17 Rhythm, Rasta, Rock, and "Electric Avenue": The Electric Guitar in Anglo-Caribbean Popular Music

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Introduction

This chapter foregrounds the roles of the electric guitar in Anglo-Caribbean popular music with particular reference to reggae and the instrument's culturally marginal position. It highlights the guitar's subordinate status in both recorded and live performance contexts, examining its functions as an almost subliminal kinetic force. The analysis primarily focuses on the global impact of reggae icons Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, both during their time in The Wailers and as solo artists, while also examining the career of Eddy Grant, whose eclectic commercial presence has remained guitar-centered. These analyses address the symbolic, cultural, and occasionally political roles of the electric guitar in Anglo-Caribbean performance, with emphasis on its international influence.

In the late 1950s, ska emerged in Jamaica, integrating indigenous, jazz, and R&B influences that foregrounded Afrocentric artistic expression after centuries of restrictive British colonialism. Jamaica's attainment of political independence from Britain in 1962 further ignited a flourish of creative activity through which the country's musical identity began to assume more distinct aural forms, with ska's high-tempo rhythmic intensity reflecting a burst of cultural confidence and national optimism.

Post-Second World War migration of West Indians to Britain created a niche international market for the local music, which almost imperceptibly mutated into the generally slower, more reflective rocksteady by the mid 1960s and then shortly thereafter into the first stages of reggae. Those Jamaican styles filtered beyond Britain's West Indian music underground, reaching marginal white audiences and gaining a limited mainstream singles chart foothold before the international emergence of The Wailers in the 1970s on the Island Records label as an album-oriented reggae group, leading to Bob Marley's stature as the genre's guitar-playing figurehead.

Historical analyses of Caribbean popular music have frequently overlooked the contributions of musicians from other former colonial

Caribbean islands, thus despite this chapter's emphasis on Jamaican music and influence, it will also incorporate references to artists from elsewhere in the region.

The history of the electric guitar in Anglo-Caribbean popular music assumes particular significance in the 1960s with the emergence of Jamaican Ernest Ranglin and Trinidad's Lynn Taitt (d. 2010) on a series of influential ska, rocksteady, and reggae hit recordings that largely defined the rhythmic and stylistic contours of the genres. Unfortunately, few interviews and commentaries discuss the moments of historical transition among the key players in Jamaica from mainly acoustic to primarily electric performance. It has been noted, for example, that while Jamaica produced a string of exceptional horn players (including Tommy McCook, Roland Alphonso, Johnny Moore, Baba Brooks, Don Drummond, and Rico Rodriguez), no such guitar legacy exists, with most performing secondary rhythmic roles.[1] Despite such anomalies, this chapter will demonstrate that the electric guitar has been both culturally and commercially significant in the growth and development of Anglo-Caribbean popular music, though its relevance and visibility have arguably receded significantly with the advance of digital music technologies since the 1980s. In particular, the chapter focuses on the stylistic developments evident on recordings in the 1970s and 1980s that reached international audiences.

Ernest Ranglin

A self-taught player, Ranglin recalls that legendary guitarists Charlie Christian (d. 1942), Django Reinhardt (d. 1953), and Les Paul (d. 2009) were among his earliest influences, with jazz as his creative root and extra artistic motivation provided by the bebop explorations of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane.[2] Ranglin was already performing in bands by age fifteen,[3] and numerous hotel gigs and recording studio sessions later followed his first stint at the radio studios of the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) that began in 1958. Besides his jazz performances, he played in the calypso-related folk style of mento before crucially contributing to the emergence of ska in the late 1950s, innovating with an offbeat staccato strum that soon defined the genre, especially through his work in the famed Skatalites band.[4]

Soon invited to work with Island Records founder Chris Blackwell during his JBC years while also functioning as Island's A&R man, Ranglin recorded one side of the label's debut album release (by pianist Lance Haywood) in 1959.[5] Blackwell encouraged Ranglin to move to England, and Island Records released his internationally available solo

albums in 1964, including *Wranglin'* and *Reflections*. Notably, the band on his 1964 EP *Ernest Ranglin and the G.B.'s* (on the Black Swan imprint, an Island subsidiary) included bassist Jack Bruce, a future member of the legendary British rock trio Cream.[6] Ranglin's relocation to England led to his pop-ska arrangement and performance on the million-selling international Millie Small hit single version of the American R&B song "My Boy Lollipop" (1964, credited to "Millie"), recorded in London. Though purportedly a ska record, "My Boy Lollipop" was recorded with British musicians, and the overall rigidity of the rendition, despite Ranglin's involvement, made it more overtly pop-oriented. That ironically contributed to the record's commercial success at a time when mainstream international audiences and radio were less familiar with West Indian rhythms.[7] Accompanying this commercial success credited with raising the profile of Jamaican music, Ranglin's credibility was greatly enhanced by his spell at Ronnie Scott's jazz club, resulting in acclaim in the *Melody Maker* 1964 readers' poll as the jazz guitarist of the year.[8]

