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**NO1**

**DURAN  
IN THE STUDIO  
EXCLUSIVE**

**!WIN DINNER  
WITH 5 STAR  
OR SPANDAU!**

**LIGHTING  
UP AMERICA**

**UB40**

**HOUSEMARTINS • CAMEO • BON JOVI • DON JOHNSON  
JULIAN COPE • BLACK • PAUL SIMON • PRETENDERS • 5 STAR • OMD  
BILLY IDOL • ANDY TAYLOR • QUO • ELTON JOHN • JACKSON BROWNE**

# FLYING THE BRUMMIE FLAG

Ali Campbell looks uncomfortable as he sits in the shade near the pool. The glare of the LA sun is all around and he's having difficulty making himself understood. It's something to do with the billing of a forthcoming American show. It's all wrong. All rock. Not at all UB40.

The band's American manager, Ken, understands there's a problem but possibly not why. This is all very current. UB40 and America are now on speaking terms. But in different languages. . .

"First thing is they can't understand anything I say," says Ali in his thick Brummie-Un-American accent. "Even English people can't!"

When UB40 first came to America in '81 the cultural differences were vast.

**"The American headbangers are funny. I'm playing 'dicky-dicky-dink-dink' on my guitar and they're screaming 'woo! play that axe, man!'"**

— Robin Campbell

"At that time there was no reggae on the radio," says brother Robin. "Just these tiny local stations playing to 12 people in each town. To give you an idea of how much of a clue they had, *Billboard* (the music biz paper) ran its first reggae chart only three years ago. Top of the chart was The Police, second was Elvis Costello and third was Bob Marley.

"That sums it up. Although it's changing. . ."

He grins, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Last year we won it!"

This last American tour has gone well for the band. Now they're

playing venues the size of their native Birmingham's NEC rather than the bars and small clubs that launched them on the place.

When they play LA's beautiful open-air Greek Theatre later tonight the audience wiggle and whoop with all the enthusiasm of a British audience. They still dance as only Americans can't but at least they're appreciating what they hear.

Typically LA, the audience is mostly white (and blonde). LA's large, rich, black audience still only turns its jewellery out for soul acts.

"The same with the radio," observes Robin. "The rock stations won't play us cos we're reggae and the black stations won't play us cos they don't play reggae either. Only the college stations really support us."

Cultural change in the Land of The Not So Free is slow and perverse. For many black or—in UB40's case—multiracial bands the easiest way to make the wad is to get in with an established rock act.

"Like that Run DMC record with Aerosmith. By themselves you'd never have heard Run DMC on the radio here. You know the first time I heard Michael Jackson's 'Beat It' we were in redneck Middle-America. To justify playing it on the radio the DJ introduced it as 'Van Halen with Michael Jackson'!

"It's strange," says Robin, "as far as England and the rest of the world is concerned we're a pop band. We're played on Radio One next to Culture Club, Wham! . . . Most people don't care what we're saying, they just like the music. While in the US it's the lyrics that are important."

"The Americans love our lyrics and hate the music," says Ali helpfully.

"No, they are actually broad-

The Americans don't understand them; the Russians want to try and understand them . . . UB40 explore the culture gap with Paul Simper in Los Angeles. Pics by John Stoddart.



★ The brothers Campbell hit the highway in LA in some flash little sporty number. Don't worry about Ali throwing his arms all over the place—the steering-wheel's on his side of course.

CONTINUED OVER

HOWARD  
JOHNSON'S



★ Ali and Robin have a rest outside Howard Johnson's (well, that's what Ali said. . .)

# FLYING THE BRUMMIE FLAG

★ Cruisin' (on foot this time)



FROM PREVIOUS minded I think," argues Robin. "It's just that they take five years to get into it. What's funny is when you get all the headbangers down the front. I'm the lead guitarist and all I'm doing is 'dicky-dickey-dink-dink' and they're screaming 'Yeah! play that axe, man!'. So I have to drop on one knee — 'dicky-dickey-dink-dink!'"

No American tour would be complete without a few local eccentricities. Before one show a bunch of cowboys rode across the stage on horses and off into the sunset and after their Salt Lake City show the band was presented with crates of non-alcoholic champagne.

