

# The Inspirational Sounds of

Featuring U-Roy, Earl 16, Sister Audrey, Jah Shaka  
Aisha, Black Steel, The Sane Inmates and more

# Mad Professor



A comprehensive guide to the works of dub reggae legend Mad Professor.  
Creative force behind Ariwa, dub mixer for Massive Attack,  
Lee Perry, Ruts DC and many others.

- 1) **Kunta Kinte** • from the LP 'Beyond The Realms Of Dub - Dub Me Crazy Pt 2'. This version previously unreleased on CD.
- 2) **Creation Dub** • from the LP 'Mad Professor Meets Jah Shaka'.
- 3) **Moses Law** • from the LP 'Escape To The Asylum Of Dub' - Dub Me Crazy Part 4.
- 4) **Atmospheric Dub** • from the LP 'Mad Professor Meets Jah Shaka'.
- 5) **Claps Like Thunder** • from the LP 'Mad Professor Meets Jah Shaka'.
- 6) **Plantain And Cassava** • Only previously released on 12" by Mad Professor and The Sane Inmates
- 7) **Fast Forward into Dub** • Original Dub from the 12" release of 'The Creator' featuring Aisha unreleased on CD. As sampled by the Orb.
- 8) **River Niger** • from the LP 'Beyond The Realms Of Dub' - Dub Me Crazy Part 2.
- 9) **Asylum Of Dub** • from the LP 'Escape To The Asylum Of Dub' - Dub Me Crazy Part 4.
- 10) **Children Rise** • from the Earl 16 LP 'Babylon Walls' a reworking of the Channel One classic.
- 11) **We've Had Enough** • from the Macka B LP of the same title.
- 12) **Raging Storm** • from the LP 'Psychedelic Dub - Dub Me Crazy Part 10'.
- 13) **Africa Is Zion** • from the Sister Audrey LP 'Populate'.
- 14) **True Born African** • Original 12" version featuring both U Roy and Sister Audrey. This is the reworking of Sister Audrey's original Ariwa classic 'English Girl'.
- 15) **6 Million Dub** • from the white label 12" release. Never before on CD.
- 16) **Psychological Warfare** • from the LP 'Black Liberation Dub Chapter 1'.
- 17) **Kathmandu** • from The LP 'Evolution Of Dub - Black Liberation Dub Chapter 3'.

The following conversation with Neil 'Mad Professor' Fraser was recorded at Ariwa Studios in London in the summer of 1998.

**Tell us about how you started and why you wanted to do what it is you're doing ?** I was into electronics from when I was a kid - I'd build radios and devices, play with wires to try to understand electricity and magnetism. I wanted to know how the radio works - it was the most technical thing in our house and I couldn't understand where this voice was coming from. So I got into electronics to discover resistors, transistors and the valves - it wasn't IC's then. I started to build my own stuff, when I was around fifteen I thought I'd like to build some effects so I built my reverb, an echo, delay and I started to build a mixing desk and kept going back to it until when I was around 21 I started to build my first professional desk, and set it up in my sitting room. I invited local bands to come and jam in the house.

I had no idea I'd end up on stage or even producing records, I wanted just to be a recording engineer. I had flashes of being a musician and up to now it comes back - I keep getting lines in my head, but because I've always been surrounded by an excellent bunch of musicians if I want something I'll get someone to play it, and usually there's someone at hand who could do it a lot better than I ever could.

**Why 'Mad Professor' - how did that start ?** It started at school when I was building stuff instead of playing football, then it came up again when I started the studio because it was a weird thing to do. It's a normal thing now in the '90's, especially with MIDI but at the end of the '70's it was strange especially if you weren't from a studio background.

