

THE BEAT

GOES ON...

HP's exclusive interview with the English Beat's Dave Wakeling
Thursday, January 25 2001 at the Odyssey Nightclub, Ithaca, NY

**Not Sonny & Cher but Dave Wakeling.
And the beat goes on, take one.**

Hello, do you get interviewed often?

DW: (grins) Yes, twice a day.

Two times a day?

DW: Yep.

**I don't know much about General Public, or
should I say I know more about The Beat –
Which one do people ask you more about?**

DW: Well it really depends. The ska interviews ask about The Beat, and the 80's interviews ask about General Public, and bigger newspapers ask about both. I can't believe my luck that there's even one thing to talk about. Not about two, what about three with this lineup now so... It's all good I think.

**You had a few other projects, a solo record,
The Free Radicals.**

I'd say you stayed pretty active musically.

DW: Yeah, in recent years I've really been just a weekend warrior, playing in Los Angeles and helping to raise two little babies. And now they're both at school, and the record company London Records is gonna bring out a Best of The English Beat sometime in the spring. We decided to come around and show off a bit. We thought we were starting to get good enough to come out of California. (pointing at HP #6's Specials interview) Ooh look, here's Neville in the paper... He's got his picture in the paper!

**I saw you on cable last summer! On VH-1's
'WHERE ARE THEY NOW? THE NEW WAVE'**

DW: Where the hell are they now...

How'd that go?

DW: Excellent. I mean they can go two different ways, you know 'cause they interview you for about 8 hours. They'd go on and on and on, basically then they edit all the contradictions together so you look like an idiot. There was a couple of people that they had on the same show, that they just get them to say something, and then edit them saying the exact opposite. And just make them look daft, or else they can just be really sweet and pick all the gems that you come out with and string 'em together like you're really erudite and they did the second one for me, so I came across great. I was very pleased.

You've worked with solar energy in the past.

DW: Yes, that's right. I worked for Greenpeace for five years. I took a break from music after I did the solo record, and it had sort of broken my heart. IRS Records had insisted I come to America, and they were going to look after me and had all sorts of fantastic stories about how Sting surrounds himself with people who he thinks is better than him and that's what makes a great record. I was flattered and came out, Miles Copeland promised me the earth, his assistant Jay Boberg gave me dirt, and so I walked away from the record then thinking if I turned my back on it, it didn't exist. Miles gave it to 2 guys that owed him money to finish, (laughs) and they brought it out and called it No Warning. That was the



solo record. Funny, isn't it? (laughs)
Have you been following the California power shortages? The blackouts in the last couple of weeks?

DW: Well, it's been wonderful, I've been following them on CNN. You know, at the moment it's just Northern California still, isn't it? So nothing has happened down our way yet. But I heard some very interesting theories, that it's having such an effect, particularly on hi-tech industries that they're losing so many millions of dollars a day, that if it goes on for a little while longer, it's enough to cause a recession in California, which of course will mean a recession in America, and that will cause a recession in the world, then George Bush will be right, which will make a pleasant change as much. (laughs)

You headed up the Alternative NRG Solar Project. Do you think there could be, or has there been another one since?

DW: Well they'd have to use our generator, 'cause it's a big project really to get a mobile generator that can store enough power. No, the technology is simple really. It's nothing that's very special, but it was a lot of time and effort to get the generator together. But it did its job because at the beginning of the year they told us that every campaign within Greenpeace had to focus on assisting the global warming and atmosphere campaign... Atmosphere and Energy Campaign I think it was called. So we scratched our heads and thought wouldn't it be great to make a record and sell the power, and then I thought the way of least resistance would be to make a live record, so you wouldn't be asking groups to do anything special for ya. You just take a feed from their live show, they wouldn't even know you were there really, you know. So they could just go about their business, and they gave us a song, we'd give them the 24, 48 or, in U2's case, 72 track live master and so they'd have a solar powered concert so they could do

**The Beat was introduced their very first show as
"The hottest thing since the Pennsylvania meltdown"**

what they wanted with, as a gift from Greenpeace. So we tried to make it, with my experience in the music business, I know that (pauses) My experience as a musician, is that however much your heart is into something charitable, if they mess you about, in the end you wish you'd never been involved, 'cause you have so much to do, and a lot of pressure already. I thought a lot well if we find a way of doing something that really doesn't bother them [the artists involved] and gives them something as an extra bonus, that would get their attention. And fair play, U2 and R.E.M. signed on first and then the floodgates opened. Everybody wanted in then.