Ultimately, Ranglin's work with key Jamaican producers and sound system operators, including Coxsone Dodd of Studio One, Duke Reid of Treasure Isle, Prince Buster, and the pioneering female producer Sonia Pottinger, made his electric guitar's sonic imprint integral to the sound of Jamaican popular music in its many shifting guises from ska through to reggae as it began developing international audiences. Those sessions included work with The Wailers and a very young Bob Marley.[9] Consistently retaining a jazz-styled warm, round, and soft electric tone often played on Gibson guitars,[10] stylistically comparable to his American contemporaries, Ranglin's vocabulary and musicianship helped set the standard for performance among Anglo-Caribbean guitarists. Apart from his pioneering work in ska and the transitional mid 1960s rocksteady style, Ranglin is considered one of the key participants in the invention of reggae,[11] although identification of any singular point of origin is usually historically contested. He recalls that his conflicting contractual obligations with Jamaican labels often meant that he could not play solos on recordings, forcing him to regularly revert to rhythm and bass guitar, frequently backing Lynn Taitt on lead guitar.[12] His influential engagement with Jamaican popular music was extended when he backed singer Jimmy Cliff during an Africa tour in 1976.[13] Despite his stylistic eclecticism, Ranglin's catalog of recordings sustains the resonances of his Jamaican genesis, fusing such components with jazz elements. Aside from his work on Millie's 1964 global hit "My Boy Lollipop" and numerous recordings by the seminal Skatalites, Ranglin played on the crucial instrumental proto-ska record "Shufflin' Jug" by Clue J and His Blues Blasters (*circa* 1959); Theophilus Beckford's "Easy Snapping" (*circa* 1959), considered by many

to be the first definitive ska record; and The Wailers' Jamaican debut hit single "Simmer Down" (1963). Among his many solo albums, the 1996 release *Below the Bassline* and 1997's *Memories of Barber Mack* are especially demonstrative of the ways in which his lyrical jazz performative style—derived from big band apprenticeships—successfully fuses with reggae rhythms.

Nerlynn (Lynn) Taitt

Nerlynn Taitt, best known as Lynn Taitt (d. 2010 at age 75), was born in Trinidad, where he developed his rhythmic skills as both a guitarist and a renowned steelpan performer before being brought to Jamaica in 1962 by bandleader Byron Lee.[14] He was initially hired as a backing musician for calypsonians, and Taitt's steel pan articulation of rhythm directly informed his syntactical execution on the electric guitar, propelling the music with a pulsating, heavily punctuated style.[15] On his journey toward becoming one of the most influential guitarists in Jamaican popular music, he occasionally played in the famous Skatalites before establishing himself as a mainstay in The Comets (*circa* 1964), The Jets (*circa* 1966), the All Stars, and The Supersonics session band for producer Duke Reid.[16] His first hit recording performance is thought to be on Baba Brooks' horn-driven 1965 instrumental single "Shank I Sheck," during which Taitt confidently takes a melodic solo. In the same year, he appeared on The Skatalites' "Guns of Navarone" that belatedly entered the British singles chart in April 1967, bubbling in the underground after its original release by Island Records. Taitt is, in fact, credited as one of rocksteady's innovators,[17] having made a crucial suggestion during a recording session to a keyboard player to slow down the ska tempo, resulting in the landmark Hopeton Lewis single "Take It Easy" (released in 1966, but recorded in 1965) tracked at Kingston's Federal Studios. Taitt's dry, unprocessed tone proved to be an ideal component of the post-ska reduction in rhythmic intensity, both coinciding with and propelling the rise of rocksteady, leading into the reggae era that has no fixed definitive starting date, but which occurs around 1967.

More importantly, Taitt's performances on several major international pop hit singles reinforced the imprint of his guitar style on the newly emergent reggae. His impact on Jamaica produced innumerable sessions, including work for prolific producer Lee Perry (d. 2021), but wider record distribution projected the sound of Taitt's performances into major music markets. Desmond Dekker's "007 (Shanty Town)" hit the British charts peaking at number 14 in the summer of 1967, and Taitt's introductory

rhythm guitar licks establish the record's sonic identity. Dekker's "Israelites" (1968) became a transatlantic Top 10 hit in 1969, perhaps surprisingly given the singer's use of unfamiliar Jamaican patois and Taitt's idiosyncratic yet complementary rhythmic phrasing, both decidedly uncommon on mainstream pop records. As one of the best-known Jamaican-produced hit singles of the late 1960s, it presents Taitt's electric guitar voice as simultaneously widely heard yet paradoxically underrecognized as a key kinetic force in reggae. By the time of his departure for Canada in 1968, Taitt had already made his mark on Jamaican popular music with his guitar work as one of the key instrumental participants in the 1960s transitions from ska to rocksteady to reggae.[18]

Those Desmond Dekker hits occurred either side of Taitt's international chart presence on the Johnny Nash single "Hold Me Tight" that peaked at number 5 in both Britain and America in 1968. Lyrically and vocally more accessible to mainstream audiences, with Nash as an American singer rendering the song in a soulful pop style, it might be argued that "Hold Me Tight" outflanked cultural resistance and projected Taitt's propulsive playing and the reggae genre into commercial prominence more quickly than might otherwise have been the case. With reggae in its commercial infancy in the 1960s, Taitt's percolating staccato guitar lines helped to establish the genre's rhythmic template, both in Jamaica and internationally. Notably, some sessions involved multitracked guitar parts that enhanced the sonic texture of the recordings,[19] despite limited overdubbing options due to the dominance of four-track machines in Jamaica in that era. While lesser-known session players helped shape the spaces occupied by the guitar in reggae, the global reach of Taitt's recorded performances makes him especially notable.

