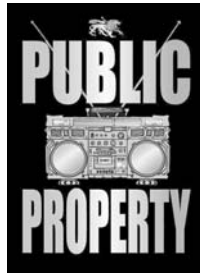




ON THE COVER

Little Fish Records; *The Label's Story*

By Sage Satori



Little Fish Records (a division of Cross Track Music, Inc) was established in 1996 as an outlet for niche products that the publishing company was bringing in. The first release on the label was by the group "4 Ever Kids" (*Just Kiddin' Around*) – a children's product with a specialized market. The label then released a Contemporary Christian release by Fr. Daniel Lonteen, (*From This Moment On*). From there, the label started to forge an identity with roots-based music, and more specifically, found a niche in the Reggae and World Music areas. In 1998, the label licensed the rights to the "First Light" catalog of CD releases; a group that was enormously popular throughout the 80's and 90's in the eastern half of the country. They then signed "Carlos Jones", former singer for First Light, as their flagship artist. This opened the door for other reggae artists such as "The Ark Band" as well as "Istan Black & The Sweets", an international reggae artist who also signed with the label. Noticing the rise of the Hispanic population in the US, Little Fish Records also signed their first Latin group in 2002 – the *Roberto Ocasio Latin Jazz Project*, and has plans to build depth in the Latin genre in the years to come.

With the initial launch of their website (www.littlefishrecords.com), the label then produced a steady stream of releases over the next several years, and also became an affiliate of "Liquid Audio" (now defunct), one of the original digital download sites, as well as MusicNotes, an online provider of sheet music and musical equipment accessories. The Company also launched its "Cleveland Classics" line of music, compiling a comprehensive collection of music from local artists from the '60's to the present.

The main staff at Little Fish are; Larry Koval - President/CEO, Woody Robison - VP Operations, Steven McCullagh - Operations Coordinator/A&R, Stacey Eutazia-Blackwood - Publishing Coordinator, Angie Siciliano - Office Coordinator, and Brandon Hawkins - Show Promotions Coordinator.

When speaking of their main focus

for this article, President Larry Koval said "We're really trying to bring quality reggae music into the area - developing acts with national potential. We've brought in *Public Property* recently, and have *Jah Works* coming in during August, *The Ark Band* will be playing at the Burning River Festival, and Carlos playing at numerous outdoor festivals including the Mid West Reggae Fest."



First Light

Formed in 1984 as an offshoot of Cleveland-based reggae act I-Tal, *First Light* took reggae as its base but expanded its reach in all directions, absorbing rock, blues, jazz, R&B, funk and hip-hop into its vibrant, eclectic sound. *First Light* maintained the same personal for 12 of its 14 years; percussionist Bob Caruso, vocalist/guitarist Chopper, vocalist/guitarist Carlos Jones, vocalist/bassist Gino Long, keyboard player Ed Marthey and drummer Rod Reisman — enabled the group to grow into a seamless ensemble with a distinctive, rhythm-heavy sound that featured three strong lead vocalists.

First Light quickly built a hometown following, releasing a 3-song EP, *Musical Uprising*, in 1985. By the time it released *Reggae Meltdown* in the spring of 1988, it had grown its base to include extensive regional and, eventually, national touring. The band developed a touring circuit that kept it playing over 200 dates a year, from Chicago to Boston to South Carolina. By the early '90s, with jam-band fans jumping on its bandwagon, long lines were forming outside venues where the band played, and it showcased at premiere music-industry conference South by Southwest in Austin, Texas. Its wide-ranging sound, which could rock hard or relax into a mellow groove, earned it opening slots for a diverse batch of acts including the Dead Milkmen, Black Uhuru, UFO, Taylor Dane, Juluka, Meat Loaf, the Clash and Living Colour.

Meanwhile, the self-released *Reggae Meltdown* kept selling and selling as more fans discovered the band. It eventually topped 12,000 sales without benefit of a record label. That was indicative of the way the band did things: strictly DIY in the days before there even was an Internet to pave the way. It followed up



Carlos Jones and The Plus Band

with a pair of cassette releases, *Live and Bootleg*, in 1992 and the CD *Groove Telepathy* in 1995. The band also co-founded (with Oroboros) the successful Free Clinic benefit event *Rock 'n' Reggae* which began in 1984 and continued through 1999, outliving both bands.

By 1998, the band members' lives were going in different directions, some of which precluded heavy touring, and the band amicably called it a day. Carlos Jones formed his P.L.U.S. Band to perform purer roots reggae and remains one of Northeast Ohio's most popular performers. Bob Caruso has played with I-Tal and the P.L.U.S. Band and is a registered nurse. Chopper manages a musical store, played with the hard-rocking Sammy's Good Eye and has a new band called Nappy Habitz. Gino Long sold guitars and went back to school to get a BA in marketing. Ed Marthey built pipe organs, wrote poetry and released a solo CD in 2000 called *Springtime on Mars — A Solo Piano Journey*; he continues to play piano gigs at various area venues. And Rod Reisman became one of the area's most in-demand drummers, performing with ensembles ranging from the *Prayer Warriors* to *Cats on Holiday* to the *Cletus Black Revue*.