You've also done songs for soundtracks, movies like the theme for She's Having a Baby, and General Public did 'I'll take you there' in Threesome, also The Beat's 'Rotating Head' was in the final sequence of Ferris Bueller's Day Off -

DW: That's all right. Tenderness was at the end of Clueless.

How did those all come about?

DW: John Hughes was a Beat fan, and then he was a General Public fan and he loved the song Tenderness. He said that anyone that had got the balls to put a bassoon in a pop song nowadays has got his vote, you know. He just kept sticking songs in films all the time. I went down to his house and everything; it was great. I want to meet John Cusack now because he's been doing the same lately. And I'm a big fan of his, I don't know if he knows that, I'd like to tell him one day.

Have you followed the ska scene in the last ten years or so?

DW: Yeah, somewhat, um, I don't go so much with those theories of first wave, second wave, third wave. I think really it's just one big ocean of ska and when it becomes popular we notice the crest on the top of a wave and say "Ooh look, it's another wave." But as you probably know yourself that ska didn't stop in between first and second wave. It barely took a breath between second wave and third wave, in fact many of the bands Toasters, No Doubt, Mighty Mighty Bosstones, they was playin' as the last wave was still squirming at the end there. Um... as is the same in every other type of music, I suppose. You know I don't try to get involved in those "Oh, which do you think was the best wave?" discussions. The good groups, they're always great and the bad groups are always a pile of shit. And uh, you can tell the difference usually at a concert within a couple of songs. Is it their heart and soul or are they bandwagoning? And there are plenty of "ska" groups in California that were heavy metal bands two weeks before they decided to go and

fly the chequered flag you know, got more chicks at a gig then a ska band.

The Beat wasn't formed a year and you had a top ten hit.

DW: It was bizarre. All our friends hated us... It was wonderful. Yeah, we got our first show in March 1979. In fact, where we played last night was real close to somewhere important to us, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. That was the weekend of Three Mile Island "nuclear incident" there as it was called, and The Beat was introduced their very first show as "the hottest thing since the Pennsylvania meltdown" and I should have

known then it was gonna be an acrid project. Right from then.

Was it more of the song, the band, or do you think it was more the climate of the time, 2Tone?

DW: With the single?
Yeah

DW: Oh, it was definitely the song. We learned "Tears of a Clown" because we were having a hard time trying to get our own songs together. We had very different musical influences, it wasn't a peer group, you know. Saxa was in his late 50's and Roger was 16. We all liked different groups and we were trying to blend these different things like a rose breed, a might trine hybrid you know. And the drummer, Everett said, I actually wanted to kick him when he first struck the idea, "Well why don't we try and learn a song that we all know, practice that, and then do one of them weird ones like Mirror in the Bathroom that you do?" And we did that and it worked great, so you know, we'd play Tears of a Clown, Big Shot, Tears of a Clown, Mirror in the Bathroom, Tears of a Clown, Twist and Crawl, and it really, really worked. By the time we had

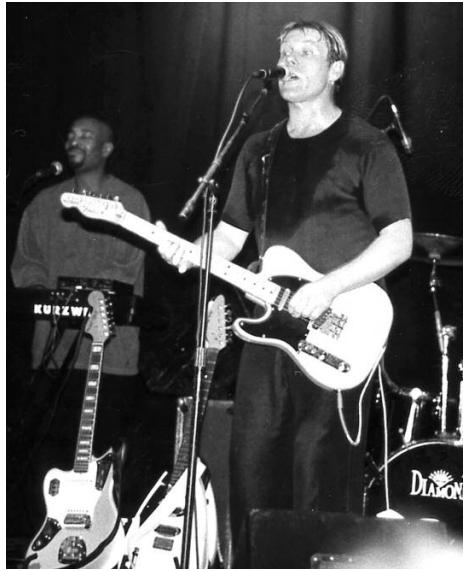
got 6 or 7 songs ready, David Steele quite rightly said that one gig is worth a thousand rehearsals and we ought to do some concerts. At this point, we've only got 6 songs. So we were like oh my god. So Tears of a Clown quickly made it into the set. But at the beginning we played anywhere that would give us a show, like some nights we was playing to punks, some nights to rastas, some nights to old age pensioners. You know, it was like anywhere we could. And sometimes the punk songs or faster songs would go down; sometimes the reggae songs would go down, every night, Tears of a Clown went off. Everybody knew the words. So when the Specials asked us would we like to make a single on 2Tone, they said that they would like Mirror in the Bathroom to start off with. But then, Chrysalis Records sent us a letter that said just sign here and we own the song for five years right? And we were like what? We had only just learned to play it. We haven't even made a recording of it. What are you talking about, you can't own it yet?!