**What was the first sounds, outside of being interested in the technology, that made you get interested in music itself ?**



I guess this album that came out by Prince Buster around 1972 called 'Chi Chi Run Run' by Big Youth, there was a dub album to it with the same yellow sleeve called 'The Message Dubwise', and it had things like 'raw and undiluted' written on the sleeve. It was totally different from anything else and you put on this album and it's like an instrumental then things would drop out and you could hear like the guitar faintly in the background leaking through the reverb. There wasn't much echo on it. There were versions of things like 'Satta Masa Gana' - it was the first time I was even hearing such songs. There was a version of 'Java', 'I'm Not a King'. It was the first time you could hear the progression of the chords and the movements, and then the rhythm section would disappear and the reverb would come up, it was exciting. When you've never heard dub and you hear it for the first time it's really exciting. I guess it was mixed by Tubby but it didn't credit him, it just said Prince Buster Allstars. I thought, I'd really like to make something like this. Soon after that dub just erupted, every producer who was making music would fish out a bunch of tapes and remix them to make dub albums. By 1975 you had all kinds of dub, 'Rasclaat dub', Burning Spear with his dub LP 'Garvey's Ghost', Joe Gibbs kicking off with 'African Dub Part 1', Treasure Islands 'Treasure Dub'. Everyone who had a catalogue of music - like Errol Thompson and Joe Gibbs - would take it to someone like Tubby's or Perry if you could get him and have them remix things if they didn't have their own in house engineer. By '76 dub culture was so strong



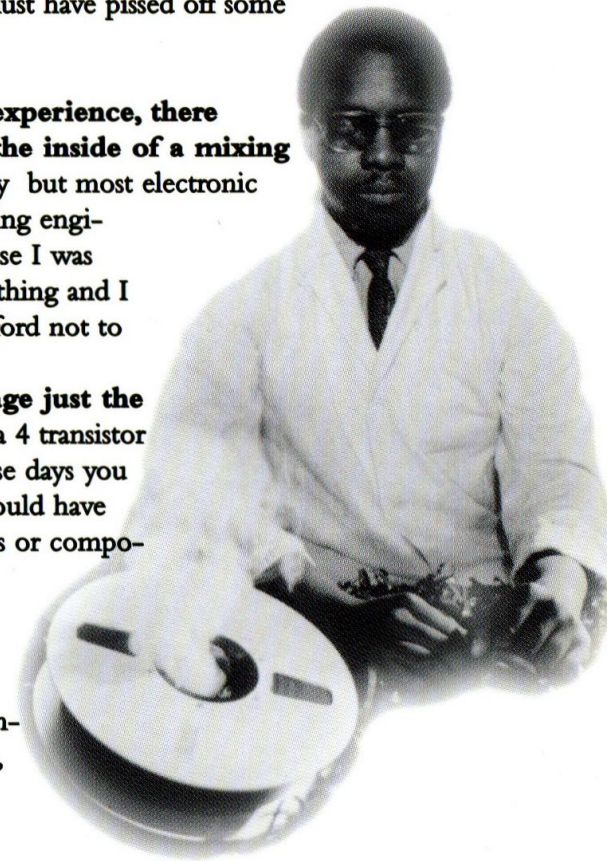
were selling for the B side's. I guess it must have pissed off some singers - the business literally flipped.

**So, returning to your engineering experience, there aren't many producers who know the inside of a mixing desk ?** Probably not, I don't know why but most electronic engineers don't want to become recording engineers. Maybe it's a different head. Because I was doing my own things I had to do everything and I wanted to do everything - I couldn't afford not to do everything!

**Were the effects you had at that stage just the ones you built yourself ?** Yes I built a 4 transistor phaser and I had a spring reverb. In those days you could buy electronics magazines that would have audio sections where you could buy kits or components. There were some great ones like 'Practical Audio' - they'd have lists of components to build guitar wahwahs, phasers and flangers. They even had a mixing desk project that they did in conjunction with one of the manufacturers, Seck, they started as a kit in one of the magazines.

**Did you ever build any synths or any siren boxes ?** I had some effects boxes like that but I was always into things that changed sound rather than generating it.

**Have you still got any of the original units that you made like the first phaser ?** I've got the boxes, we've got stuff at home most of it all rusted. They weren't labelled or anything so they're really rough.



**What are your favourite Jamaican studios and engineers ?**

Two studio's. I really loved Joe Gibbs, I would even say I patterned my studio off his sound. I found it the most technically advanced sound and the most adventurous, they would try things that no one else would dare to try. Their records were in stereo as well. Channel One in the seventies was a good tight, clean sound - brilliant edits, well recorded, but it was a mono sound and not as bassy as Joe Gibbs' sound but it had a nice crisp top end.