"The promoters were Mormons," says Robin. "I've never seen so much un-drunk champagne in my life!" Best fun, perhaps, was the night they spent in Reno at the legendary Vegas casinos.

"We went to the biggest casino in the world," says Ali. "It was

gross. . ." There's another impression of a foul American accent. "AWESOME!"

"It was the size of a football pitch," says Robin.

"2,400 bedrooms in the hotel, two cinemas, a shopping-mall . . . you never know what time it is. We spent all night playing black-jack, you go to bed, get up, the lift opens and it's still the same. There's all these grey, unhappy people walking round who've just done their brains in."

But the experience hasn't changed the boys into high-rolling playboys.

"I only lost 100 dollars," says Ali. "That was all each of us took with us so we couldn't lose more. Me and Jimmy (UB's drummer) managed to play for six hours on that."

"If you play black-jack right you can go on forever," says Robin, knowledgeably. "You don't win or lose much. I play at home."

"Yes!" says Ali pointing an

accusing finger at his big brother. "He taught me all about gambling. In the Seychelles. I lost millions."

"Oh yeah," scoffs Robin. "Millions of rupees. There's 500,000 to the pound!"

As ever UB40 are keeping a keen eye on finances. Do they enjoy doing business with big bucks Americans?

"You just have to be very careful," says Robin, checking his bar bill. "Maintain your independence, maintain control . . . this is Babylon here. We want to be sold but we want it to be us who does the selling."

UB40's next adventure could not be further from the hardsell of Babylon. The band have been invited "by Russia's cultural attaché" to play the USSR. How did that happen?

"Easy," says Ali. "I phoned up the Kremlin and said is Len-in?" Apparently Russia knows all about UB40.

"I heard about this bloke who

defected from Russia in a boat," says Robin. "He ended up in England or somewhere and the only Western possession he had was a UB40 tape. He obviously brought it thinking it wasn't available in the Western World. That tickled me!"

Have there been any conditions on the band playing?

"No," says Robin, "if there was anything like that we wouldn't be doing it. We've been invited to play our stuff and that's what we'll do. It's not a place I know much about. I don't have any particular places I want to go. I guess we'll get a 'selective' tour anyway."

**"My brother taught me about gambling. I lost millions in the Seychelles."**  
— Ali Campbell

To make matters more complicated the band have decided to make a full-length feature film of their visit. Saxophonist-turned-film-maker Brian Travers (who co-directed their *Labour Of Love* short) will direct it and they hope to show it at cinemas.

"It'll be bigger than *Gone With The Wind* and smaller than *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*," says Brian, as he assembles all the material in the heart of Hollywood (where else?).

"Forget about *Wham! In China*, forget about Sting, forget about rock and roll films. It won't be a rock and roll film. It'll be a film of personalities. A black comedy about the music business."

As Brian unravels the story it sounds more like The Beatles' hilarious *A Hard Day's Night* than a normal rock film — although we will see footage of the band onstage in Russia.

When the band are told about the Russian tour by manager Ken (playing himself), in LA, they don't want to go. But a few fibs from Ken and they're on their way. What follows is a sequence of wheeler-dealing scrapes through the USSR.

Not so much a culture clash as a cautionary tale of the pitfalls of the naughty music biz.

"It won't be a political film," says Brian, "and it won't be dour and serious. To get people to go to the cinema you've got to entertain them. So it'll be a realistic account but a bit more romantic. . ."

Does the band feel, like Wham!, that they're cultural ambassadors for Britain, showing their wares to a new world?

"No. I'm sure George Michael believed that Wham! were that when they went to China but it's not the same for UB40," says Robin. "We don't represent Britain."

"No," says Ali, "we represent eight w\*\*\*\*ers from Birmingham. . ."

He muses on this one. "That's right. We *do* represent Birmingham. I think if you took eight geezers out of Birmingham they'd look and sound something like us."

"The Borsall Heath bit," corrects Robin. "The native Borsall Heathens."

"Alright then," says Ali, a zealous glint in his eye. "We'll fly the flag in Russia for Borsall Heath!"