

Vol. 2 No. 6 1982

Upbeat

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S.A. MAGAZINE FOR TEENAGERS

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Upbeat talks to **REGGAE** band **UB40**



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UB40 is the name of one of Britain's top reggae groups. UB40 stands for Unemployment Benefit Form Number 40. People who are without work in Britain have to fill in this form before they can receive dole money.

The eight band members, with a large sound and lighting crew, visited Zimbabwe in May this year for a short tour.

Two of the six shows were cancelled because of heavy rainfalls, and there were misunderstandings and disagreements with their promoters. Despite this, UB40 was sorry to leave Zimbabwe.

They want to come back, they say, and they would like to build a studio in Zimbabwe, where local music could be well-recorded, and where they would record their own albums.

To date they have recorded two albums: *Signing Off*, and *Present Arms*. They always record abroad anyway "for tax purposes," and Zimbabwe is a place where they could make a contribution to the development of the local recording industry.

Upbeat spoke to lead vocalist Ali Campbell, his brother, guitarist Robin Campbell, and drummer Jim Brown, about the tour and about their music.

Upbeat: Do you describe your music as reggae?

Robin: Yes, we play reggae. There's a false belief that you have to be black or you have to be Jamaican to play reggae. We think that's nonsense, racist nonsense. It's like saying you have to be white to play classical music. That's a ridiculous thing to say!

There are a lot of white bands trying to play reggae who can't play reggae. But that's not because they're white, it's because of their influences. It's because

UB40 in Zimbabwe

Upbeat talked to UB40 about their music and their tour of Zimbabwe in May.

they're rock-influenced, rock-orientated.

Jim: I've heard plenty of rock bands that can't play reggae either, because they're English blacks, brought up on rock music or whatever.

Robin: Yes - and I was in Barbados, which is only down the road from Jamaica and they can't play reggae there to save their lives.

There are show bands playing in the hotels and they play American soul music: Commodores-type stuff, with an occasional reggae number thrown in.

Jim: It's called jam jar reggae because it goes jam jar, jam jar, jam jar.

Upbeat: Jar or Jah?
(Laughter)

Robin, Jim, Ali: Jar.

All three insisted that reggae has changed enormously in the last two years, and complained that the new Jamaican reggae is seldom played on the radio in Britain, much less in Africa.

They mentioned groups like Roots Radix band, Scientist, Captain Sinbad and Gregory Isaacs, who probably sell more records than even Bob Marley in many places, but haven't been heard of in Britain.

Ali: The only Jamaican reggae that's available here is stuff like 3rd World and Marley of course. But 3rd World are nothing to do with reggae any more - they're playing disco for the American market.

Robin: It's interesting that before we came on stage in Harare, we were playing some new reggae records over the sound system, and a



bunch of guys in the front row were shouting, 'We want some reggae!' It was reggae playing. They weren't even aware of it because it didn't sound like 3rd World or Bob Marley.

UB40 say that they don't regard themselves as musicians, and that it's a



Ali Campbell, Jim Brown and Robin Campbell reading *Upbeat*.



myth that you have to be specially talented to play music.

Jim: We make a big point about it – we don't play to musicians because we'd get shown up if we did!

(Laughter)

Robin: I'm not into playing to musicians anyway because I'm not into the musicians' trip: "Look how quickly my fingers move," that sort of thing.

Ali: Basically, we want to play music to people who just enjoy music for its own sake, not according to how clever it is, or how difficult to play. Just because it's nice to

listen to or dance to or whatever.

Jim: Yes, people are encouraged to think you've got to dedicate your life, eighteen hours a day, to playing a musical instrument. Then in 12, 13, maybe 20 years you might be half good! We're saying that's nonsense. I mean you can do it after six months, because we did.

Robin: None of us could play. We just picked up an instrument and started. Six months later we were doing gigs.

Now if we can do it, anybody can do it. All you have to do is **want** to do it. It's only like learning to type a letter. All you do is put your fingers there and do that. If you want to do it it's easy. It's when you don't want to do it it's horrible.

Jim: And the disgusting thing is that musicians actually believe it as well, they're encouraged to

believe they're an elite, that they were born with a gift. But nobody's born with a gift. Nobody's better than anybody else at birth.

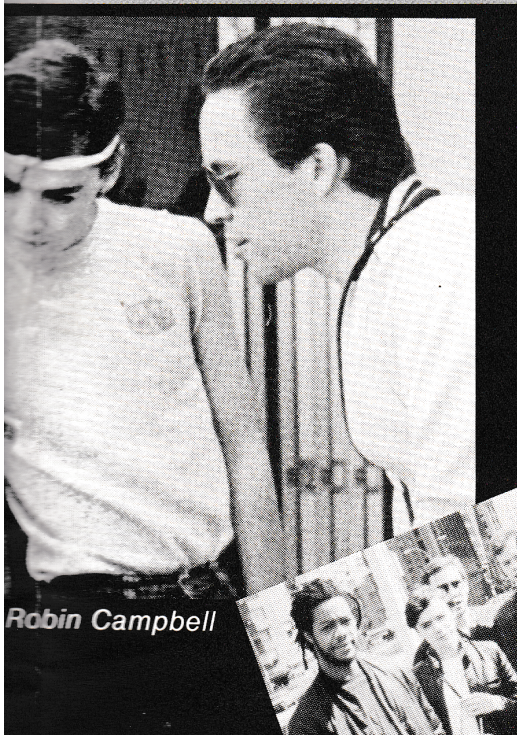
Robin: Compared to John Williams or Eric Clapton I'm a useless guitarist, technically hopeless. But that doesn't make the music bad. The music's good, the combination of inputs. It's the end result that counts.

Ali: We know our end result, we knew it before we even started a band. But because we're more experienced now than when we started three years ago, we're able to do what we want to do easier and quicker.

Jim: Perhaps the audiences here were a bit put off by the fact that we don't behave like stars, we don't dress up to come on stage and that. I think they expect a bit of glitter.

Upbeat: I think you supply a lot of glitter. People were dumb-struck by your light show, and also your act is note-perfect, just like the records!

Robin: That's what we try to do, to make our live performance as close to the record as possible. Very often we don't put stuff down on record if we don't think we'll be able to reproduce it live. Which I think is very important because whether you like it or not, people have come to hear the record they bought. If you can get as close to that as possible then you're winning. And that's why we're a very successful live band, I believe.



Robin Campbell



Above and left the whole band. Below Astro, Brian Travers and Earl Falconer.