Bob Marley & The Wailers

Prior to the release of The Wailers' *Catch a Fire* album in 1973 by Island Records, reggae guitar reveled in its secondary rhythmic role, serving either percussive functions or lightly toned melodic accentuation as demonstrated by the sophisticated articulation of Ernest Ranglin and Lynn Taitt. By the 1970s, the intersection of postcolonial political consciousness influenced by historical and contemporary Black civil rights movements and Rastafarianism foregrounded lyrics challenging the brutalities of Western capitalism with appropriate accompanying instrumental intensity. *Catch a Fire* still employed the usually scratchy rhythm electric guitar as performed by both Bob Marley and Peter Tosh (whose solo contributions are discussed later), but it also

introduced a harder-edged blues-rock tonal sensibility to the material, serving Island's rock market crossover imperatives in the process. The production approach of label head Chris Blackwell was directly informed by a commercial motivation to break into American college radio airplay to build a broader audience base receptive to the new aural and visual presentation of reggae.[20] The guitar artistry of Ranglin and Taitt stylistically advanced the music but did not alter the perception of reggae as a novelty singles-centered genre, lacking the credibility and suitability for the wider, whiter album-buying youth market. As Blackwell sought to establish a Black rock group identity for The Wailers, he supplemented the Jamaican recordings made for *Catch a Fire* with rock-inflected overdubs in London, notably featuring the blues rock guitar of American player Wayne Perkins. In 1972, American singer Johnny Nash had produced Marley's commercially unsuccessful solo single "Reggae on Broadway" for CBS, characterized by a growling recurrent fuzz guitar rock riff. However, apart from its tonal peculiarity within an ostensible reggae track, that performance served a supporting role without including any solos. In contrast, the opening track on *Catch a Fire*, "Concrete Jungle," featured a brightly foregrounded sixteen-bar guitar solo played by Perkins for which tape-edited space was especially created, while the song was interspersed with his rock guitar phrases employing an incisive tone alien to the era's other reggae records.[21]

That song and album harnessed the electric guitar in a manner signifying a directional shift in the globalization of reggae whereby the album format (with accompanying rock-styled cover art and packaging) highlighted self-contained group identity and songwriting as the audiovisual hallmarks of the new phase. Ironically, Perkins' distinct unfamiliarity with reggae prior to the London overdub sessions in 1972 became the commercial conduit for audiences similarly unacquainted with the genre's idiosyncrasies that had frequently provoked resistance from mainstream radio on both sides of the Atlantic. As demonstrated later in this chapter, Marley subsequently expanded this dimension of the band's sound by supplementing the lineup, sometimes with two guitarists, for both studio and live purposes. Nonetheless, launching The Wailers into the international album market with the solo performances of an uncredited blues rock guitarist raises questions regarding authenticity and the manner in which the electric guitar was used to combat cultural bias at the potential expense of the group's identity. Chris Blackwell mentions a long-held audience assumption that the "Concrete Jungle" solo and accompanying melodic guitar work had been performed by Peter Tosh,[22] but the stylistic syntax and tonalities immediately suggest a player with a blues rock vocabulary developed beyond the realm of reggae.

The chart-topping 1974 pop cover version of the Marley composition "I Shot the Sheriff" by rock guitar icon Eric Clapton (originally released on The Wailers' second Island album *Burnin'* in 1973) provided a vehicle whereby reggae was more widely legitimized in the rock world. Although Clapton's rendition smoothed out the abrasive percussive edges of the original version and did not include any solos, the mere association of such a highly regarded rock guitar figure with a hit reggae song from a still relatively unknown writer helped alter the genre's mainstream public profile. "I Shot the Sheriff" transported reggae—albeit in heavily diluted form—to wider audiences, and Clapton's inextricable association with lead electric guitar infused the record with a rock aura despite his guitar's confinement to rhythmic roles on his version (echoing its function on The Wailers' original recording).

Following the international ascent of Bob Marley & The Wailers (as the unit was once again known from the end of 1974), the 1977 *Exodus* LP confirmed Marley's superstar status. That album, acclaimed by *Time* magazine in 1999 as the album of the century, included its share of lead guitar, although the performances were usually embedded within the mix rather than assuming unambiguously foregrounded sonic positions. The record's revolutionary tone was captured on "The Heathen," which featured a sonically outstanding eight-bar solo (performed by Julian "Junior" Marvin) immersed in delay and reverb. However, when the album was reissued as part of the three-disc *Exodus Fortieth Anniversary Edition* in 2017, the remixed version stripped the song of its original sonic treatments and "ethereal mystique."[23] While in both instances, the lead electric guitar served commercial purposes, the 2017 mix created "a potential rupture in popular music's historical narrative" by representing a key work from a major album in a manner disconnected from its forty-year-old sonic imprint.[24]

Peter Tosh

As a singer and rhythm guitarist in The Wailers, Peter Tosh was always likely to need more expressive space than the group afforded him. Reggae historian and Tosh's former manager Herbie Miller describes him as having "a very personal, indelible rhythmic concept, tone, texture, sound" that helped to distinguish him from his contemporaries.[25] In a 1981 *High Times* magazine interview, Tosh even suggested that he was one of the originators of the reggae rhythm guitar style during his time with The Wailers.[26] Collaborator and musician Lee Jaffe, who also wrote the liner notes for the Deluxe Edition reissue of *Legalize It* (2011, originally

issued in 1976), affirms Tosh's contention and, in describing his playing, said, "It's so powerful. His rhythm is so percussive and it's so distinctive."[27] Miller's analysis also highlights specific facets of Tosh's technique and expressive vocabulary: "It's identified by the rapid rhythms he plays within the space . . . and also how he heard rhythm. His guitar playing and the tone and the texture was very much like when he would play the clavinet which he loved in his music. It still had that biting, caustic, grabbing sound."[28]

Whereas many rhythm players blend into the sonic fabric of a band to the point of anonymity, Tosh's playing was an extension of his forceful personality, demanding to be heard as a primary participant. Hints of his lead melodic identity can be heard in the 2021 archival CD/DVD release *The Capitol Session '73*, capturing the transitional post-*Burnin'* LP Wailers lineup. Apart from Tosh's roles in accentuating the rhythmic grit and tension on the first two Wailers albums for Island Records, *Catch a Fire* and *Burnin'* (both 1973), there is also much to be said about a pair of 1975 collaborations that ultimately influenced his own perceptions of the electric guitar and demonstrated his versatility on the instrument. Tosh's work with American jazz guitarist Eric Gale[29] (d. 1994 at age fifty-five) has largely escaped critical examination. The quintessential reggae guitar album, *Negril*, was recorded by Gale (not to be confused with the Jimi Hendrix-influenced blues rock American guitarist, Eric Gales) while he was living in Jamaica, and he was familiar with the skills of particular local musicians.[30] Tosh appears on lead and rhythm guitar on tracks such as the remarkable "East Side West Side" that elegantly fuses jazz and reggae without compromising either genre, retaining a distinct rhythmic vitality and energy.[31] Tosh's performance here foreshadows one of his key solo album operational modes as he contributes to creating a solid foundation for Gale's lead guitar explorations.

