

# Smokin' Jah Roots

## Seven Midwesterners get down with Jah

It is a packed concert, and a diverse group of excited fans is jumping in the air all at once and hanging onto every lyric. This is Ras Josh's view from the stage when he is jamming for his fans.

"Our music is about education and news but isn't preachy," says Josh, vocalist and guitarist for Jah Roots. "If there isn't news to sing about, there is always love."

Jah Roots will be bringing love with smooth tropical rhythms and spreading its Rastafarian message at Mojo's on Oct. 8.

Jah Roots didn't start out as the seven-member band it is today. In 2001 Josh and his friend Mike Hulsey began playing in Josh's Springfield, Mo., home. The pair slowly added talented friends to the group before creating its first album, *Steppin' Out of Babylon*. Four years and three albums later, the group has grown to seven members and is sharing reggae vibes by playing shows all over Missouri and surrounding states. Jah Roots' influence has also been felt overseas. Its album *More Herbs for the Youth* received radio play in London.

As members of the predominantly black reggae scene, these Midwestern white boys believe they have brought a new sound to Missouri. Josh says he never saw any members of the black Springfield community at concerts he attended until Jah Roots started playing. He believes he is helping bring two communities together through the band.

Jah Roots, like so many other reggae groups, is influenced by the Rastafarian religion. After getting into reggae music and researching the religion, the band members decided they wanted to live a life of love. Rastafarians historically believe in the redemption of blacks, forbid the cutting of hair, consider Haile Selassie, an Ethiopian king of the early 1930s, a god and use marijuana for ritual purposes.

"We try to encourage herb burn," says Josh, who changed his name to Ras (meaning king in Ethiopian) Josh. "It lets the people at our concerts let loose."

Although Josh encourages herb burn, he wants to make it clear that he does not condone the use of all drugs. "I do not do drugs or drink alcohol," he says. "I only smoke marijuana."

Jah Roots has played big shows with Damien Marley, just one of the band's many influences. "Chezidek, Jacob Miller, Bob Marley and Turbulence, a singer and D.J. from Jamaica, are all inspiring," Josh says.

At the band's concerts, CDs are not sold. Jah Roots takes an unconventional approach when distributing its rhythms. The band gives away albums at concerts and encourages fans to make and give copies to their friends. It believes that this approach has actually helped to get the band's name and its Rastafarian message to more people. Jah Roots has mailed CDs to fans in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. By giving away CDs and spreading their music, the band members hope the concerts will be packed.

"People keep coming, so it is making me feel that we are doing something right," Josh says.

— MICHELLE DUMONTIER

## EVENT INFO

**What:** Jah Roots  
**Where:** Mojo's  
**When:** Tuesday, doors at 8:30 p.m.  
**Cost:** \$5  
**Call:** 875-0558



COURTESY OF JAH ROOTS

Jah Roots has come a long way from two guys jamming. Members are Grant Maledy, Ras Josh, Eric Groves, Steve Washburn, Josh Nail, Mike Hulsey and Baddaflex.

## SOUND ADVICE

### Franz Ferdinand — *You Could Have It So Much Better*

Eighteen months ago the Scottish lads of Franz Ferdinand conquered America with a platinum-selling, self-titled debut. Not wanting to sit idly and let the fire of creative success burn out, Franz cut touring short to get back into the studio. Its second album, *You Could Have It So Much Better*, showcases the band's ability to recreate the same level of passionate, highbrow dance rock it gave us before. It's a far cry from a sophomore slump.

In the album's first minute, two guitars wage war over a driving house beat, both trying desperately to own it. Singer Alex Kapranos encourages the sonic violence and sets the tone for the record when he provocatively calls out, "What's wrong with a little destruction?" Electric guitar fuzz burrows into the cerebellum with the fervor of a dentist's drill. Brain signals travel through the body. Hands and feet, shoulders and chest bounce slowly but gain speed in anticipation of the next tempo change.

Franz Ferdinand has been hailed as the forerunner of a new Britpop invasion along with The Futureheads, Bloc Party, The Libertines, Snow Patrol and Kaiser Chiefs. It has also been associated with the '80s revival movement led by retro kings The Killers, The Bravery, Scissor Sisters and Interpol.



COURTESY OF SONY

The band's relevance is undeniable, yet Franz seems unaffected. In "Outsiders," the album's last song, Kapranos defends the band's independence when he sings, "There's been some change, but we're still outsiders." His words are charged by the music underneath them: a medley of piercing funk licks and lazy synthesizer humming. It's progressive disco-swank reminiscent of Pink Floyd. At other times the album is more animated pop, drawing from The Beatles. The audacity of *You Could Have It So Much Better* does create a sort of trap for the band a couple of times when songs come on a bit too quick, leaving the listener behind. The offense is minor, though. Franz really proves itself, and you can't have it much better.

— CLINT CARTER

A tasty morsel of ear candy VVVVV

### Paul van Dyk — *The Politics of Dancing 2*

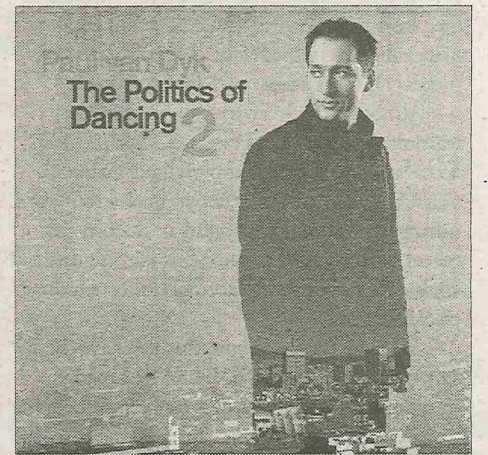
Paul van Dyk grew up deprived of a club culture in communist East Berlin, but after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a club scene finally emerged. van Dyk first played his techno music in 1991 at a club in Berlin. This September, van Dyk released *The Politics of Dancing 2*, his first compilation in four years.

Van Dyk "reworked, remixed, rearranged or edited" most of the songs on this two-disc album, according to *JIVE* Magazine. With 32 songs, techno fans should be able to find at least one song that captures their interest. The first disc contains more mellow songs compared to the fast-paced, harsh beats on disc two.

Granted, some songs sound the same, such as "Swing 2 Harmony" and "Carry On." Without lyrics to distinguish these songs, it's difficult to tell them apart.

"The Other Side," the only song on the album composed exclusively by van Dyk, is about the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia last year. The song hints at the idea of being able to communicate with those who have died and now exist on the other side. This demonstrates the depth that van Dyk can express with lyrics, but the other songs without lyrics lose the capability of conveying more thought-provoking messages.

"The Other Side" is the best song on the album and sets high expectations that the rest of *Dancing* fails to meet. Wayne Jackson



COURTESY OF MUTE U.S.

provides dreamy lyrics that fade in and out of the song. This song begins with his lyrics and an acoustic guitar, then fades into synthesized music. The track smoothly transitions between computer-based electronics and acoustic guitar throughout the song. These even transitions by both Jackson and van Dyk are the most intriguing aspects of *Dancing*.

Regardless of your preference for a specific music genre, "The Other Side" is worth downloading. As for the rest of the album, keep aspirin handy. The generic, repetitive, electric thud-thud found in every song on the album achieves nothing more than headaches.

— NISA KORTE

Bargain bin-bound VVVVV