

„Wir werden immer lauter und wir hör´n nicht auf!“
German reggae and dancehall in the 1990s and 2000s

Martin Pfeleiderer, Weimar

In the 2000s, reggae and dancehall music blossomed in Germany like never before. Although in the 1970s some Germans from an alternative milieu loved to listen to Jamaican roots reggae, particularly to Bob Marley, and in the early 1990s Jamaican dancehall and “ragga” artists like Shaggy or Shabba Ranks earned modest success, it was not until the 2000s that German artists – like singers Gentleman (born Tilmann Otto in 1975) or Jan Delay (born Jan Phillip Eißfeldt in 1976), or the Berlin based dancehall crew Seeed (founded in 1998) – achieved broad attention and success at home and abroad, and even reached the German pop charts. However, this success was only the tip of the iceberg taking into account a lively sound system and club scene already growing since the mid of the 1990s in cities like Cologne or Hamburg.

In my paper, I examine the relationship between the reggae and dancehall boom of the 2000s and transformation processes in German culture and society of the 1990s and 2000s. In particular, I look for changes in the self-images of German youths which are graspable in issues and attitudes treated within German reggae and dancehall music.

At first, I give a brief historical outline of reggae and dancehall in Germany and a short description of the infrastructure of the German reggae and dancehall scene after 1990 (cf. Kautny/Philipps 2007, Koehling/Lilly 2012), including the crucial role of sound systems, record labels, and music magazine *Riddim* (founded in 2001) as well as intercultural relations between German dancehall aficionados and Jamaican artists. Additionally, commonalities and differences to other music scenes in Germany after 1990, esp. rave and hip-hop, are discussed in order to grasp the peculiarities of the dancehall and reggae scene.

Then, divergent topics in German reggae and dancehall music are identified and characterized: the spiritual message of love and unity, social criticism, partnership as well as parties, dances and sound system culture. From a close reading of the staging and of song lyrics written by German artists, e.g. Seeed, Jan Delay, Nosliw, and Ronny Trettmann, conclusions regarding the self-conception of the reggae scene within contemporary German society are drawn. Moreover, some textual references to German history as well as musical peculiarities of recordings produced in Germany are depicted.

Lit.:

Karnik, Olaf / Helmut Philipps (2007). *Reggae in Deutschland*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
Koehlings, Ellen / Pete Lilly (2012). *The Evolution of Reggae in Europe with a Focus on Germany*. In: *Global Reggae*, ed. by Carolyn Cooper, Kingston: Canoe Press, pp. 69-94.