Harry J was a great international studio, they had a Neve desk and got some really good drum sounds. A couple of Bob Marley albums were done at Harry J, like the 'Natty Dread' album, good sound. Dynamics was also a good studio but to me it was an international sound with a Jamaican flavour. I don't think it was as grand as say Mixing Lab is now, but it was heading that way. Kind of a colourless sound.

**Do you have much knowledge of the technology which made each studio unique ?**

I did some research because I was always curious. The good thing about that period was you didn't have much choice in tape machines or even mixing desks. Joe Gibbs had a Soundcraft, Channel One had an API desk and used Ampex tape machines, most people used Ampex or 3M then. Sixteen track 2 inch was the state of the art of the early seventies and the only studio in JA that had one was Federal, which again was a very good studio, probably the best technically. If you listen to Federal recordings of around 1971 you'd be amazed up to this day, they really stand out. Dynamics got a sixteen track soon after that, then Joe Gibbs.

**What about the likes of Tubby or Lee Perry who didn't have the access to the budget of the bigger studios ?**

Well from what I understood, when Dynamics got the sixteen track 2 inch, Tubby's ended up with their four track board, it appears that Tubby started as Dynamics got an upgrade. I was told that Tubby never left Jamaica. Anyway, Tubby's had Dynamics stuff which was 1/2 inch 4 track and 1 inch 8 track, and Perry who built his studio around '74 started and finished with 1/4 inch 4 track Teac.

**Do you think Scratch got his sound by the amount of bouncing down he had to do ?**

That contributed definitely but he was one of the first people to use Soundcraft who started around that time. He ended up with a Series 1 desk in a flightcase, nice EQ, very good desk.

**There tends to be an almost parochial view that although classic music came out of Jamaica it almost happened by accident . . .**

You should talk to Sylvain Morris who for years was the in-house engineer at Harry J, and he would tell you that they could all fix things. In Jamaica they would get things in from America and England - some things work on 110v some things on 240v and some things were designed to work in cool temperatures so they would have to change transistors, add fans.

From what I understand an engineer in the seventies had to be more than just a guy who pressed the buttons or plugged in a microphone, you had to be able to fix things when they went wrong. When we used to run Ariwa as a commercial studio almost every week I was having to bring in people to line up machines or fix things that I couldn't fix, the rest of the time I was fixing things.

**What made you want to start putting things out on a label - why did Ariwa start ?**

After the 4 track we moved up to 8 track and things started to sound a bit more professional. Singers started to come along and DJs, anyone who fancied themselves as an artist would come along and record. Then they started to say to me we should start a label and after we had a few recordings I thought why not. I got to know a bit about pressing records and we had the first release 'Come Back Again' by Sergeant Pepper.

**Did that go down well ?**

No it didn't! (Laughs) That would have been '80-'81, the beat was changing from steppers into radics beat, things like 'Sitting and Watching' Dennis Brown. The music got a bit slower and moody it wasn't as hard, but it was still dense, Barrington Levy, Barry Brown that type of sound, Al Campbell 'Midnight Blues', heavy and slow. You had some Scientist mixes. Channel One was one of the leading studio's and they'd upgraded to 2 inch and you could hear the difference, it sounded sparser and heavier and their tunes were in stereo, though the engineers didn't make much use of the fact that it was in stereo. You still had some good recordings though, 2 inch sixteen is a good medium to record on, a lot of people still swear it's the best, it kicks.

**How did the 'Dub Me Crazy' series come about ?**

Well I was collecting tracks for various purposes, just like I do now. I knew I wanted to do a dub album at some point, I was building the whole concept. I didn't want it to be something boring like 'Ariwa dub', I wanted to take it on a bit of adventure. When I started the first 'Dub Me Crazy' we were on 16 track 2 inch. I bought this great big Ampex machine, we were still in my house and that's when I started to get complaints from the neighbours so that's when we had to move. I finished it down Peckham.

That was at the same time we were doing the Ruts DC album ('Rhythm Collision'). The Ampex weighs about a ton and the studio was in the basement and the machine could not fit down the stairs so we ended up putting it on the ground floor and running cables down the stairs. . .

