

CHAM: DANCEHALL'S INVINCIBLE MESSENGER

The rich, bass-laced, fast-paced world of dancehall music means only the best of the best survive. Not many can go through a name change and still remain relevant. Many would say that even less can manage to take a break, tour the world and return to the scene to command an audience like never before.

Clearly, you've never met the Grammy-nominated-2-album-dancehall-superstar that is Cham.

Having started in the music business by watching artistes like John Wayne and Super Cat rehearse on his uncle's Waterhouse-based sound system, Studio Mix, Cham doesn't look at his musical career as a 'job'. He has all right to, though. With his unmistakable voice and remarkable stage presence, Cham has made his name in dancehall all over the world.

Currently riding high on a string of high-tempo, club-rocking hits with new comer 'O', Cham's stake on dancehall is as strong as ever. The songs, *Wine*, *That Way* and *Tun Up* put Cham's versatility as an artiste on display for the world to see.

The three songs have spent months on dancehall charts, and now a DJ only needs to play the first three seconds of any of these Cham tunes before ladies start going wild. The tracks, produced by Cash Flow Records (*Wine*, *That Way*), and Dave Kelly (*Tun Up*) are without a doubt three of the most scorching tracks in dancehall, and who else but Cham could manage that?

In fact, when the official video for *Wine* was released, more than 100,000 persons clicked 'play' on popular video hosting site 'YouTube' on the DAY it was uploaded. Just another accomplishment for Cham to etch on his seemingly never ending scroll of achievements.

That's nothing surprising, since he comes from the hit-making camp Madhouse Records, headed by the one and only Dave Kelly. Kelly and Cham enjoy a relationship that ensures the hits keep coming. You would have known Kelly's name from his work on many hit singles and albums, including Buju Banton's *Bogle*, Terror Fabulous & Nadine Sutherland's *Action*, and Beenie Man & Ms Thing's *Dude*

He first emerged on the dancehall kaleidoscope in the mid-1990s, making tracks on various juggling riddims including the immortal *Showtime Riddim* which spawned his hit *Galang Gal*. Then, in 2000, under the moniker Baby Cham, gave the world his debut album *Wow: The Story*, and hits such as *Many Many*, *Boom Tune*, *Man & Man* and more. The formula of Cham's deep baritone voice and rustic, lyrically-lethal tracks made sure that he would stake his claim in the annals of music history.

While musical naysayers continued yapping about the limited potential of dancehall, Cham's crossover hit *Vitamin S* struck a nerve... with the world. The song was perfect. *Vitamin S* racked up uncountable hours on disc jock turntables around the world, and led the artiste, whose real name is Damian Beckett, to a deal with Atlantic Records, where he joined fellow Jamaican Sean Paul and American rap stars like Lil' Kim and Fat Joe.

His loyalty to Jamaica and Jamaica's culture never faded, and his goal was always to bring dancehall music to international ears. In fact, Cham can be quoted as saying, many years ago, that he wants Madhouse Productions to be an international household name.

"We need Madhouse to be like how Bad Boy, Rocafella and G-Unit have dem name. That is where our head is at and that is what we're working towards, the development of dancehall not just for Jamaican music lovers, but for music lovers the world over".

It came as no surprise when Cham and Madhouse worked together to produce *Ghetto Story*, his biggest hit to date. The song hit at the end of 2005, and again, Cham took over the world. The song was a narrative of the rough and rugged life Cham overcame to become the man he is today, through the thick and thin of some of Jamaica's toughest garrison communities and streets.

"You can't escape the fact that every country has these kinds of problems. We only talk about it in patois, but check New York, LA, the UK, Canada. In every country, there's a ghetto and we all go through similar experiences and realities. We might speak in different ways, but our stories are remarkably similar and everyone can relate to what *Ghetto Story* talks about and relays," he says.

Having put the song into perspective and silencing all naysayers yet again, Cham went a step further and attracted none other than Alicia Keys to remix the now worldwide hit single. The world waited on baited breath for the release of *Ghetto Story's* official video, and again the world watched in awe as Cham sent dancehall music to new heights, shattering glass ceilings on the way to the top.

But that wasn't the first time Cham's unmistakable style and voice ended up on a track with an international artiste. His list of collaborations includes Foxy Brown, MIA, Nina Sky, Mario and more. But for Cham, it's not about the accolades and the egos. In fact, the artiste has been quoted countless times in the press that younger artistes should make sure to shed egos and hype before they go into the studio and make sure they make timeless tracks that "people can still play and rail up to 10, 20 years from now".

What's next for Cham? The seemingly invincible dancehall superstar is working on his third album, while making sure he remains relevant – which shouldn't be too hard a task for him and his 'O'ut of the box team at Madhouse Productions.