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We argued and argued back and forth, back and forth but they wouldn't budge. So we said alright, well fuck you then. Have Tears of a Clown and you can argue with Smokey Robinson about it and owning the rights to it, you know. So we did Tears of a Clown and it turned out to be just the same as it was at all the clubs, like everybody loved this, to the point where younger fans who had not been around for Smokey Robinson said, "Somebody else has done your song you know" (laughter) Cheers!



You mentioned the Specials and their 2Tone. The Beat also went on and founded its own label, Go Feet Records.

DW: Yes.

That was kind of modeled after 2Tone

DW: It was, but it didn't work very well. It was a bit of a mistake really. Arista Records were not into it, we did manage bring out a couple of singles. Singles which they made sure got buried thick and fast, you know. It really ended up, I'm afraid, as just an opportunity to embarrass your friends in public. After 2 or 3 singles we left it. (laughter) Though we ended up bringing out... It was a great record, a fantastic reggae record, one of my favorite reggae records, Heart of the Congos, [Later to be on Blood & Fire UK] um mixed by Scratch as well, by Lee Perry. And it had been a big favorite record of ours and we got to meet Cedric Myton, the singer, or one of the singers, but the record is impossible to get. My copy of it was scratched, so we re-released it on Go-Feet, remastered it and everything wonderful (laughter). It worked out good for that, but it didn't work out very well as a... It didn't work out like 2Tone did anyway. And probably right you know, they'd already had the idea, it was probably a bit daft to try to emulate it.

Who came up with The Beat girl cartoon? Who drew it?

DW: A pretty famous cartoonist called Hunt Emerson did that and most of the artwork for the first couple of Beat records. He's probably most well known for a rather dirty, no pornographic cartoon that appears in

"gentleman's magazines", as I believe they call them, called Ferkin the Cat. He draws, he gave birth to Ferkin the Cat and, the notion behind it was, Horace, the bass player from Specials, he'd drawn the 2Tone man right? [I always thought it was Dammers – ed.] Later he ended up playing in General Public on the bass, the first few shows the Beat did, it was all a bunch of lads trying to split each other's noses with their foreheads whilst we sang songs. And so we thought, wow, if that 2Tone man had got a girl to dance with, he might start behavin' a bit better, you know? So we talked to Hunt and we'd gave him a photograph we'd found of Prince Buster dancing with a girl in front of a jukebox and just the way she's holding herself, you just knew. She'd got groove. And he drew a beat girl and we started using that as our logo, and god damn, loads of skinhead and suedehead girls started turning up to gigs. Loads of girls started dressing like the beat girl, coming to gigs, and now all the skinheads and rude boys, they were on such good behavior at our gigs. We ended up doing really well, and

"Loads of girls started dressing like the beat girl, coming to gigs, and now all the skinheads and rude boys, they were on such good behavior"

people would say "Oh, we like your shows much better, 'cause there's no fighting is there?" So the boys were just so busy trying to impress the girls that they stopped trying to razor each other in the name of some soccer team or whatever it was, you know? It worked very well. So much so that later on, it even got written up in some sociology book that was used as a University textbook about the growing power of women in British society! (bursts into laughter and slaps the table)

Fascinating. As a musician what are your thoughts on MP3 technology? Is music as we know it finished?

DW: It doesn't sound as good as records, that's for sure. I worked a little while at MP3.com and was thoroughly disappointed. (pauses) For all the bad talk about record companies, and there's plenty of reason for some of it, there are at least people in record companies that love music, and they understand that you've got to invest and speculate on music and great things might happen, even though any one album out of 10 might recoup. But at the least... It's kind of like saying would Michaelangelo have painted the Sistine Chapel if he had to buy the paints himself? I don't know, probably not. (pauses) I was very disappointed when I went to MP3.com that they treated musicians so badly compared to most record companies. Record companies would get sued if they treated their artists like that. They were like computer snobs I felt. There were some people... They hired some people that liked music, but was sort of new to them pretty quickly, and to me, it just seemed like just new-wave capitalist computer geeks who could be sellin' anything – they could give a fuck about music. And I didn't notice that really fully until I went to a... We did a show, an MP3.com college tour, and there was quite a few of what they call "baby bands" and they were ordering them around, shoutin' at them, and tellin' them if they didn't behave they were kicked off the tour! I went back to talk to the boss in San Diego, I was like if you treat your artists like this, you shouldn't be involved in