First Light Reunion

When First Light broke up on May 28, 1998, it left behind legions of dismayed fans and a record of accomplishment any band would envy. The Light is going to shine again! And for a generation of music fans, that's the best news they've heard in years. Ten years after disbanding, Cleveland's phenomenally popular "*First Light*" is coming back together for the first time for a special summertime show at the Plain Dealer Pavilion at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 21. That also marks the 20th anniversary of the band's landmark album. Larry Koval let us in on an extra bit of information, "We found a batch of the original First Light "Meltdown" CD's, from the

original run in 1987, we are going to have the band autograph the inside cover.

These were in someone's warehouse all these years, as an over-run on the original order!" We're going to be selling them at the show on June 21."

Reggae Music

Some of our North Coast Voice staff had the privilege of attending a show at Beachland Ballroom last month that featured *Public Property* who perform several "colors" of reggae; roots to gospel reggae, ska to hip hop infused funk, rock and back to roots again all impeccably. The dance floor was positively alive and it continued to be so on through the night with headliner *Carlos Jones*. There is something about reggae that makes one feel really good and makes it easy to envision being in the sand and dancing to that funky beat with a tropical drink in hand.

It seems only fitting to mention a little history of Reggae music. It is a music genre first developed in Jamaica in the late 1960s. It is the heartbeat of Jamaica; it is their music and is as strongly associated with Jamaica as R & B is with Detroit, and Jazz is with New Orleans. While sometimes used in a broader sense to refer to most types of Jamaican music, the term *reggae* more properly denotes a particular music style that originated following on the development of ska and rocksteady. Reggae is based on a rhythm style characterized by regular chops on the off-beat. The tempo is generally slower than that found in ska. Reggae usually has accents on the 3rd beat in each bar, there being four beats in a bar.

Reggae is often associated with the Rastafari movement, which had an influence on many prominent reggae musicians from its beginning. It is common to hear the music with this influence referred to as "rasta". Reggae

lyrics can deal with many subjects, including faith, love, relationships, poverty, injustice and other broad social issues. One would be hard pressed to find a more confrontational and outspoken band than *Public Property* but the sound is still fun.

As with any genre of music, transformation and evolution is expected and accepted. Not long after Reggae came to America Cleveland based *I-Tal*, formed in late 1977, had an impact by regionally touring to consistently packed houses. *I-Tal* was Cleveland's very first reggae band. Reggae music had been popular in England for a little more than a decade by then, but it was just starting to initialize here in the States.

Carlos Jones was a member of *I-Tal* prior to becoming the front man for *First Light*. The reggae influence was apparent in their music but over time they developed a sound unique to themselves. Feeling the need to get back to his musical roots and to create positive vibrations through his music and lyrics, Carlos formed the *Peace-Love-Unity-Syndicate* (aka the PLUS band). This was a side project for Carlos until *First Light* broke up. The PLUS band has been voted "Best in Cleveland" in the Reggae/Ska category in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005 alternately in both the *Free Times* and *Scene Magazine* readers' poll.

The Ark Band and *Jah Works* are two other outstanding reggae acts represented by Little Fish Records. *The Ark Band* is a St. Lucian reggae band based in Columbus with a powerhouse of talent. They have continually toured across the United States, Canada, and Jamaica sharing their roots reggae, calypso, and soca music. Exceptional harmonies capture the audience from the first note of the original and cover repertoire. From the Baltimore area the members of *Jah Works* bring their own US native flavor to what is clearly reggae based. Switching and combining styles is not out of their comfort zone, in fact they take pride in it. At a live show they may switch from roots-reggae to dancehall to original lyrics over a hip-hop rhythm. Pick up a copy of their CD "ONE For You" and watch for them in the area www.jahworks.com

More to Little Fish Records

There is much more to Little Fish Records and to the artists they represent. In future issues of *The North Coast Voice Magazine* we plan to feature other artists and genres of music promoted by Little Fish. Larry speaks proudly when mentioning some of the musicians they work with "We also work with rock groups like *The Jack Fords*, Best Rock Band of the Free Times Awards in 2007." Their debut live CD "Bent Outta Shape" received rave reviews and they are currently working on their follow up

record due to be released in winter 2008. Other artists working with Little Fish include; *Cletus Black*, *Robin Stone*, *Alexis Antes*, *Roberto Ocasio's Latin Jazz Project*, and they also have their "Cleveland Classics" line, which features the legendary Cleveland groups from the 60's, 70's and 80's, like *Glass Harp*, *James Gang*, *Michael Stanley*, *Alex Bevan*."

The First Light Reunion, the Mid West Reggae Fest, and the Burning River Fest are just some of the great music experiences to be had in our region. So come out, we be jahmin mah!

Carlos Jones Sat June 14 Player's Club - Willoughby

First Light Reunion Sat June 21 Plain Dealer Pavilion (Tickets available through Live Nation and Ticketmaster)

The Ark Band Sun June 29 Shooter's Cleveland

The Jack Fords Fri June 27 Sam & Tommy's Painesville ☐