Programme

Sound System Stories: Wheel And Come Again!

Details

Friday 23 August 2024, 18.15 - 21.30, in person at V&A South Kensington, SW7 2RL.

Overview

In the frequently challenging, often hostile environment of post-Windrush Britain, 'Blues' parties and private clubs, for the Caribbean community, provided vital safe spaces in which to unwind and express themselves. In major cities throughout the country, these often-unlicensed events were powered by mighty Sound Systems which disseminated soundtracks that reflected the hopes, fears, triumphs, tragedies, styles, fashions, attitudes, and day-to-day lives of the local communities they not only entertained but came to represent. In so doing, they also created a platform which highlighted and documented the shared experiences of the wider Black diaspora. These small acts of musical resilience, resistance and representation were instrumental in shaping the global Sound System movement as we know it today.

Arrival

On arrival, please use the Exhibition Road Entrance of the museum, NOT Cromwell Road. Ask a member of staff for directions, then make your way to the Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecturer Theatre. Further arrival details will be sent nearer the event date.
Please find details of the Exhibition Road entrance here click here for the digital map.

For any accessibility requirements, please email courses@vam.ac.uk

Schedule for the evening

18.00 - 18.15 Arrival at the V&A Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre, using the Exhibition Road entrance.

18.15 - 18.30 Welcome, Event Housekeeping and Introductions – Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre with Janet Browne, Senior Producer, Audience Development.

18.30 - 19.00 Who Can’t Hear, Must Feel presented by Dr Michael McMillan
Who can’t hear, must feel. It is not the sound of the drum, it’s where the drum takes you. The sound system calls out, and the crowd responds, like going to church. In every urban centre where black communities settled, sound systems created these vibes in alternative multiracial spaces through bass culture: house parties, blues parties, clubs, dances, carnival. This legacy continues with reggae dancehall, rave culture, hip hop, jungle, garage, drum & bass, grime, and drill. Dr McMillan will speak to this narrative through a multi-media presentation.

19.00 - 19.50 Gladdy Wax and David Katz in Conversation
Sound System legend Gladdy Wax will share his personal musical memories - revealing the sounds that shaped and defined his life and career, in conversation with author and music journalist David Katz.

19.50 – 20.30 Audience Q&A.

20.30 – 21.30 Wheel And Come Again!
To play us out, Gladdy Wax, award winning veteran sound system operator, selects a special pre-Carnival DJ set for your listening pleasure. REACH!

21.30 Event Ends.
Biographies

Born Gladwin Wright in Jamaica in 1951, Gladdy Wax spent his formative years between the countryside and Spanish Town, where his mother held weekly sound system dances at her grocery store and bar; one of his uncles was a guitarist at Studio One, the renowned recording facility often referred to as Jamaica’s Motown.

Before setting off for England he played at his own leaving do age fourteen. Settling in Birmingham, Gladdy and his older brother built a small sound system and imported records from Jamaica. The Gladdy Wax moniker came from working at the Black Wax record shop during term-time holidays.

Gladdy Wax is a legendary figure of sound system culture in the UK. Renowned for his consummate skill as a selector, his knowledge of Jamaican popular music, his commitment to Britain’s black communities, he is an esteemed figure whose sound system has been a perennial highlight of the Notting Hill Carnival, always attracting a diverse crowd.

As a record distributor, he gave support to iconic figures such as Gregory Isaacs, Dennis Brown, Freddy McGregor, and John Holt, as well as Lloyd Parks’ We The People band.

Gladdy has broadcast on BBC Radio London, community stations BRMB and WNK, also Boiler Room and Vice. The Gladdy Wax Unlimited record shop was a focal point for reggae in northeast London for over fourteen years, and he continues to stock vinyl to the public online.

Gladdy is one of the nicest people you are ever likely to meet, his positive outlook adds to his widespread appeal. BBC Radio London honored Gladdy Wax as ‘a certified Londoner,’ and when radio presenter Robert Elms asked him, “Who is your favourite imaginary Londoner?” Gladdy’s response naturally was, “Anyone who can beat me in a Sound Clash.”

David Katz is the author of People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry, and Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae. He has written for many international periodicals, including the Guardian, Newsweek, Mojo, Q, Wax Poetics, Caribbean Beat, and Riddim. The compiler of over 100 retrospective collections of Jamaican music, Katz has produced documentaries on the music
and culture of the Caribbean for Public Radio International and contributed to documentaries and feature films for the BBC, Arte, and other entities. Since 2004, his *Dub Me Always* vinyl nights have been a regular feature of London’s musical landscape. [www.davidkatzreggae.com](http://www.davidkatzreggae.com)


[www.michaelmcmillan.uk/](http://www.michaelmcmillan.uk/)

*Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.*