music, and you won't last. And I don't know what he took to now, but I know they're under some serious pressure from the big, bad music industry. I tell you, they were no better, which is a shame. As for the technology I think you... (turns to J. McCain) There's three levels of it now right? Three levels of MP3s?, and the best quality of it sounds alright. The usual, lets-do-it-quick sounds awful, I think it sounds like crap. But then it took me a long while to get used to CDs, frankly. You know, until digital sampling started to get to 20 or 24 bit, I thought it was awful. When it was 8, 12, and 16 bit hi-hats and cymbals sound horrible on early digital stuff, really horrid. Somebody even explained why it was non-linear distortion or something. Like you get distortion naturally on a record recording analog, but it makes things ring, (harmonics) so the guitar'll make the drum ring. The drum will make the guitar amp vibrate and so you get harmonic distortion. With all digital stuff you get non-harmonic distortion; so essentially it's just numbers making other numbers vibrate kind of randomly, and until it got to really tight sampling, 24 bit sampling, I thought it sounded awful. Now, either they've gotten the technology down or in my dotage, I'm going deaf and I can't tell the difference. But, 24 bit sounds... Modern.

Do you still ever keep in touch with former bandmate Ranking Roger?

DW: Yeah, when I saw him in October I bought him a Guinness. I had walked into a pub in Moseley 'cause somebody said that Saxa was playing there. I walked in and Everett was playing the drums, Saxa was playing the sax, Roger was toasting and Roger's eldest son was also toasting with him. It was like, fuck. It was really good, it was a great night out. We all talked afterwards, it was just lovely, and I asked them, I think I might have irritated them a bit 'cause I asked them would it be alright with this Beat record going out... I tried to get the original English Beat together again to do shows. Everybody would do it except David Steele who says he'll do it but not right now and so I asked them if I could use the name "English Beat". I said c'mon, I'm gonna be sellin' the 'best of' record for ya. My band sounds great. But one or two of them are kind of pissed about it, so I had to call this tour the English Beat's Dave Wakeling. But hopefully no offense taken, as there's none meant. (laughter)

We were talking earlier about how London reissued The Beat catalogue in 1999

DW: Yes.

And personally I had probably just in the past year, heavily gotten into your band The Beat.

DW: Ah.

Because they've been available

DW: Right, They've only just been available haven't they... here in the states?

Before that I only knew compilation songs; Mirror in the Bathroom, Rankin' Full Stop, Tears of a Clown ...Big Shot

DW: Right, yes well I.R.S. did us the weirdest favor really by fucking us over so thoroughly. They made us like an underground classic, a real rarity. Then they went bankrupt and the records went out of print and everyone was buying them on Ebay for like 40 bucks. We were like, god damn! the first time everybody's scrambling for my records, it's double the price and I don't make a royalty! (laughter)

How does the song "Too Nice to Talk to" fit in? I have the LP of that same second album and it's not the first track there. Why was that added to the update? Was it a non-album single?

DW: It was a single between the first and the second album. 'Cause in England, if you didn't come out with a single every three months, you were dead. They just hated you.

They would forget about you

DW: You know, The Beat - the who? No, The Beat, The Who? No, The Beat! (laughter) Yeah, it was a single in-between. All the singles had finished charting off of the first album, and it was the first song that we recorded and then went on to record the second album not long after that. We were all so frightened about it because we thought it was a disco song. You know it sounded different to us. We liked the beat of it, the rhythm somewhere is where the bassline came from. It was a butum, butum, solid. It was from an R & B song I think. But we were so worried about it, that we finished the mix and the band was like really conflicted you know. Some people were like, "It sounds great!"; others were like, "Ooo, it don't sound like us. What if all the ska fans think we've gone disco or something?" So, we went down to Camden Market, which was just down the road and we grabbed this bunch of kinda rough-looking skinheads. Said, "Do you want to come to this studio and listen to this song? (grunts affirmative) We marched them all in, played the song, we sat there. They seemed to like it. We asked "What does it sound like?" "Well, it sounds like the fuckin' Beat buddin' it?" they said. I didn't wanna put it out (laughter) and it went up to Number 6 in the charts! It was a relief! Oh good, no disco.