Also in 1975, Tosh recorded with rock guitar legend Eric Clapton during the Jamaica sessions for the latter's album *There's One In Every Crowd*, though it appears that none of Tosh's guitar contributions made the final mix.[32] Nonetheless, Herbie Miller suggests that this first-hand exposure to such renowned lead guitar players as Gale and Clapton helped guide Tosh's choices for the types of guitarist with whom he would subsequently record and tour in his solo career, while those encounters also influenced his own rhythm style. Interestingly, two Black American blues/rock guitarists, Al Anderson and Donald Kinsey, both of whom also played with Bob Marley & The Wailers at various times, practically defined the lead guitar role for Tosh's solo work, both appearing on the solo debut, *Legalize It* (1976). In a decision that was unusual for a reggae act at the time, Tosh decided to use both lead guitarists in his live show. Miller

suggests that Tosh advocated "hearty conversation" between his band members, and this concept probably informed his thinking: "That's what makes Peter Tosh great as a bandleader: the confidence to let his lead guitarists in particular go, [while he would] submerge himself in the rhythm section. And in particular on talking drum or repeater drum, and seldom on rhythm guitar at that point – he makes both of them have that conversation."[33]

On *Legalize It*, Kinsey's blues background emerges clearly on "Till Your Well Runs Dry" in his softer-toned fluid phrasing, typifying the integration of blues/rock guitar performance into the mix of the album's tracks. The 1977 Tosh follow-up *Equal Rights* is helmed by Al Anderson's rock-influenced lead licks, although they too are positioned well within the mix, contrasting the unrestrained expressive roles granted to both Kinsey and Anderson (and other guitarists with Tosh) in the live environment. In the 1984 concert video *Peter Tosh: Captured Live*, Kinsey takes multiple solo spots, unleashing his blues rock vocabulary far more freely than recording studio circumstances usually allow on another artist's songs.

Tosh's M16 machine-gun-shaped guitar, introduced during his 1983 European tour,[34] symbolized the revolutionary rebellion and the anties-tablishment ideological polarization embedded in his own music, as well as reggae in general. Here, the electric guitar was a political weapon, both sonically and in its physical representation. However, Tosh's delegation of live and studio lead guitar duties to others meant that he primarily articulated his personal electric instrumental resistance through rhythm guitar, at the core of the rhythmic friction and broadsides against the agents of "downpression" (inverted Rasta-speak for "oppression"). Jaffe comments that "His signature rhythm guitar was an interminable force creating both a percussive and lyrical sound."[35]

Donald Kinsey

Guitarist Donald Kinsey came from a background steeped in blues, growing up surrounded by veteran musicians with the same cultural influences, including his famous guitarist and harmonica-playing father known as Big Daddy Kinsey. His arrival in the reggae world was accidental following the formation of the incendiary Black trio White Lightnin' and the recording of a lone self-titled album released by Island Records in the summer of 1975. The record, which only reached number 205 on the *Billboard* chart, was produced by Felix Pappalardi, who had previously produced British trio Cream and played in the American hard rock group Mountain. On this unambiguous funk rock LP laced with aggressive blues licks (said to

have influenced Vernon Reid of Living Colour), Kinsey's performance clearly capitalized on his unimpeachable credentials earned from playing with blues legend Albert King at the age of seventeen.

Signing with Island led to a connection with Lee Jaffe, subsequent recordings with Peter Tosh on his *Legalize It* album, and completing a tour with Tosh before being hired by Bob Marley for the *Rastaman Vibration* LP sessions that took place at Criteria Studios in Florida. Kinsey instructed producer Chris Blackwell to run the tape to allow him to "get a vibe" for his overdubs, unaware that all of his exploratory moments were already being recorded and would become the takes used on the 1976 album.[36] On that record, Kinsey's contributions consist mainly of bluesy fills, accentuating the lyrical and rhythmic content of the songs, as opposed to his later role with Peter Tosh, arranging his rootsy remake of Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" (1983), which also created a platform for his outrageous lengthy live solos.[37] This reinterpretation of the archetypal rock electric guitar text extended direct and oblique references to Chuck Berry and Jimi Hendrix, who both also performed the song regularly. However, Tosh's recording of the song does not place the guitar at the sonic center, as opposed to the live performances on which Kinsey was granted enormous expressive space to demonstrate his capabilities. Ultimately, despite his prior unfamiliarity with the genre, Kinsey says the spirituality of reggae music provided an easy transition because "there were a lot of similarities in their vocal melodies that were like gospel and the Pentecostal church and also in a lot of blues."[38]

Tosh's adoption by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones, evidenced by his 1978 signing to their fledgling eponymous label, signified a recognition of reggae's crossover potential, with the guitar spearheading the instrumental charge toward commercial success. Although the pop, reggae, and punk fusions of the late 1970s promised much, innate polarizations within the industry and fractures between Tosh and his rock patrons meant that his prospects were never quite fulfilled despite the guitar's sonic presence in his music.

