

Label Focus - Greensleeves

Greensleeves Records

Greensleeves is one of the most famous of all reggae labels and in 2007

celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. Now owned by Zest Music Group, their catalogue comprises over 500

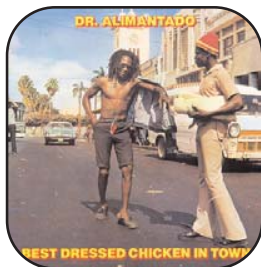
albums, including a recent label retrospective compilation *From Dubplate To Download*, and over 1,500 7" and 12" singles.



The Early Days

The origins of the business stem from a record store set up in 1975 in West Ealing by Chris Sedgwick and Chris Cracknell, with the label itself born once the duo moved to new premises in 1977. The shop specialised in reggae imports from Jamaica but soon realised that demand was outstripping supply on many of the titles they stocked - hence the Greensleeves imprint was launched with the express purpose of licensing and pressing these best sellers to satiate the demand of the British audience.

A number of factors helped the reputation of the business to spread. The patronage of John Peel was an early boost; also beneficial was the timely punk/reggae crossover of the late seventies.



The specific endorsement of Greensleeves records by John Lydon of the Sex Pistols - in particular the first releases by Doctor Alimantado (such as *The Best Dressed Chicken In Town*, also a firm Peel favourite) - gave the label a greatly improved profile which reached out beyond its core audience of roots reggae aficionados.

Building The Roster

Within its first five years the label had released music by a mixture of both UK

All-Time Greensleeves Best Sellers (all territories)

1	The Biggest Ragga Dancehall Anthems 1999	Various Artists
2	Heads High	Mr Vegas
3	Oh No It's Red Rat	Red Rat
4	The Biggest Ragga Dancehall Anthems 2000	Various Artists
5	Bobo Ashanti	Sizzla
6	The Biggest Ragga Dancehall Anthems 2001	Various Artists
7	Royal Son Of Ethiopia	Sizzla
8	The Biggest Ragga Dancehall Anthems 2003	Various Artists
9	Ragga Ragga Ragga 2005	Various Artists
10	Higher Level	Elephant Man

acts - such as Reggae Regular and Capital Letters - and artists from Jamaica such as Barrington Levy and Yellowman. This internationalist outlook paid off on several occasions - one of the biggest successes in the eighties, for example, came with South London-born Tippa Irie's 1986 hit *Hello Darling*.



The label has also made a concerted effort to keep abreast of changes in the reggae market. It issued the record commonly adjudged to have initiated the 'digital' phase in 1986, Wayne Smith's *Under Me Sleng Teng*, and continued to release records from the studios of the top producers of the day such as Gussie Clarke, Fattis Burrell, Junior Reid and Mikey Bennett.

In the nineties the roster grew to include productions from the burgeoning New York reggae scene, providing the label with what was to become its biggest hit: Shaggy's *Oh Carolina*, which reached Number One in the UK singles chart in March 1993, went on to become one of the biggest sellers of the year.

Recent History

The end of the nineties saw seminal releases from artists such as Bounty Killer and the enigmatic Sizzla, whose

1997 release *Black Woman & Child* is regularly cited as a modern roots reggae classic. The latter artist's reputation has continued to grow and a number of his releases on Greensleeves have gone on to be all-time best sellers for the label (see chart above).



The label capped the decade with two more huge crossover hit singles. Beenie Man's *Who Am I* made the national Top 10 in March 1998 and was followed into the Top 20 a year later by Mr Vegas with his reissued *Heads High*.

The label capped the decade with two more huge crossover hit singles. Beenie Man's *Who Am I* made the national Top 10 in March 1998 and was followed into the Top 20 a year later by Mr Vegas with his reissued *Heads High*.

Current Activities

Greensleeves' dual purpose as both a major source of catalogue and a hub for new talent has been central to its success. Around four albums a month have been released in 2007, encompassing both reissues of original albums (some for the first time on CD), compilations (such as the *Most Wanted* and *12" Rulers* series) and material from newer artists such as Chezidek and Ras Shiloh. An increased web presence (including a download store) has helped to bring the label to a new audience and ensure the Greensleeves brand is as prominent as ever.

www.greensleeves.net