

Being Bob Marley

As The Wailers prepare for Sandance, Rob Garratt meets Danglin – the singer tasked with standing in for a reggae legend

There may be few pairs of shoes larger to fill than those of Bob Marley. An icon who transcended music, the Jamaican's songs are known worldwide, selling millions and reaching billions. Marley's relatively young death has seen him enshrined into the ranks of pop culture alongside Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and just a handful of others. It's been said that Marley's image is the most reproduced on T-shirts worldwide behind Che Guevara.

But these are the metaphorical shoes Dwayne 'Danglin' Anglin stepped into in 2010, when he got a call asking him to front The Wailers, the band Marley led from 1963 until his death 1981. 'Bob Marley is one of the icons of music,' says Danglin. 'He's right up there with the likes of Michael Jackson – but I'm not really filling anyone's shoes. I'm just carrying on his legacy, in any way I can. There's just no duplicating, replicating or replacing Bob Marley.'

That phone call is only the most recent remarkable turn in an otherwise remarkable life. Born in Jamaica in 1982 – a year after Marley's death – Danglin moved to the US when he was 14, supported by his mother, a nurse. And his father? 'I couldn't tell you, I haven't seen him in 20-plus years. I hope he's alive and well.'

After school, Danglin joined the US navy, serving four years in Japan and the Gulf during the 9/11 period, an

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experience he says taught him 'discipline, attention to detail, perseverance and tolerance'. Then at 21, never having played before, he was suddenly hit by the bug for music. He quit the military in 2003 and, in between honing his musical chops, studied for a master's degree in criminology, criminal-incident management and homeland



security. And then he struck gold with a record deal, releasing an acclaimed first single 'Excuse Me Miss' in Jamaica in 2009. And then The Wailers called.

'When I got the call I was not 100 percent sure what I was going to do,' admits Danglin today. 'Coming here to join The Wailers would put on hold my solo career, so I had to make a decision.' Recalling countless childhood memories of overhearing Marley's melodies on relatives' radios, he took the job. 'Bob Marley was my idol growing up, to this day he still is, so I had to reflect and say: there's a lot of experienced people they could have called, and they chose me, so at least give it a shot.'

Today, Danglin is far from the only new man in The Wailers' ranks, with the band little resembling that which Marley left behind three decades before. Leading is Aston 'Family Man' Barrett, the 68-year-old bassist who joined Marley in 1974 and who, alongside his drummer Caroly, lent many of Marley's best-known hits their distinctive groove. It's a fact the veteran is well

aware of, losing a UK court claim for Dhs350m in unpaid royalties in 2006. If he'd won, Barrett's reported 52 children – that's how he got the nickname – could have been in line for nearly Dhs7m each.

This isn't the Family Man that Danglin knows. 'He's such a quiet person, a humble person,' he tells us. 'He's very strict, but at the same time he allows you to move. It's a balance, just the right amount of discipline and freedom to operate as you require.'

But it's clear from talking to Danglin it won't be enough freedom forever. With his debut solo album set for release next summer, it seems like it is the singer's great respect for the music which is keeping him in the job, and will be the thing that drives him away.

'You can never be bigger than this [Marley's] music,' he says. 'People really resonate to this music, and you just have to be respectful to this music and try to maintain a positive

attitude. I'm still committed to my solo career, but the music recreates its own identity every time I'm on stage. I'm just a vessel.'

We ask him if there's a security in The Wailers' pay cheque his own music career wouldn't afford, and the subject of his four-year-old daughter comes up. Remarkably the conversation goes full circle to Marley, a man Danglin says inspires him as 'an example of being a good father, one of the things I aspire to'.

This comment comes as a surprise. While not as prolific as Family Man, Marley is said to have fathered more than a dozen children from a number of women. But Danglin refuses to hear a sleight against his own forefather. 'Bob Marley is Bob Marley,' he answers. 'That's a man, and that's a man who was the most recognisable face on the planet. When you get to that point in life, I think everything else is okay... let's just celebrate that. Everything else has already happened.'

'Whoever criticises I say: look at your own life. Examine your own faults, and if you can come up with a flawless record, then criticise all you want. But I know no one can. So, Bob Marley is Bob Marley.' And those are the shoes Danglin has to fill. *The Wailers perform at Sandance on Friday October 11. Tickets cost from Dhs295 from www.timeouttickets.com*



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