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Busy Signal: Step Out [Greensleeves, 2006]

-Laura Gardner
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There haven't been many CDs recently that I feel the whole world should know about, but this is definitely one of them. Take my advice —[pre-order](#) this September 26th release—and thank me later. Before I get labeled a “gusher” (you know the type – the ones that have never heard a bad album since the Beatles came stateside), I want to back-up my claim.

A lot of dancehall is one dimensional – Elephant Man writes great dance songs; Vybz Kartel has amazing flow; Capleton has mastered angry energy; Jr. Gong has a conscience. There are

unforgettable singles out there too – Tony Matterhorn's "[Dutty Wine](#)," Turbulence's "Notorious," Sizzla's "Dry Cry" – but there have been very few dancehall albums that can carry from beginning to end. The only analogy I have is [T.O.K.](#) meets Assassin, and that is a mere approximation of Busy Signal's sound.

Jamaica. Reality. Love. Anger. Intelligence. Humor. Melody. Rhythm. Bass. The only unfortunate piece about this album is Busy Signal's name, given to him because of his busy and active lifestyle. I would hate for people to confuse him with the band Voicemail. Or even with that silly ditty "Telephone Ting." Maybe I'm getting old but I fear the day when the next stable of dancehall artists is Text Message, Ringtone, and Call Waiting. But I digress...

What I appreciate about Busy Signal's music is that he depicts a slice of Jamaican life. He airs both the glamour and problematic nature of rudeboy life. The culture that is so fond of children and motherhood comes through. On the track "That Bad" about "alla da bad chunes dem," his references to Sizzla, Vybz Kartel, Bounty Killer, Buju Banton, Beenie Man, Capleton, the Fugees, Turbulence, Elephant Man, Spragga Benz, and others ground his work in a context. He's got a couple of tunes that pay respect to his island of Jamaica – "Where I'm From" ("Tha system a kill we!") and "Born & Grow." There are definitely political messages interspersed – the lack of opportunity in Jamaica, the system that is ill equipped to meet the people's needs, the need for education, and the ease at which someone will take your life.

There is vulnerability in "Love Me Not?" where he asks, "Do you love me, or do you love me not? How could you do me that? Creeping with my friends dem behind my back." There is the requisite mamma tune, "Mammy," which is sweet despite a Jamaican friend's comment that grown men and their mothers in JA often have dysfunctionally enmeshed relationships. There is a darling interlude where Busy is talking to his young daughter on the phone and they settle on the fact that she wants mango.

"Guns fi Dubs," another interlude, is just about that - a man wants a dubplate but doesn't have any money so he offers Busy guns for the track. Not an uncommon episode. As so many that came before, Busy Signal has the mandatory ode to Jamaica, "Born & Grow." The backdrop is the Jamaica National Anthem and the lyrics describe Jamaica's underbelly a la Junior Gong in "Welcome to Jamrock." In "I Love Yuh" with Alaine, Busy tells it like it is - that he's got a lot of female friends and fans, but "No worry, I will never leave you lonely. Gal, my love for you will never end."

The wordplays that Jamaicans (rastas especially) love so much come through in another one of his interludes - a woman asks Busy if he's ready for a relationship. He replies, "Baby, no, but we could gladly try a relation-boat, or a relation-jet ski, or a relation-raft, or a relation-canoe... Cau' di ship too BIG!"

He's got guests with him – Bounty Killer (apparently a hero of his) on "Do the Maths" and Alaine on "I Love Yuh." There are a couple of tracks with Movado, and one with Kris Kelly as well. Unfortunately I don't know much beyond that about the production credits, since the label sent me a pre-released burned copy ("Tracklist printed with iTunes," is the only information I got).

The harmonies are fluid and Busy's delivery is confident – his notes are strong and on point. The melodious way about his music is lacking in a lot of dancehall. "Step Out," the title track, was a huge hit in Jamaica in 2005 and my feeling is that a large international audience will follow very soon. He seems to have the charisma, the originality, the talent, and the common sense needed to propel his own career – and if he stays humble, authentic, and works hard, the sky's the limit.

For more information, visit www.greensleeves.net or www.busvsianal.biz.

