



### **Clement “Sir Coxsone” Dodd**

The Jamaican record producer Clement “Sir Coxsone” Dodd, who died of a heart attack aged 72, nurtured the career of nearly every internationally renowned reggae artist. He was one of the first to record local talent, and an integral force in the development of Ska. Having been involved in the development of reggae for more than 50 years, his contribution to the evolution of the island's music, from his Studio One recording facility, is simply enormous. It was at Studio One that he cut the first recordings by Bob Marley and the Wailers.

Dodd was born in Kingston, spent some formative years in the parish of Saint Thomas, and returned to the capital to learn cabinet making and train as an automobile mechanic. Dodd's father was a contractor-cum-mason who helped build the Carib Theatre, a landmark building in the Kingston Cross Roads business district. In the early 1950s, Dodd's mother ran the Nanny's Corner restaurant at the downtown junction of Lawes Street and Ladd Lane. There customers were entertained by the sound, if not the presence, of Billy Eckstein, Sarah Vaughan, Lionel Hampton and Louis Jordan wafted out of the family Morphy Richards radio.

In the early 1950s, Dodd worked as a farm labourer in the United States. Having seen the money being made at outdoor block parties he started thinking about an entry into the music business.

From the late 1940s, the Jamaican music scene was based around the sound systems, huge sets of portable equipment that played rhythm and blues at open-air dance events. In the early 1950s the leading sound was Duke Reid The Trojan, established by former policeman Arthur Reid, a friend of Dodd's parents. Dodd did guest spots, spinning his records on Reid's set, but then became Reid's biggest competitor with the Sir Coxsone's Downbeat sound system. It took its name from a noted Yorkshire cricketer whose batting skills Dodd was said to emulate.

Dodd had a superior selection of R&B and rare jazz discs; he also had toaster Count Machuki, a wisecracking DJ. Several other later famous figures worked for Dodd in this early phase. These included Prince Buster, a former boxer who staved off attacks from rival sound systems before striking out on his own in 1957, and Lee "Scratch" Perry, who began working for Dodd as a vocalist, talent scout and general dogsbody in 1961.

In 1956, Dodd began recording artists such as Bunny and Skully at Federal studio, usually with R&B echoes. An early hit, Theophilus Beckford's Easy Snappin, had a different beat, pointing the way to the Ska that Dodd would champion by the end of the decade. By the early 1960s, he was ruling Jamaica with Ska hits by Toots and the Maytals, the Gaylads and the Skatalites, Jamaica's premier ska group.

In October 1963, on the site of a former nightclub, The End, Dodd opened the Jamaica Recording and Publishing Studio - always called Studio One - close to the Carib Theatre at 13 Brentford Road. He signed Bob Marley and the Wailers, and gave them immeasurable guidance, selecting Marley as leader and scoring several number ones with them. He acted as something of a surrogate father to Marley during this period, even giving him a place to live on the premises.

When rock-steady briefly supplanted ska in 1966, Dodd found Duke Reid overshadowing him, but when the new reggae style emerged in 1968, Coxsone was back on top with entralling recordings by the Heptones, the Abyssinians, Bob Andy and Marcia Griffiths. The organist Jackie Mittoo, who arranged much of this material, also scored instrumental hits of his own.

In the early 1970s, Dodd advanced Dennis Brown's career and made forays into dub. Although recuts of his rhythms recorded at his rivals, Channel One, subsequently found greater favour, he beat them at their own game with a Studio One renaissance in 1979, voicing new material with proto-dance hall singers such as Sugar Minott, Johnny Osbourne and Freddy McGregor, plus DJs Lone Ranger and Michigan and Smiley.

Then armed bandits attacked the Brentford Road headquarters. Dodd transferred Studio One to Brooklyn, New York, where he recorded during the 1980s and early 1990s. The music included dancehall works, with Frankie Paul and JD Smoothie sometimes voicing on new mixes of old rhythms. Reissues by Boston's Heartbeat records also kept his vintage material in focus.

In 1991, he received the Order of Distinction, Jamaica's third highest honour. Following his mother's death, Dodd moved back to Kingston in 1998 and reopened the Brentford Road for new recordings with veterans and young talent alike, while reissues and a documentary DVD released by London's Soul Jazz records brought Studio One's popularity to an all-time high. Last week, the Jamaican government renamed Brentford Road Studio One Boulevard.

Throughout it all, Dodd remained an avid music lover and an astute businessman. For the past few years, he had been plagued by arthritis. His wife Norma and several children survive him.

Clement Seymour Dodd, record producer and entrepreneur, born January 26 1932; died  
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