But we were really nervous at the time. We're going to do that song soon, put it in the set. I like that. It was story of a club called Barbarella's. There have been a few songs about Barbarella's; punk songs. It was a great club, but twenty-past two, didn't matter what was going on, all the lights went on and the record went screeeee-eeech! (sound of needle ripped off turntable) and "OUT!" And you'd just be in heaven, and some of the people there might have taken pills or something. Me, I would never recommend that to young people, but they told me that some people had been doing that sort of thing, and you'd just be in heaven. There'd be some



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beautiful girl. Time was standing still. I'm gonna talk to her in a minute, I am. I'm gonna, go over there, and then it would be like *screeeech!* "OUT!" Aw shit! It's too late now. It's twenty-past two. I've spent all night just watching you.

There's a lot of heavy political message in Beat songs and that's clearly common in both reggae and punk...

DW: Yes, thank you! Thank you! That's why! Everybody goes "Oh, why were you so political?" It's like I don't know, do you even listen to Bob Marley or the fucking Sex Pistols? It didn't seem.. Do you think that's what he was meant to sing about? It wouldn't be sincere unless you were singing about what was going on in your life. What was on the news and what was affecting you, you know? It was only fashion, but it was a fashion of social realism at that point in music.

Do you think that's important to all music?

DW: Well, music has different functions, doesn't it? Sometimes music can serve as just pure escapism. What we found was, after a few 2, 3, 4 years of social realism and social commentary; The Jam, The Clash, the 2Tone stuff, followed by far unbeknown Buzzcocks and all of that, I think the social situation in England got so bleak, that people just couldn't bear another fucking song about unemployment. It's like you know I've been unemployed for 3 or 4 years now, shut the fuck up. So it soon became, I know, I want to listen to a song that's like some group on a yacht with loads of models you know, and Duran Duran was born. And they're from our town too, they're from Birmingham also. So that type of new romanticism was born as a reaction to too much social realism. Everybody in the groups looked exactly the same as the people in the audience, and by end of the night most of the audience was on the stage anyway. That became a conscious thing of trying to break the barriers between performer and audience. You know, it wasn't that we didn't want to appear to be demi-gods there to be adjudicated. We were lucky. We'd gotten a job and offered one at 'em. But it turned almost full cycle and then people wanted music just as sheer escapism. Just get me out of here. Adam Ant and Duran Duran and the like came and killed 2Tone, I suppose, as far as the English charts were concerned anyway.

What about the role of spirituality in music? Do you have a particular take on that? The hall was flooded with incense tonight.

DW: Yes. I was very lucky to have Saxa as a mentor. Saxa was much older than us. He'd been around the block so many times, when I started in the group I was really nervous-like. I'd get loaded-up drunk and just throw up just before going on stage and stuff like that. First or second time we played in London, I was shakin' and had cold sweats and oh my god, how can I do this?

And Saxa said, "You're the lucky one, you are. These people have paid to come here, walked to the bus stop in the rain, got on the bus, walked from the bus to the concert in the rain. They're going to go back in the rain and all you've got to do is entertain them. You're the lucky one." So he got my attention with that and it stopped me from being freakin' out before the gigs. So, I soon started to ask him more and more about music. What it stood for; what it signified, and he told me that he'd had to leave school at a very early age. Before he even really had proper education, he said. On his way out walking out the drive, the last day of school, God spoke to him and said, "Sorry you've got to go and help your dad on his fishing boat. I'm sorry you didn't get a proper education. You need to build yourself a bamboo flute and any time you play it, you can talk to me directly." So, Saxa convinced me that everytime you play your instrument you are praying. You're talking directly to God. So if you look at it in that point, there's no such thing as a bad gig and there's no such thing as a bad P.A. system, which, I've often felt there is, but it turns out not. So it's as connected as that, I think. Unless you mean it with your heart and your soul, you're better to shut up and go home. Don't waste other people's time because, I know as a pop music fan and listener, the things that moved me were the things that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. For me maybe it was Tamla Motown, or Motown as it's called here. The Rolling Stones' "Ruby Tuesday" and "Walk Away Renee" by the Four Tops used to make me cry. And I always think about it. So now, people will say to me, that song "Tenderness" man, that means so much to me. They can't explain what it means, as long as it means that much, that's fine. That means that even though I didn't know what I was doing, I did it.

Along those same lines, Bob Marley himself once called your band The Beat his favorite 2Tone group. What'd you think of that?