Eddy Grant

Eddy Grant is one of pop's unheralded riff masters. Known primarily for his 1983 international hit single "Electric Avenue" and the transatlantic Top 10 album from which it came, *Killer on The Rampage*, he is the only Caribbean musician to achieve major commercial success on records featuring his own solo and rhythm-based guitar performances. Not even the globally acclaimed Bob Marley possessed that degree of solo

vocabulary,[39] as evidenced by the series of lead guitarists featured throughout The Wailers' existence, as noted previously. However, Grant's 1980s international mainstream breakthrough was preceded by a series of iconic hits as a member of The Equals and in his earlier years as a solo artist, all featuring the electric guitar and thereby making the instrument sonically and symbolically central in his career.

The seminal catalytic guitar moment in Eddy Grant's life occurred in 1964 on May 9 when he witnessed the British debut of Black rock legend Chuck Berry performing at the Finsbury Park Astoria in north London. Having migrated to England from Guyana in December 1960, Grant says that there was "no real guitar influence as such" on him before this, although his trumpet-playing father also influenced his solo performance capability. Grant emphasized that Berry was an accomplished rhythm player as well as a soloist, noting that such rhythmic capability is foundational for developing meaningful solo skills. He points to the melodic characteristics of calypso as a major influence on his solo phrasing and correctly observes that "there were no rock guitar soloists out of the Caribbean historically."[40]

The resonance of Grant's approach to the electric guitar during his time with The Equals (among the first successful multiracial pop groups) is evident in the many cover versions of "Baby Come Back" (first released as a B-side in 1967, reaching number 1 in Britain as an A-side in 1968) and the similarly primal power of "Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys" (1970, number 9, UK). "Baby Come Back" featured tremolo-toned guitar melodies throughout the record, while "Black Skin Blue Eyed Boys" harnessed a rougher tone in a pulsating Afro-rock framework. "Police On My Back," recorded by The Equals in 1967 and famously covered by The Clash on the gold *Sandinista!* album (1980), provides further emphatic testament to Grant's songwriting and the critical role of the electric guitar in his music. The latter song translated the oppositional, mainly Afro-Caribbean angst and anxiety in dealing with the British police into a wider statement of youth disaffection with law enforcement authorities. Notably, in each one of his many appearances on the BBC's *Top of The Pops* TV show, including The Equals' Top 20 hits as well as his solo work, Grant performs with his electric guitar. Following his departure from The Equals after heart problems arose in 1971, his guitar became a primary vehicle for his creative liberation and the artistic independence through which he projected the dimensions of his individual musical identity.

First issued in 1982, "Electric Avenue" achieved hit single status in 1983 as the music industry searched for the next Caribbean superstar in the wake of Bob Marley's demise in 1981. His 1978 single "Walking on Sunshine" was a club hit in America, and an extended 12-inch version

included a lengthy guitar solo. Recalling the attitude of American media gatekeepers and the contrast between the record's club success and mainstream radio indifference, he noted that "When they saw me they couldn't hear my music, they could only see my face. I'm black and from the Caribbean. But my music is not R&B and not reggae."[41] With the cross-cultural marketing challenges he faced in the music industry, his use of the electric guitar became an artistic and commercial bridge that facilitated movement beyond reflexive categorization, though not without resistance. While Grant's original version of "Walking on Sunshine" failed to crack the upper reaches of either the British or American charts, American dance act Rocker's Revenge peaked at number 4 in Britain with its guitar-free version in mid 1982, perhaps partially presaging Grant's imminent global commercial explosion. Rather ironically, the original version was the B-side on the British single release of the massive hit "Electric Avenue." Multi-instrumentalist Grant survived the UK's post-punk pop era with massive reggae-inflected hits such as 1979's "Living on The Frontline" (number 11, UK) and "Do You Feel My Love" in 1980 (number 8, UK), and his music videos for those songs highlighted his close performative and compositional relationships with the electric guitar. His eight-bar solo on "Living on The Frontline" is the instrument's only overt presence on the recording, yet it appears as a central prop in the video before its sound is ever heard. Those vital eight rock lead-guitar bars prominently placed in the mix arguably ensured the record's pop crossover appeal and presented the uncommon spectacle of a featured Black musician taking his lead electric guitar to the heights of the pop charts, even as Prince was just beginning his superstar ascent.

An aggressively toned rock riff provides the central instrumental introduction and chorus hooks in "Do You Feel My Love," which also incorporates the eight-bar solo strategy (with an additional screaming note afterwards), collectively making the instrument more intrinsic to the sound and energy of that record than its predecessor. The lead British single from *Killer on The Rampage*, "I Don't Wanna Dance"—which made its chart debut in October 1982 (number 1, UK)—similarly featured an eight-bar radio-friendly electric guitar solo that also accentuated the protagonist's emotional angst and disillusionment with a lover. The British success of the track effectively opened the doorway for "Electric Avenue," with the latter record making it difficult for the American market to ignore his presence.

After entering the *Billboard* Hot 100 on April 16, 1983, peaking at number 2 and eventually reaching platinum status, "Electric Avenue" became Grant's biggest-ever solo hit with its chorus driven by a single repeated electric guitar rock chord, without any solo work whatsoever, and

synthesizers providing bass and melodic accentuation applying the methodologies of his earlier hits in that era. Although ostensibly a tribute to the actual Brixton street location of Electric Avenue in London and the Black British cultural frontline pitted against oppressive sociopolitical forces during the riots of 1981,[42] in the context of Grant's career, the song title is emblematic of the creative path he has traveled, principally fueled and inspired by the power of the electric guitar. That record is certainly the best-known international hit single by a featured Caribbean artist playing lead guitar, and its central hook was even included in BMW's 2022 American Super Bowl TV commercial promoting an all-electric SUV.