**So you controlled the studio from the basement ?**

Yes, because the desk had no meters on it, you were really working in the dark.

**What tunes did you make under those conditions ?**

Mainly the 'Dub Me Crazy Part One' mixes, we were not active as a singles label. It was frustrating but I couldn't afford a smaller more modern machine that could fit down the stairs. Then we found one built by a guy in Shrewsbury, a machine called Aces. The ideal machine would have been a 3M M79 or a Sony MCI.

**How long were you in Peckham ?**

April '82 until May '86 - four years. The place we rented was dilapidated, we had a burglary that told me it was time to move. By then we had another Ampex, an 1100 from a Virgin Records barge, one of the best sounding machine's, crisp and solid. Anyway we moved everything back to the house and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and where, then the place we are now in came up and it was ideal, sometimes you could forget how ideal. We came in with the soundproofing from Peckham and it could only do maybe the vocal room!

**Over the years have you rebuilt the inside ?**

Yes, I keep changing it. I just go through ideas. Sometimes people think I'm really crazy, I'd have a song in my head and I'd know to get this song right we'd have to be facing a different way. When we first came in I still had the old console which was by then up to 32 inputs, we had proved ourselves, we'd had several number one hits in the reggae charts. Everyone was coming to the studio from Dennis Brown, Johnny Clarke, loads of artists.

# ariwa sounds

**That must have been incredible. . .**

At first, but then you stop being a fan and become an engineer or a producer. You'd do what you had to do, you couldn't really have fan notions. The hardest people to please are reggae people, everyone has a song in their head, they know when something sounds good but they don't know how to make it sound good. If you have a pair of horrible speakers they would give you a hard time. My desk always looked rough, I had wires hanging from it and you could hear the doubt in peoples voices and see it in their faces. Then when they compared their mixes elsewhere with ours they realised it sounded good.

**What was the first big seller on the record label ?**

We had some hits that we channelled through the Shaka label - Johnny Clarke, Tony Benjamin. Shaka label was more established and it was easier to do that.

**How far back does your relationship with Shaka go?**

It started when the studio was in my house before Peckham. When I started the studio I was working full time for someone in Woking - boring electronic stuff. They gave me a hard time, me and the guy had some words and it was clear he wanted to sack me so I said "just give me my cards and fuck off" and went home, which was what I wanted to do in any case. When I got home I had two calls for the studio, one was Shaka and one from Mo Ambassa. Mo Ambassa was a top sound system, people like Berris Bassa. Shaka wanted to come in and do 'Commandments of Dub' so he came in with a few guys including Wazair and Hughie Issachar, so straight away I had two good sessions. They were pleased with what they heard so came back for more.

**On the day that you decided to be an independent record producer ...**

That's right. Mombassa were doing a lot of work with Kojak, Jah Thomas and others. They would come in and bring all these Tubby tapes with voice on one side and music on the other which they wanted mixing together, editing, tape copying, little jobs for £50 sessions. Helped to balance me not working.

**How much of the early Shaka stuff was recorded by yourself ?**

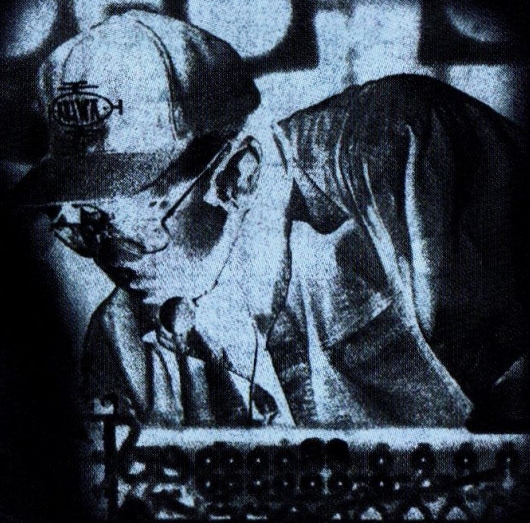
Most of it. Say up to '84, the last ones we did were maybe 'Commandments of Dub Chapter IV', 'Brimstone and Fire', 'Revelation Songs'.

