



***Distillation of Sound, Dub and the Creation of Culture.* By Eric Abbey. Bristol: Intellect, 2022. 187 pp. ISBN 978-1-78938-539-7
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Eric Abbey's *Distillation of Sound, Dub and the Creation of Culture* provides a comprehensive and engaging exploration into the world of dub music, a genre that emerged in Jamaica during the early 1970s and would go on to influence many artists across the globe. Abbey, a professor of English and literature at Oakland Community College, Michigan, is also a professional musician and producer of dub, reggae and ska music, and it is mainly in this capacity that he frames dub as both a professional culture and a creative process. By focusing on the work of engineers and the technological developments that enabled their unique approach to music production, he brings these often-overlooked figures to the forefront.

The book examines the work of dub pioneers such as Hedley Jones, Errol Thompson, King Tubby, and Lee 'Scratch' Perry, who used second-hand technologies and their electronic engineering training to create new sounds. It delves into the importance of the sound system in dub music and outlines the specific traits of the genre, including timbre, rhythmic interplay and re-production. Through these discussions, Abbey aims to shed light on the 'sound of a culture' and how this sound impacts and shapes the culture itself.

Abbey begins by explaining the differences between a 'version' and a 'dub' in Jamaican culture (Thomas Vendryes (2010, 2015) has also addressed this issue in his work on dub), highlighting the importance of the engineer's reinterpretation of the original song. He argues that Jamaican engineers went from being 'quiet scientists behind the mixing board' (p. 48) to prominent figures of Jamaican culture, by 'asserting their presence into the tracks' (p. 40) through their use of the mixing desk, equalisers, reverberation and delay. The book then delves into the early history of dub and its importance in Jamaican society by analyzing several seminal dub records, placing them within a larger socio-economic context, and examining their production using a musicological approach.

While the analysis of each record is deeply interesting, it is not always clear how the selection was carried out. Additionally, though the musicological analysis helps identify recurring motifs that would later become identifiers and markers of dub music, it would have been useful to incorporate interviews or fieldwork materials to better understand the creative processes behind the production of these records from the engineers' perspectives.

The second half discusses how dub music traveled to the UK, the USA and, interestingly, Japan. Abbey traces the rise of Jamaican music back to the Windrush Generation, showing how racism shaped the practice, creation and reception of dub in the UK. He also emphasises the differences between Jamaican and English dub through a musicological analysis of Dennis Bowell's 'Strictly Dub Wize' (1979). Through this example, he demonstrates how English dub records, while sharing the same timbre as Jamaican records, were performed by musicians with the purpose of using the recordings to create a dub record, while Jamaican dub tracks used pre-existing recordings which were not originally intended to be used that way.

In the USA, Abbey connects the origins of hip-hop practices and culture to dub and Jamaican origins through the trajectory of Kool DJ Herc. He shows how the

origins of hip-hop can be found in the sound system culture imported from Jamaica to the Bronx and Queens. An analysis of Bullwackie All Stars' *Free For All* album highlights the distinct atmosphere of NYC dub and reggae records, characterised by darker and edgier sounds, which were more often distorted than their Jamaican counterparts.

Finally, the chapter on dub in Japan explains the rise of Jamaican music in the country, starting with Bob Marley's 1979 Japan tour, and the growth of a Japanese sound system and dub culture (see also Sterling 2020 on this topic). While engaging with questions of appropriation and assimilation, the analysis remains primarily focused on the aesthetic side of the issue without delving very deep into the social or anthropological aspects of the globalisation of a music culture. Abbey also discusses the unique characteristics of Japanese dub, exploring how the genre has been adapted and transformed by local artists while still retaining its Jamaican roots. Overall, *Distillation of Sound* serves as a great introduction to dub as a musical practice and music culture. Although Abbey's work primarily stems from a musicological and aesthetical analysis perspective, the references to the equipment used in the studios during the production of the records discussed are always interesting. However, the book would have benefited from further contextualisation and a more critical engagement with some of the theoretical works surrounding the issues of music cultures, technologies and globalisation – such as those found, for instance, in Baily (2010), Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000), Lysloff and Gay (2003), Manuel (1993) or Meintjes (2003).

Despite these minor shortcomings, *Distillation of Sound, Dub and the Creation of Culture* remains an important contribution to the study of dub music and its cultural impact. Abbey's passion for the subject is evident throughout, and his detailed analysis of key records and figures in the genre brings new insights into the world of dub. Music scholars, fans of dub and those interested in the interplay between music and technology will undoubtedly find much to appreciate in this insightful work.

Maël Péneau 

Centre Georg Simmel, EHESS, Paris
jmpeneau@ehess.fr

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