DW: He did, didn't he. Well, I mean I could have cried and screamed for joy at the same time, you know. A journalist.. (pauses) A journalist in Finland had just done an interview with him the week before he had interviewed me and he told me that he'd [Bob] told him that as well. I mean he was my hero, and he managed to sing with compassion about very difficult subjects, and still remind the audience on the way out that it is still all love. It's alright. You know, don't cry. It's gonna be alright and he won an accolade. I never even thought I'd be in a group, but for Bob Marley to say we was his favorite 2Tone band, for Pete Townsend to play Save it for Later; to have Bowie impressed and for Elvis Costello to play Stand Down Margaret, I mean, I could just go home and die I'm sure, but I ain't gonna.

Yeah, what's next for you in 2001?

she's only seventeen

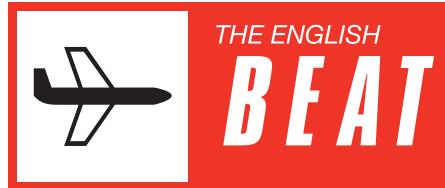
DW: It's a whole new millennium isn't it?

Playing at the Odyssey in Ithaca

DW: Yes.

A Space Odyssey.

DW: The Space Odyssey 2001, I said that on new year's eve. Something like "This a really weird night. It's like a total Space Odyssey dude!" (laughter) There really is a change in the air. How many people do you get into conversations with and everybody's talking about synchronicity. Syncronicity, I was just about to say that... and there's this wonderful explanation of it. If you get enough people in the world talking or thinking about mass-consciousness at the same time, and whether it exists or not, guess what? It does! (laughter) And I think that's what's going on, and I even see this farce of an



election in exactly the same light. This is indeed the age of Aquarius, but beyond the shadow of a doubt now, and the age of Aquarius is signified by the age of free-thinking gnosticism. We can't cling to institutions or anything, and you've got to find your own way. And if you fuck up, it's your karma, and nobody's going to save you. It's up to you, your soul's travel. If anybody thought that they could seek either comfort or trust not only from the government, but also now from the American judiciary who have shown their cards in the most vile and wilful of manners. It's a good lesson to us all that we have to look to ourselves now. We have to be personally responsible. You can't look to rulers anymore, 'cause you can't trust them and that as I

"It doesn't mean Russian guys running around in cloaks with bombs. It means the population as a whole finds a balance between freedom and responsibility"

understand it, is the (pauses) true meaning of anarchy. Anarchus - without rulers. It doesn't mean Russian guys running around in cloaks with bombs. It means the population as a whole, finds a balance between freedom and responsibility and itself acts an *archus* - without rulers. And that's what the Age of Aquarius is about. So, George Bush does us the biggest favor, and Rhenquist,



although he'll burn in hell...Oh no, there won't be a hell, will there? He'll burn in his own hell now. (laughter) He's doing us all a favor. And anybody who thought the political system was an anachronism doesn't have to worry about it anymore. It is.

Alright, I think that's about it, many thanks for your time.

DW: Yes, on that very happy note ha ha, let's skank! (laughter)

For the record, who are the musicians you're playing with now?

DW: Yes, what a good thing to discuss. Kevin Williams plays the guitar and sings backing vocals. He was in a couple of bands previously, The Bonedaddys and The Soul Sonics, and when I first moved to Los Angeles, I heard him sing and I thought he was an angel, and he is. He is actually a shaman, or shamen as you say over here. He's connected, he just is and um...

Jonnathan from the Toasters.

DW: Jonnathan McCain from the Toasters and New York Ska Jazz Ensemble on the drums. Mark Simms plays the bass. John Roy plays saxaphone and is the other vocalist, and he used to lead a band called Unsteady. Yeah, the traditional ska band out of San Diego that opened up for me often. I thought that he was really the closest thing I had heard in just passion and technique to Saxa that I'd heard here in America.

I agree, he is close.

DW: He really is. And not just when he plays Saxa's notes but when he plays his own notes, he plays it with the same dripping sincerity and passion. John's a very passionate person you think he's gonna explode sometimes. Also Rudy Richardson plays keyboards and does vocals, and our new boy is Mister Mixlee Moxlee, he's on toasting, rap, and vibes. (laughter)

Many thanks again for your time and music.

DW: Thank you very much. I like your magazine. See one of my new ventures at dawewakeling.com

Alright, very cool!

THE END

1-25-2001



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