

Xinyu - Mixing Dancehall Reggae and Medicine



Xinyu (One876Entertainment.com Photo)

At some point in Caribbean social history being a medical practitioner and a pop musician didn't mix ? especially if the music was that from the grass roots. Then in the 1970s a quartet of medics from the University Hospital of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, changed that and started what has become a tradition of sorts.

The latest med student reggae songstress is the arresting Xinyu, a 20-year-old who writes her own protest lyrics that speaks for those who lack a voice in the halls of power.

"I write all my songs and produce or co produce them," she told Abeng News. "I generally know what sound I want, describe it to the band and have them play different variations until we get it."

Take the single, Man, that we showcase here, where the artiste throws the challenge to the "Man", the one "dressed up in his pretty suit" to halt his plan and path of destruction in the society.

"Man, when you gonna do something, stop all this talking, when you gonna make a change, a you a call all this rage ? it's so easy fi turn wey yu head, when all the ghetto man dem a dead..because you never feel dem pain, never go through them strain..."

"I think dancehall is a great genre of music and has created avenues and inspired many ghetto youth,? Xinyu says of her preferred genre and message medium. ?It has travelled so far and has been loved by so many people. The beats are unique and lively and make you want to dance (and) the culture is full of life and love and creativity. Dancehall has pulled so many different walks of life together and created bridges between them.?"

She made her debut performance before a huge crowd at Teensplash at the north coast James Bond Beach on December 26, 2007, earning an encore before the heavyweights such as Macka Diamond, Munga and Beenie Man took the stage.

Like the reggae idiom which spawned it, the dancehall style, especially as espoused by the DJ chanters, has earned its share of criticisms ? dancehall moreso for the often violent or sexually explicit lyrics.

But Xinyu challenges the stereotyping of dancehall while acknowledging its warts.

"We as Jamaicans have a lot of our identity wrapped up in dancehall. I think dancehall can be as well-known and accepted as R&B or soul music, but this kind of acceptance can't happen overnight,? she declares.

?Dancehall has a great potential to carry a socially positive message as we have many artistes that are highly lyrically inclined, and can write about anything and make it a hit. But we have to package dancehall in such a way that people know its coming from the ghetto where a lot of suffering and pain is endured which we are not here to encourage, but merely comment and shine a light. We also need to recognize the need to leave socially sensitive issues alone.

"Dancehall has managed over the years to carry a violent message and whether or not people want to admit it, has had a negative influence of our youth. In Jamaica the most influential bunch are our artistes; they are the most heard and listened to.?"

So she argues, if one sings of violence and of being a 'bad man', young boys will want to be just like these role models and further, ?if women sing of being sexually provocative then our young girls will want to be the same? she said.

?It always hurts me when I turn on the TV and see a woman accepting what dancehall has dictated she should be. We as female artistes have a heavy load. We have male artists painting a very negative and demeaning picture for young women to accept and a 'piggish' and disrespectful picture for the younger males to follow, so we have to work twice as hard to help young women realize

that this is not the way to act or be treated and it is very hard. This is why when I see a female artist encouraging this further, it's depressing because it makes it that much harder.?

She has words of praise all the artistes that offer a positive message ?not just a 'one time' thing but consistently coming out with inspiring music?. She lists among these Queen Ifrica, Etana, Taurus Riley, Pressure and Tanya Stephens.

?These are the people that I aspire to be like,? she said.

"My music is inspired by dancehall, reggae, R&B and many other genres of music. I want to bring something different, something fresh, something new, something true. I want to make feel-good music but music that can open peoples eyes. I don't want to encourage violence or hate in any way.?"

While holding to her ideals, Xinyu isn't under any illusions.

"I know my music can inspire youth, it's why I make music, but I also know that my music alone won't make the difference; it will take much more than that."

It's not an easy path that she has chosen either, but she gets huge support from her mother siblings and friends.

"I plan to specialize in Ophthalmology," she said. "There are many challenges I face at UWI. One of the main ones is the fact that I can't reschedule my exams and the timetables are quite inflexible and congested."

But she copes.

Her catalogue built up over the past year includes her first song Come Get It produced by Bulby on an original rhythm featuring Sly and Robbie and Lenky.

According to her publicists, some of her completed collaborations include Man and Clouded produced by Richie Morgan of To Isis, while songs such as Surrender, Phenomenal, Get Over Him, and No Fake Santa have generated interest among Jamaican producers who have started sending beats her way. Not all of her songs have been released.

Xinyu's artistic career began at an early age when at eight she joined the Little People and Teen Players Club where she was exposed to drama, dance and singing.

Apart from her singing and academics, she was a favourite in this year's Miss Jamaica Universe beauty pageant.

"I entered ... out of encouragement from friends and family and I thought it would be a nice experience. It turned out not to be as appealing as people make it out to be but I managed to forge friendships with other contestants so I definitely would not take back the experience."

For us, we experience the pleasure of her burgeoning talent.