE TV and RE TV where dancehall music has provided employment in their advertising sectors some of those being video directors, make-up artistes, camera men and editing staff. They also may have to rent locations, provide transport and hire food merchants. Dancehall artistes also

influence the economy by initiating consumer trends. The dancehall fraternity sometimes has the power to provide local clothing designers and franchises to show their brands on an international platform. For example, Romeich Wear a clothes brand owned by Dancehall producer Romeich, who produces songs for some of dancehalls most popular current artists Ding Dong and Shenseea, who also model his products in their music videos.

Another benefit that Dancehall has had on Jamaican Society is that it has helped to promote peace. Several times in previous years Peace dances have taken place in garrison areas where crime rates are or have been increasing. Queen of the Dancehall, Lady Saw will be championing the cause of peace when she, along with several other entertainers, journey to Montego Bay on Wednesday for the Bring Back the Love, Bring Back the Peace concert is the title of a gleaner article and is a prime example of the power that these artistes have to introduce the theme of peace in a country. Some of the pioneers of this early dancehall music are King Yellow man and Shabba Ranks. All of these men grew up with little to nothing in areas of Jamaica known for violence and illegal activities.

Yellow man born Winston Foster was born an albino and was abandoned by his parents and so grew up in the Maxfield Children's Home and attended Alpha Boys School and was shunned due to his skin due to his albinism according to him. Shabba Ranks who was born as Rexton Rawlston Fernando Gordon was born and raised in St. Ann but faced the same reality as many inner-city children as he said on an interview with Winford Williams " He was the reason I didn't become a gunman" in this interview he was referring to

another notable dancehall artist in Ninja Man this is proof to show that dancehall and the artistes can play an integral role in changing the lives of people who face struggles on a daily basis and feel that there is no way out of whatever financial or emotional state that they're in, and these men are notable examples of how dancehall culture has provided a haven for youth in unpleasant situations.

Many times, dancehall music has also provided people with another opportunity to turn their life around for example Reanno Devon Gordon better known by his stage name Busy Signal who is a dancehall artiste who was jailed for a drug case and extradited to the US. In one of his songs titled ' Jail' he sings about the experiences he faced in the maximum-security prison he was incarcerated in for 6 months and advises people to never do anything that would land them into such an isolated and gruesome place another artiste to make songs with the purpose of educating youth and influencing them to never do anything that will land them in prison is Vybz Kartel. Kartel has a song titled " back to life" in this song he sings about the rough times he has in prison for example the chorus of the song says " Back to life. . . Me waan go Back to reality Back to life. me-me waan go Back to reality" shows how prison is similar to a fantasy place or a nightmare and that he desires to rejoin society, he also describes the inside of the prison by saying " when the cage lock you haffi thug it up inna dem place yah dutty like rubbish truck" so the cell is described as a cage, a cage is usually where animals are kept and then the phrase " thug it up" shows the personalities the prisoner had to acquire showing that they had to become crass and show

no remorse and “dutty like rubbish truck” this is self explanatory and shows the conditions in which the prisoners were staying.

Dancehall also seems to seamlessly bridge the gap between the upper and lower classes in Jamaican society. I think that there is a commonality for the music which evokes a sense of national pride in people from both upper and lower classes, we can all relate to the lyrics of the songs and so the music transcends the social divide that is prominent. In foreign countries when dancehall music is being played whether in clubs or offices wherever, I think that is an example of the pride Jamaicans feel even if sometimes when the persons themselves are in Jamaica might not really care to listen to the music. I believe that most if not all Jamaicans can relate to the lyrics and common themes conveyed in dancehall songs such as the theme of money, theme of God, theme of religion, themes of struggles and celebration some songs even promote education and encourage children to stay in school and this is why we can all relate to one another because it paints a picture of the realities faced in Jamaica. In the music video for Vybz Kartel's song “Straight Jeans and Fitted” is a perfect example of how the commonalities between both upper and lower classes and how the divide is bridged, in the video one part is shot in Waterford a well known garrison known for producing many talented artistes and the other part is shot in Cherry Gardens an affluent community in the hills of Jamaica. In the video you see the several commonalities between the people that is the love for high end fashion, jewelry, money and girls.

A person from a wealthy social background who has never really gone deep into a garrison community can very well give a detailed picture of the environment and can know the thoughts of the people in the area without stepping foot in that place through the lyrics and videos of the dancehall songs. For example in a song by Popcaan titled "Gangster City" he describes the place where he is from, in the song he says "i'm from a place where dog eat dog. Im from a place where blood spill" which means its extremely violent and that it's so difficult to survive, 'dog' and 'eat' are uses of figurative language and are describing the actual people most likely men and how it is so difficult to survive that they have to talk each others life and behave uncivilized and like animals. Another song that focuses on the actual image of what these garrison and so what they look like is.

However, not only can the music paint the picture of the realities of the people it can also help to take people mentally out of a that state they may be in or help to provide a motivation for them to put in hard and smart work and set goals to try and attain their dreams. The music also emotionally acts as a relief of stress for the people suffering because of poverty and helps them in a way feel free from stress. It seems like the positivity emitted from the music really speaks to them and because the youth want to emulate the artist because they want to also be on tv, have nice houses and drive nice cars.