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Pato Banton

Interview with
Robby Takac
pg. 9



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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

PATO BANTON

By Glenn Swift

Ten years ago, British reggae great, Pato Banton, was touring the United States just like he is now...but my how things have changed.

“Back then, it was all about seeking success and making a name for myself. Now it’s very different. I’ve achieved far more than my wildest dreams and I just want to give back. I look at music as my ministry, my ministry of love. And I want to spread that love to everyone. After all, that’s really what reggae is all about, showing one love for all of humanity, regardless of what color you are or what language you speak,” said Banton, echoing the words of the legendary Bob Marley a generation ago.

Banton’s path to success was not exactly paved in gold. The child of Jamaican parents, Banton was born and raised in the industrial city of Birmingham, England, a breeding ground for avant-garde musicians going back to the R&B days of the 1950s and early 60s.

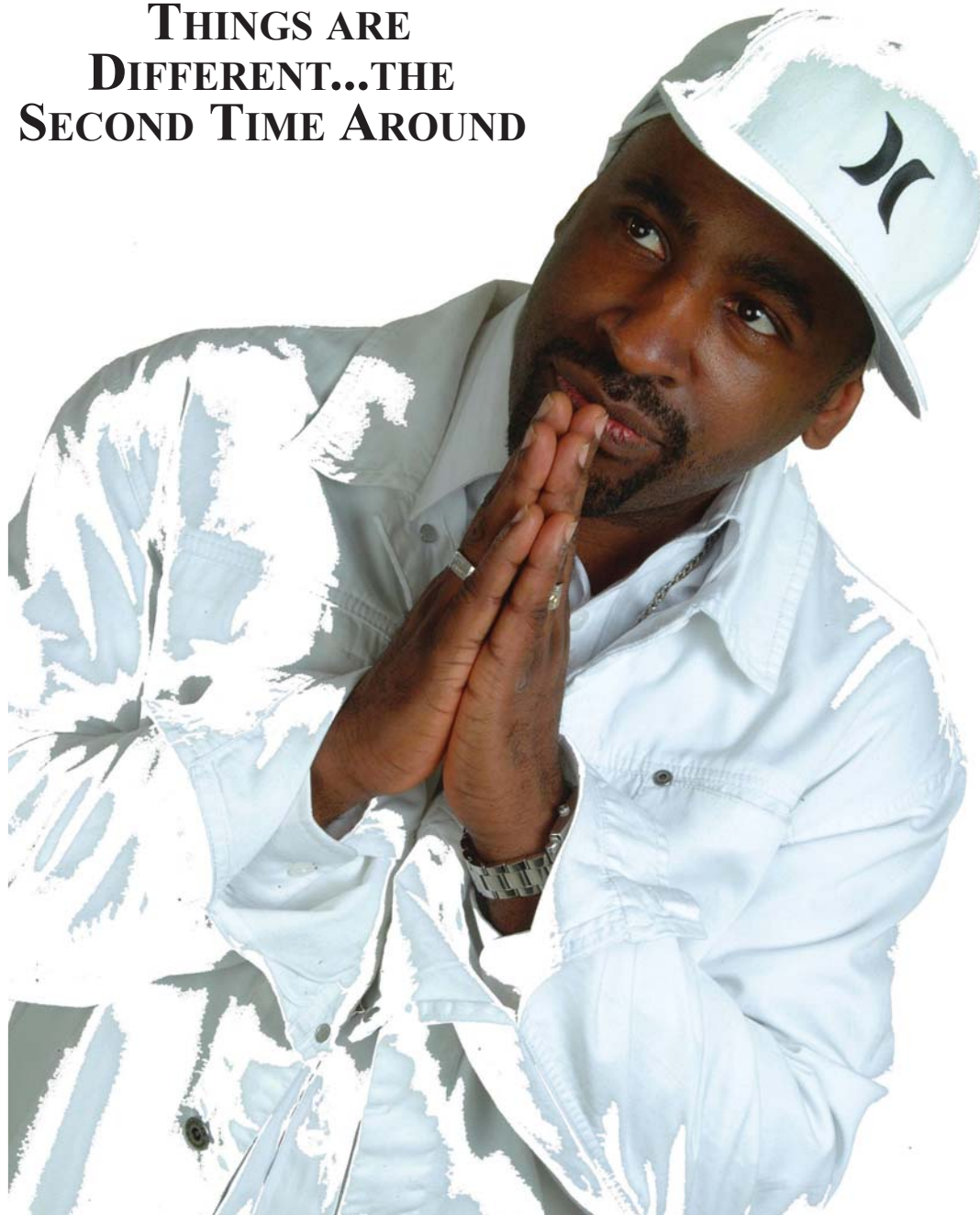
“Like so many before me, music offered an escape from the often difficult everyday life in the city,” said Banton. “And from the earliest I can remember, I loved music. My father was a DJ, and I listened to all different types.”

