

One, Interview w/ Sister Nancy

By Corey Poluk



I sat down with the artist of with the most sampled song of all time, and a pillar of the dacehall community, to ask her a couple of questions about what her legacy means to her during the 20th Anniversary of Victoria Ska & Reggae Festival.

CP: Seminal moment here for us in Victoria, and for this community. It's been 20 years. How does it feel to be so someone who can deliver on big moments in our community? And how does it feel to be able to put your stamp...well you've already put your stamp on reggae music...

SN: On the wall.

CP: Exactly! More than on the wall, you've built your own wall! But how does it feel to also put your stamp here, and bring that here?

SN: Well it's a normal feeling if you're in the position the I'm in. You know, after doing it so long and if you're doing something so long everything does feel normal. Because you know, it's my job. It's my world. This is what I do for a living. So it doesn't matter where I perform, or where I go it's just the same thing. You know, it feels the same. It's leaves to say how do YOU feel? How do THE PEOPLE, who come to see me feel? Ya know? Because when I go out there to perform I always do my best. I don't try, but I DO my best. It's up to the people who come to see Sister Nancy, how they feel. I know how I feel already, just as I said it's my job. I go to entertain, to perform. I just hope that people who come to see me feel the same way I do.

CP: Well said. Absolutely. So I got a chance to talk with the band that you played with, The Phonosonics.

SN: Yeah.

CP: Really nice guys.

SN: First time. I just met them.

CP: Which is incredible and I asked them about this. So playing with them. How did you like it?

SN: Well you know I told them I've never been to a rehearsal. You know in all my years of doing this, I've never been to a rehearsal. I don't believe in rehearsin' not me! You know, I think rehearsal are for singers, not for DJs. Because I'm a DJ. You know or whatever you want to call it. I'm a DJ. In Jamaica we say DJ. Your version of DJ is a person who play the music, like a disc jockey.

CP: Exactly.

SN: In Jamaica, DJs the person who toast on the mic. I tell them, I don't need to rehearse. You know cause I talk. I don't sing. So you know, singer sings in A flat B flat. You know all those keys? I don't need keys. I just talk. But you know the promoter ask me very nicely. He said "Sister Nancy I just need you to go, even just once." and you know, being that I'm here from Wednesday I said "Yes let me go and listen and play the tracks" and... they got them. I didn't have to go. They played them well.

CP: I felt the same way. It reminded me of this scene in "Rocksteady Roots Of Reggae" where Derrick Morgan... You know when he performs now, you can see the music...it brings life. You know? There's a life force in the music. Seeing you, it's the same thing.

SN: It should be, it should feel like that.

CP: And it was felt. I think everyone felt that.

SN: I know they did, I know they did.

CP: It's been 37 years...1982...One, Two...The seminal album.

SN: The One Two Album is from 1982 yes.

CP: "Only Woman DJ With Degree".

CP: You know I think of the Pantheon, I think of the Mount Rushmore if you will of Jamaican DJs. You know in mine is King Stitt, You got Dennis Al Capone, You got I Roy...

SN: The greatest, all of them.

CP: And you! How does it feel to be on that Mount Rushmore? To be in that pantheon, and to be bringing it, and to continue to bring it, and in that... encouraging women to follow in your footsteps? How does it feel to be doing that?

SN: It feels wonderful and I'm not going to say it don't. It does. And...It's not like following. It's just like...Having the opportunity of teaching you know, other ladies or female the way to go about doing this DJing from a woman's perspective. You know cause it's really not easy for a woman. You know maybe it's easy for these ladies now, but back in the days for me. It was really a rough rough rough road. But you know, I still hang on to it because I see that this is something that I wanted to do. With all those men...I work with all of those great men. More times, sometimes 36 men and just me, just this little brown girl, and I stick it out because it's something that I really wanted to do. And you know I have to say thanks to my brother Brigadier Jerry, cause I see him do it and I say "I always wanna be just like him". So everything that he does, I wanted to do. It doesn't matter what they say, or what they do, or the beatings I get. I get so much beatings and all that. Stuff happened to me... But I said this is something that I have to do, and I have to stay there. I'm glad I got the opportunity of doing it, so now other ladies could come and you know, see that it's something that all of us can do.

CP: Absolutely. You carved a path. And were so happy to have you. I really want to say from everyone. Thank you so much for being a part of this.

SN: You're welcome and I hope I come back again.

