

"Dance music is not necessarily dumb"

Willie Ocean, singer of The Special Guests, about the new album "Beetroot", irony and political statements in music.

What was your motivation to do a cover version of Tracy Chapman's "Talkin' Bout A Revolution"?

Willie Ocean: Last year the french-german TV station Arte contacted us and asked us to do recordings for their new music format "Klang". They not only wanted an original song from each band, but also a cover version. Since we usually don't play covers, that first seemed like a problem. It took a lot of really serious discussions before someone mentioned that song and everybody said: yes, that fits.

Did the message of the song play any role in that decision?

W.O.: When the song was a hit in 1986, there were far less reasons for a revolution in good old Europe than today. Today the mass of the people find themselves in social insecurity, while they are told they only have to seize their chances. Okay, we know in these days who's our enemy: the diligent workers in China. We just have to follow our leaders like Dr. Joe Ackermann (the Deutsche Bank CEO) to defend our economy. Maybe we haven't internalized that new paradigm yet.

Maybe that was the reason we decided to play that song. And not take one from Michael Jackson or Rammstein. It wasn't an intellectual decision at all. You can hear in the original that there's more wishful thinking than fear. We tried to exaggerate that feeling in our Ska version.

When I listen to the new CD I get the impression that you're talking more politics now. How did that happen?

W.O.: Man, we are the dance band for the alternative scene! Even punks like to dance once in a while. For us, the spirit of Ska always had political and social connotations. You just don't stress that point all the time. At our gigs workers dance alongside intellectuals. I believe that groove and revolutionary spirit both bring people together.

On the new album I decided to be a bit more clear about things that I'm thinking about. There are some themes you just can't avoid. There's love and all it's complications on the one hand. On the other, there are all these limitations to freedom. Besides our own mind these limitations come from all those measures in the war against terrorism. Or is it the same subject? Never mind. Keep smiling. Dance music is not necessarily dumb.

What does Ska stand for today?

W.O.: When I joined The Special Guests and told my friends that I was in a Ska band now, some of them said: "Yeah, punk is great!" I thought that was strange. Well, you can't always separate one from the other and that's fine, but: We play Ska! We play the Ska! I see the connection...

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BEETROOT from The Special Guests feat. Willie Ocean
CD, 13 Tracks
Distribution: rough trade/LeechRedda/iTunes
Order No.: 341.0007.2 (rough trade)
Cat. No.: moa07008-2
UPC: 880918068626
Release Date: 20.04.2007
www.thespecialguests.de