But something magical happened when Banton heard his first reggae song. “I fell in love,” he said. “Ever since, it’s been all about reggae.”

Reggae also offered Banton something else, an identity to which he never had before.

“I never felt completely comfortable in Anglo-Saxon culture, because it wasn’t my culture. My heritage was that of the African experience in the West Indies. For me, reggae filled a cultural void,” said Banton, ironically in his distinctly English Midlands accent.

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT...THE SECOND TIME AROUND



Banton began recording in 1982 with Ranking Roger of English Beat. Three years later, he appeared as a guest artist on the UB40 album, *Baggariddim*. It was about this time that the budding star changed his name from the Anglo-Saxon-sounding Patrick Murray to the one with which we are most familiar. (He had been

nicknamed “Pato” by his stepfather -- Jamaican patois for “wise owl.” As for “Banton,” that’s British urban street jargon for “heavyweight DJ.”)

Banton’s solo debut was in 1987 with the release of *Never Give In*, which included a collaboration with the renowned Paul Shaffer. After an EP in

1988, Banton released a more pop-oriented LP, *Visions of the World*, followed up two years later with *Wize Up! (No Compromise)*. This latter work included a college radio hit in “Spirits in the Material World” (later covered by The Police) and another collaboration, “Wize Up!,” with David Hinds of Steel Pulse.



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Banton then worked on a live album with Mad Professor, before releasing the highly-acclaimed Universal Law in 1992. After a British #1 hit in Baby Come Back (originally recorded by Eddie Grant while performing with The Equals) with Robin and Ali Campbell of UB40, a best-of album was released. In 1996, he released Stay Positive, which was followed in 2000 by Life Is a Miracle, for which Banton received a Grammy nomination for Best Reggae Album the following year.

At the present time, Banton is touring with Mystic Roots, a reggae band formed out of Chico, California.

"It's great performing in the States. In many ways it's a purer form of reggae. Back in Britain, a great many of the reggae artists have fused their work with hip-hop, because the hip-hop and reggae scenes there go hand in hand. Then again, many reggae fans in the UK don't want to take a reggae artist seriously unless they're from Jamaica."

In some ways, success has opened new doors for Banton.

"As an established artist, I've got a lot more freedom to experiment in my music and take some risks that I couldn't afford to when I was just starting out. Whereas so many reggae groups will use the same basic rhythms over and over, I prefer to mix it up."

Something else makes Banton's work just a little different than the rest of the herd. With so many musicians nowadays, it seems to be only about them. Well, not with Banton.

"I've always had a big band, and I like to showcase the other musicians so that each one can display their own individual talent and style."

You can hear Pato Banton live, along with another reggae superstar, Mikey Dread, at the Sunrise Theatre in historic downtown Ft. Pierce on Saturday, August 4. Showtime is 8pm. For more information, please call 772-461-4775 or visit www.sunrisetheatre.com.



Pictured-Mary Jayne Raleigh, MAMMA MIA! North American Tour 2007 by Joan Marcus

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