As Grant is himself readily aware, his 1980s hits have a strong underlying digital framework and presence, and yet the drum programming and synth interjections usually set the stage for guitar-centered statements utilizing both rock-flavored riffs and solos with edges designed to slice into the pop market alongside his emphatic vocal presence. However, it is important to note that the story of Grant's relationship with the electric guitar certainly does not end with "Electric Avenue" and its global hit status.

Though not a reggae artist, Grant has harnessed every musical aspect of his Afro-Caribbean background on his recordings, and the 1983 single "War Party" (number 42, UK), also from the *Killer on The Rampage* album, employs distinctly reggae-styled rhythm guitar and a full-frontal seven bars of guitar solo. I actually witnessed Grant recording some of this song's guitar tracks at his Blue Wave Studio complex in Barbados in 1982, as he spent hours ensuring that the often elusive "feel" of the recording truly fulfilled his creative intent. With its lyrics critiquing histories of imperialist involvement in exploiting military and political conflict, in conjunction with the guitar-laced instrumental text, "War Party" allowed Grant to negotiate a complicated commercial pathway between roots credibility and pop pragmatism along which many other Caribbean artists have attempted to journey, with few succeeding to the same extent.

Following the success of "Electric Avenue" and its accompanying album, Grant's *Going For Broke* LP (1984) featured "Romancing the Stone," a theme song titled after the Hollywood movie starring Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner that it was intended to help promote.[43] In the music video interspersed with movie footage, Grant was filmed on a tropical hillside ripping through another eight-bar solo, ensuring that the track's dance appeal was suitably complemented by a radio-friendly rock guitar edge. Although the single barely cracked the Top 30 in America, it consolidated Grant's image as a guitar-wielding Black artist when few were visible on the pop charts. The album's next track and single, "Boys in the Street," defied commercial logic by failing to achieve any chart traction in

America or Britain whatsoever despite its undiluted inclusion of overdubbed rock guitar riffs (reminiscent of Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones),[44] fluid fills, and a generous ten-bar electric lead solo.[45]

The paradoxes of "Electric Avenue" and Grant's Afrocentric pop identities were forcefully foregrounded by his decision to title his 1988 album *File Under Rock* "to combatively address the cultural reflex of trapping dreadlocks solely within reggae's stereotypical contexts."[46] His appearance on the album cover in a purposefully blurred shot in which the guitar he plays is more visible than his dreadlocks strikes a distorted chord against the reluctance of radio and retailers to embrace the totality of Grant's musicianship and the perceived genre contradictions inhering in his rock dimensions:

> *File Under Rock* was just speaking to the people who were the controllers of the music industry . . . in England . . . but they weren't giving me a break in an area that I would conquer . . . . I was playing rock music that is identifiably rock, so much so that on that album, I have [a track titled] "Chuck (Is The King)."[47]

The album's character was typified by the rock and reggae fusion of the powerful single "Harmless Piece of Fun." Grant stated that "they [the industry gatekeepers] haven't given it a chance," and consequently, the record remained virtually unknown.[48] Throughout his music video, Grant is constantly framed with his guitar, effectively making his persona inseparable from it.[49] The rhythm guitar-driven anti-apartheid hit "Gimme Hope Jo'Anna" (number 7, UK), originally included on the British version of the same album, reaped commercial success employing a highly danceable Afrocentric highlife rhythm that was more easily accepted by resistant industry forces. Despite industry impulses to marginalize the role of rock guitar in Black popular music, Grant has persisted in retaining the instrument as a key component of his sound, as evidenced on his 2017 album *Plaisance* (named after his Guyanese hometown) on the track "Up Against the Wall." The electric guitar avenue that he has traversed in over fifty years in the music business has been contiguous with a vast series of changes in Anglo-Caribbean popular music, yet the axe has remained a constant feature in his sound and image construction.

Orange Sky

Though rock inflections and adaptations have been previously discussed in this chapter, the emergence of Trinidad's Orange Sky in the 1990s and 2000s represents an undisguised adoption of heavy metal-based rock aesthetics in a band that also boldly incorporates its Caribbean identity

into its sound. In fact, their fusion of local, regional, and global influences has been described in one article as "reggae rock,"[50] underlining the ease with which Orange Sky interconnects the genres in a manner decidedly uncommon for typical rock groups of other geographical and cultural origins.

Breaking into the rock mainstream poses colossal challenges for Black artists in general, and even more so for Black Caribbean acts, plagued by the weight of cultural stereotypes, some of which this chapter has discussed in relation to Eddy Grant: Orange Sky has included various dreadlocked members across numerous personnel changes. The band celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in 2021, and the years of global touring with key sponsorship deals[51] but without a major commercial breakthrough are highlighted by two albums. *Upstairs* (2005),[52] released in America, and the independently issued *Dat Iz Voodoo* (2008) capture Orange Sky's electric guitar-centered intensity and dimension, emphatically distinguishing them from other Caribbean artists venturing into the international market in the twenty-first century. The group prioritizes its rock credentials, accentuating its instrumental and lyrical expression with Caribbean flavors, as exemplified on their effortless reggae cover of the 1971 Cat Stevens song "Peace Train" and their own explosive rock-underpinned "Real Love," both from the *Upstairs* album. Their unapologetic presence as a rock act with some substantial long-term local support signifies a limited degree of movement for the electric guitar from its subordinate role in Anglo-Caribbean music. Orange Sky's origins in Trinidad also highlight the sonic subservience of the electric guitar in that island's native calypso and soca music traditions, an area requiring a separate analysis alongside discussion of the instrument's role in the marginal (and quite separate) spouge genre popular in Barbados in the 1970s.