**The sound on those records is incredible.** It's definitely the early

British roots sound. It's a sound the general reggae market didn't take to, we were outside the main stream.

Years later we realised just how much it spread, but at that time as far as anyone in the reggae business was concerned it was rubbish. People were saying "you can't go to Ariwa if you want to make a lovers sound". They were saying we could only do roots until two/three years later when we decided to go full into the lovers market with a different sound.





*Holly is the administrative brain behind Ariwa. Here she is in conversation with Molara from Zion Train.*

**ZT** Were you together when the studio was in the house?

**H** Yes. We met in '73 and the studio was started in '78 - there were a lot of electronics inbetween time.

**ZT** He said his initial interest started when he wanted to take the radio to bits.

**H** I did think he was mad then! He liked music, was into electronics and I kept thinking what is this? But he was so into it all I could do was encourage him.

**ZT** What did you think when Professor came home from work and said he'd packed it in?

**H** I told him he was mad. I said "how are we going to pay the mortgage"? He said "Don't worry about it I'll sort it out", and he did. I have great faith in him because he's always delivered what he's promised. It may take time sometimes but you can guarantee he'll do it.

I started out as a dental technician. In the time that Neil stopped working as an electronics technician I carried on working and started to do bits and pieces in the office for him. I didn't start working full time at Ariwa until 1980 - a major change in career! I do all the paperwork, bookings, transport, sending out biogs & pictures, contracts, we back each other up.

**ZT** Have you ever wanted to get involved in the music?

**H** I always wanted to sing as a child but I have the most atrocious voice! I think it's a true gift to be able to express yourself like that.

**ZT** A gift that everybody has I think. If you go to place like South Africa singing is just a part of everyday life - there is nobody who can't sing. It is just that the society we live in is so far removed from that . . .

**H** I believe in smiling when I see people in the street. In England when

life is difficult people are miserable. I look for positivity, when I wake up I give thanks for another day and carry on regardless. Sometimes things are difficult. I sit back close my eyes and say "you can do it, it will work". I try not to go home feeling depressed - I have to go home with a positive frame of mind; look after the children.

**ZT** What was it like having a recording studio in your house with the Ruts DC and various other punk and dub bands coming round?

**H** When it first started I was still working. One evening I was coming home from work, out the train station up the high street and there was this "gentleman", about six foot tall, face painted totally white, all dressed in black and it was a summers day. I was having a laugh at this bloke walking down the road with his cape flying behind him, as he carried on down the same street I thought "I hope he's not coming to my house"! I followed him, giggled along with everyone else on the high street but he turned the same corners that I turned, into my street to my door - he'd come for a session. I was tempted to just walk past!

**ZT** Who was he?

**H** He called himself Zoland. He wanted to record as the clock struck midnight - I thought "oh my God he's a vampire", scared the life out of me. Whether he recorded at midnight or not I don't know. I think he left, Neil made sure that he left. We didn't see him again!

**ZT** Is the story Professor told us about Joseph (Holly and Professor's son) plugging in leads in the studio as a baby who couldn't yet walk, true?

