



Marley the musician, activist and humanitarian lives boldly, wild and free

By Michael Swanger



Ziggy Marley plays People's Court on Wednesday, Oct. 12 at 8 p.m. Leon Mobley opens. Tickets are \$28.50 through Ticketfly.

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. That old adage applies to five-time Grammy-winning reggae musician, actor, artist, activist and humanitarian Ziggy Marley.

"I love adventure. Keep life alive. Keep livin'," said Marley, 42, the oldest son of the late Bob Marley, in a thick Jamaican accent. "That's one of the main objectives of this album."

A few months ago, Marley released "Wild and Free," his fourth album for Tuff Gong Worldwide. Recorded in Los Angeles and Jamaica, and co-produced by Don Was (Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan), "Wild and Free" affirms Marley as a master storyteller with a deep soul. It's 12 original songs like the title track, "Forward to Love," "Personal Revolution," "Mmmm Mmmm," and "A Sin" are spiritual, philosophical, political, environmental and autobiographical. They range in theme from freedom and responsibility, to hope and love.

"The most important thing about this record is the lyrics," Marley said. "Where the treasure lies in my music is the words."

Marley was recording the lyrics to the album's title track, written in support of California's Proposition 19 to legalize marijuana, when he decided to ask his friend, actor Woody Harrelson, to sing about "hemp fields growing wild and free." An acoustic version of the song, previously titled "A Fire Burns for Freedom," is available on the musician's website for free.

"It's always fun when Woody's around and not fun in a silly way, but fun in a serious way because we talk about spiritual things, environmental things, social things," said Marley, who splits his residency between Jamaica, Florida and California. "We have deep discussions, and we have similarities in ideas.

"Having Woody on the song was a spontaneous thing. He came over one day while we were working on the record, and I said, 'Yo, Woody, you want to sing on this thing?' and he said, 'Yeah, sure.' And he did. It was good, and I put it on the record."

Marijuana is a part of Marley's spiritual and musical culture. His father gave him the nickname "Ziggy," which he says means "a small joint." (His first name is David.) Yet to Marley, marijuana is a misunderstood plant. To help shatter some of its myths and stereotypes, he recently wrote and released "Marijuanaman." The oversized, 48-page, hardcover comic book "tells the tale of a noble extraterrestrial champion, who has arrived on Earth to deliver an important message and at the same time save his own planet."

"I have been researching cannabis and hemp, especially the hemp side. We grew up in a culture where the smoking of marijuana was a spiritual action. So we understood that from a very young age, but then I started learning about hemp, the other side of the plant and how beneficial it is and all the things it can do. I was like, 'Why isn't hemp being grown everywhere?' It has so much use and the potential is so great," Marley said. "So it's a cause I took up to put it out there in a different format, and I came up with the superhero idea.

"The plant is a superhero, but it is a neglected one, it is a demonized one, a criminalized one. For some reason, society rejects it as a natural resource while embracing oil, gas, coal and nuclear energy. It's strange, they deem everything else as beneficial for medicine, food and energy, except this one plant."

Though Marley's political views might be polarizing, his musical themes of unity and love are universal on "Wild and Free."

"My goal is to express myself and hope that people can identify with a common ground on the record that can be a part of their own expression," Marley said. "I meet people at concerts who say that my music helped them through some bad times. You create something, but you don't have an idea of the potential of what it can do for people. People can take away from it whatever is necessary for them." CV

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