Conclusion: Extra Riffs

The spatial limitations of this chapter have meant that the survey of guitarists worthy of analysis has been limited to a mere handful. The contributions of Trinidad's jazz guitarist Fitzroy Coleman (d. 2016) were crucial in supporting calypso's postwar presence in Britain on the recordings of Lord Kitchener, and his multitracked early 1960s singles mirrored aspects of the production style of American guitarist and innovator Les Paul. Others such as Cat Coore, the immensely versatile member of the veteran Jamaican band Third World, and Barbados' Jimmy Haynes, producer of the 1985 Grammy-winning Steel Pulse album *Babylon the Bandit*, are among many key figures meriting further consideration.

It is also worth noting the extent to which the guitar aesthetics and influence of artists discussed in this chapter have impacted on international acts. One example is *Circus Money* (2008), the second solo album by guitarist Walter Becker (d. 2017), formerly one half of the eclectic Steely Dan. In two 2008 interviews promoting the record, he emphasized the evident Jamaican influences, with one writer noting that the album "is the result of a conscious effort to integrate reggae and dub" into his musical universe.[53] This is especially apparent on two tracks, "Bob Is Not Your Uncle Anymore" and the Japanese edition recording, "Dark Horse Dub." In both instances, the rhythmic electric guitar articulation established by such players as Ernest Ranglin comes full circle.

The Afro-Caribbean electric guitar articulation swept across the rock world in the 1970s, with this influence symbolically reclaiming an instrument that has been persistently disassociated from Black music, even by Black audiences. This reclamation impulse inspired Eddy Grant to exclaim, "I would stand up anywhere in the world, including Memphis, Tennessee, and say that Chuck Berry is the King of Rock & Roll."[54] This underscores the critical need to challenge perceptions intrinsically linking the electric guitar to tropes of whiteness and white performativity, and the importance of expanding the soundscapes of cultural authenticity within and beyond the Anglo-Caribbean space. In the twenty-first century, the role of the guitar has become muted and confined by severely limiting preconceptions about its sonic roles pervading the diverse branches of Caribbean popular music, to the extent that it has little real presence in the digital era despite the critical role it has played in nurturing the region's musical development.

Notes

1. Herbie Miller, interview by Mike Alleyne (April 3, 2021).
2. Liane Hansen, "Monty Alexander and Ernest Ranglin: Jamaican Jazz Pianist, Guitarist Are Old Friends, Music Legends," *NPR* (May 16, 2004). Available at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1897058 (accessed July 3, 2021).
3. David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 32.
4. Mike Alleyne, Barry Kernfeld, and Val Wilmer, "Ernest Ranglin." *Grove Music Online*. In press.
5. Katz, *Solid Foundation*, p. 32; David Katz, *People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee "Scratch" Perry* (Omnibus, 2006), p. 22. Numerous conflicting dates have been cited for Haywood's debut Island release, but available evidence including label founder Chris Blackwell's 2022 memoir suggests that 1959 is accurate. It should be noted that the years of release were not printed on the labels of Island's albums until about 1965, a few years after Blackwell relocated the operation to England from Jamaica.
6. Freddy Villano, "Looking Sideways," *Bass Player* (June 2014): 41–49.
7. Mike Alleyne, *The Encyclopedia of Reggae: The Golden Age of Roots Reggae* (Sterling, 2012), p. 222.
8. *Ibid*.
9. Timothy White, *Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley* (Henry Holt, 1992), pp. 158–159.