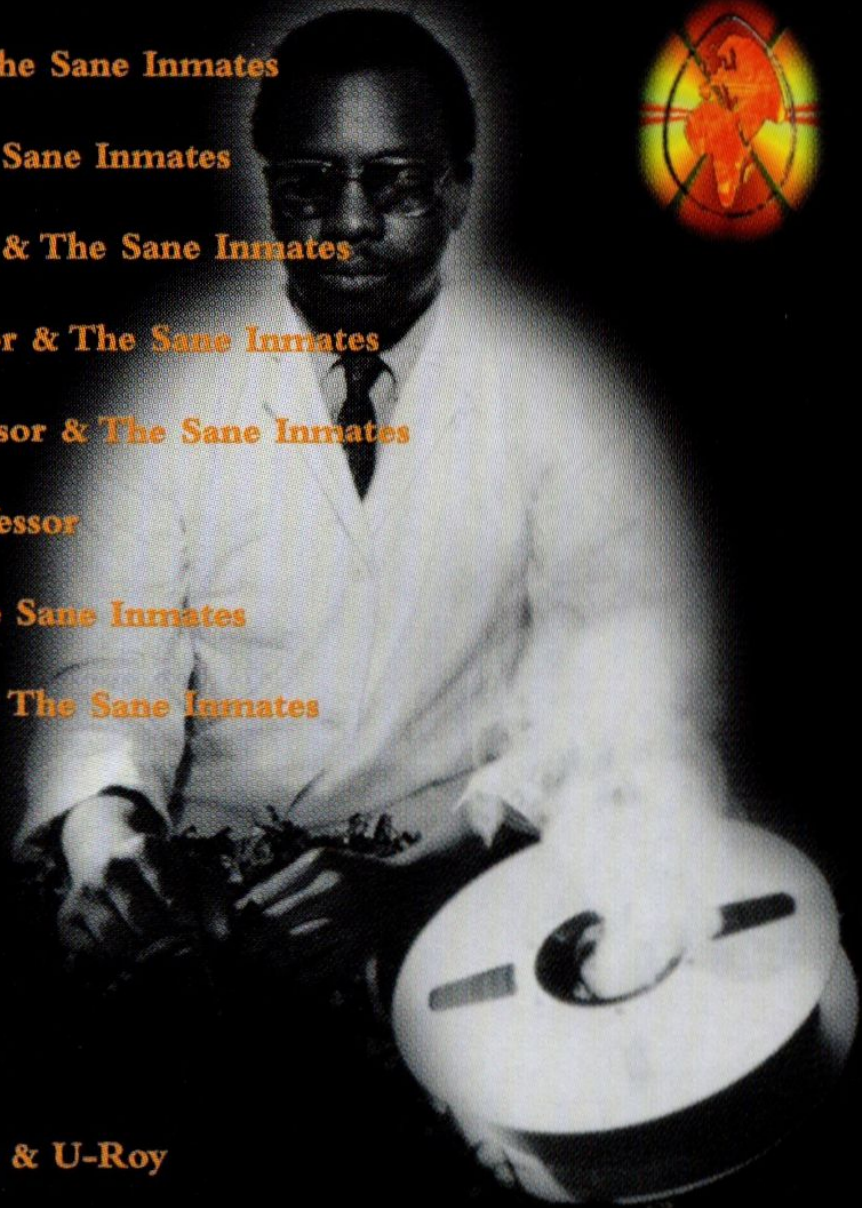
**H** Absolutely and totally true. You'd think he was born to be an engineer.

One time when Neil was away I went to work with my son on the way to school. I went up to the office and asked him to go and check that everything was ok in the studio and the next thing he's shouting "Mum, Mum!". The floor was covered in water, the rain had come down so hard it had managed to find a way in through a gap in the roof, I freaked. I was supposed to go out that day but we had to drop everything. We rushed around - he said "Mum I think I know where the cover for the mixing desk is", we found that and covered the desk then went round with plastic bags covering everything else, it was a total nightmare. Then Neil called and asked how everything was, I said "You want to be here" and told him what had happened. He said "I don't want to be there, you can cope, it'll be alright". It's great to have that kind of faith put in you! He has great faith in me. Sometimes it's misplaced because I can't manage everything!

I learn every day. It's a great challenge for me. I enjoy coming to work because I don't know what the day will bring.

I like the laugh you can get from the business - the funniest things can happen. Lee Perry was a good laugh. The very first time I met him I'd just had Joseph and I was round at Ariwa. Joseph started crying, Lee Perry heard this and said he wanted to record it and put it into his music !





**1) 'Kunta Kinte' - Mad Professor & The Sane Inmates**

*(Mad Professor and The Sane Inmates)*

**2) Creation Dub - Mad Professor & The Sane Inmates**

*(Mad Professor and The Sane Inmates)*

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**7) Fast Forward Into Dub - Mad Professor**

*(Ross)*

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*(Mad Professor)*

**9) Asylum Of Dub - Mad Professor & The Sane Inmates**

*(Mad Professor)*

**10) Children Rise - Earl 16**

*(E Daley)*

**11) We've Had Enough - Macka B**

*(McFarlane)*

**12) Raging Storm - Mad Professor**

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**13) Africa Is Zion - Sister Audrey**

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