10. Alan Di Perna, "All Hail The King of Ska Guitar! The Life and Times of Jamaican Guitar Legend Ernest Ranglin," *Guitar World* (July 2021): 56–60.
11. *Ibid*., p. 58.
12. Michael Turner, "Ernest Ranglin: Bass Is the Place," *The Beat* 15/6 (1996): 34–35.
13. Elena Oumano, "Palm Pictures Debuts with Baaba Maal, Ernest Ranglin," *Billboard* (July 4, 1998): 11, 87.
14. Katz, *Solid Foundation*, p. 70.
15. David Katz, *People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee "Scratch" Perry* (Omnibus, 2006), p. 49.
16. *Ibid*., p. 49; Carlos Malcolm, *A Personal History of Post-War Jamaican Music* (Jarrett, 2017), pp. 141–143; Steve Leggett, "Review of *Lyn Taitt, Hold Me Tight: Anthology 1965–1973*," AllMusic (n.d.). Available at www.allmusic.com/album/hold-me-tight-anthology-1965-1973-mw0000406097 (accessed November 3, 2022).
17. Katz, *Solid Foundation*, p. 78.
18. Katz, *People Funny Boy*, p. 50. Katz observed that some Jamaican musicians regarded Taitt "with envy and spite" despite his performance and arrangement skills because he was a foreigner.
19. *Ibid*., p. 58.
20. Mike Alleyne, "Tracks and Transformations in The Wailers' 'Concrete Jungle,'" in *Analyzing Recorded Music: Collected Perspectives*, edited by William Moylan, Lori Burns, and Mike Alleyne (Routledge, 2023), pp. 386–402. Island recording engineer, Tony Platt, recalled that he was hired for the role because of his prior work with both rock and reggae acts.
21. *Ibid*., pp. 390, 394.
22. Chris Blackwell and Paul Morley, *The Islander: My Life in Music and Beyond* (Gallery, 2022), p. 165.
23. Mike Alleyne, "Authenticity in Music Production," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Music Production*, edited by Andrew Bourbon and Simon Zagorski-Thomas (Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 19–31. The specific reference to the guitar solo on the two contrasting versions of "The Heathen" from the editions of *Exodus* is discussed on p. 25.
24. *Ibid*., pp. 25–26.
25. Miller interview.
26. "High Times Greats: Peter Tosh – A Conversation with a Reggae Pioneer," *High Times* (1981). Available at https://hightimes.com/culture/high-times-greats-peter-tosh (accessed November 3, 2022).
27. Lee Jaffe, interview by Mike Alleyne (January 28, 2021).
28. Miller interview.
29. Howard Campbell, "Revisiting Eric Gale's Negril," *Jamaica Gleaner* (June 17, 2008). This is one of numerous sources citing Gale's Barbadian parentage, indirectly implying that his familial Caribbean roots were in fact intrinsic to his creative identity even before his Jamaica sojourn. Available at http://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080617/ent/ent1.html (accessed November 3, 2022).
30. John Masouri, *The Life of Peter Tosh: Steppin' Razor* (Omnibus, 2013), p. 132.
31. American jazz guitarist Eric Gale (reportedly of Barbadian descent) appears on the 1975 album *Negril* (first released on the Klik label in the UK) alongside Peter Tosh who appears on rhythm guitar on several tracks. The album, produced by Gale, was reissued in Japan *circa* 2006 (or later) under Gale's name as the main performer, but it was also released in 1997 credited to Peter Tosh & Friends. Tosh is also credited with playing some lead guitar on the album, though its credits are not track-specific. Recorded at the Harry J. Studio in Kingston, Jamaica, the record appears to be currently out of print. At the time of writing, it has never been legally released on CD, although unauthorized European releases are said to have occurred. Gale's contractual obligations to CTI Records during a short-lived tenure that only produced two live collaborative albums in 1974 immediately restricted the record's international release. The situation also led to the frustratingly unclear authorship of the *Negril* album.
32. Masouri, *Life of Peter Tosh*, p. 130.
33. Miller interview.
34. Roger Steffens, Liner notes for *Honorary Citizen* by Peter Tosh. Columbia C3K 85668 (1997).
35. Lee Jaffe, Liner notes for *Equal Rights* by Peter Tosh. Columbia/Legacy 88697 74691 2 (2011).
36. Donald Kinsey, interview by Mike Alleyne (February 18, 2021).

37. Earl "Chinna" Smith has lead guitar credits on the album as does Al Anderson, but only the latter's contribution on the track "Crazy Baldhead" is clearly identified. Consequently, the observation about the album's guitar work is both general and applicable to Kinsey.
38. Kinsey interview.
39. Eddy Grant, interview by Mike Alleyne (April 9, 2021). Grant states that Island's Chris Blackwell expressed the viewpoint that Marley would have been an even greater phenomenon with fluid solo skills.
40. Grant interview.
41. Nelson George, "'Romance' Gone From Film Tie-In For Eddy Grant," *Billboard* (June 23, 1984): 50.
42. Cecily Jones, "Brixton" in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, edited by David Dabydeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 69–71.
43. George, "Romance," p. 50. Grant complained that his theme song was used "for maybe five seconds" and was not given the space and attention that its association with the film demanded. He also noted that once he realized the disregard with which his recording was being treated, he refused to attend the movie premiere. He restated this idea of industry politics limiting the song's integration into the film in a 1995 interview with me.
44. Coincidentally, later The Rolling Stones' songwriting and preproduction for their 1989 *Steel Wheels* album took place at Grant's Barbados studios before the group relocated to Montserrat's Air Studios for recording. Years prior to *Steel Wheels*, the band's former bassist Bill Wyman reportedly suggested Grant as a potential signing for the nascent Rolling Stones Records label.
45. The video was directed by Steve Barron who had helmed Michael Jackson's MTV breakthrough "Billie Jean" and Grant's own "Electric Avenue," raising hopes for its commercial success.
46. Mike Alleyne, "Globalization and Commercialization of Caribbean Music," *Popular Music History* 3/3 (2009): 247–273. The primary reference to the *File Under Rock* album occurs on p. 258. In my 2021 interview with Grant, he confirmed what I perceived as many cultural paradoxes and contradictions being encapsulated in that title, including the impulse to automatically categorize a black dreadlocked male artist as a reggae performer.
47. Grant interview.
48. *Ibid*.
49. Ohnoitisnathan65, "Eddy Grant – Harmless Piece of Fun," YouTube (2016). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=02OMcDd1Z9Q (accessed November 3, 2022).
50. Timothy Rommen, "'Localize It': Rock, Cosmopolitanism, and the Nation in Trinidad," *Ethnomusicology* 51/3 (2007): 371–401.
51. Nigel Telesford, "Orange Sky Celebrates 20 Years of Intoxicating Music," *Trinidad Express* (August 21, 2016). Available at https://bit.ly/4ceM52u (accessed November 3, 2022).
52. *Upstairs* was produced by Jeff Glixman, formerly the producer and recording engineer for the American progressive rock group Kansas. He helmed the gold albums *Song for America* (1975) and *Masque* (1975), as well as their quadruple platinum albums *Leftoverture* (1976) and *Point of Know Return* (1977).
53. Paul Tingen, "Walter Becker – Larry Klein & Helik Hadar: Recording Circus Money," *Sound On Sound* (November 2008). Available at www.soundonsound.com/people/walter-becker (accessed November 3, 2022); also see Adam Sweeting, "Walter Becker: Steely Dan man sees the light," *The Telegraph* (July 17, 2008). Available at www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3556548/Walter-Becker-Steely-Dan-man-sees-the-light.html (accessed November 3, 2022).
54. Grant interview.

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