
SPANNER BANNER - Issue #3

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The Chillin' is
Over

by Karie Russell

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Now, apart from being both linked with this tool box scenario, Spanner Banner and Pliers are otherwise connected on two counts. They are brothers and they are both signed to the same recording company, Island Jamaica.

Pliers' career is already somewhat successfully cemented as he is part of the "wicked" hit duo, Chaka Demus & Pliers, who has had such hit songs as "Murder She Wrote"

and "Tease Me," which went gold, selling some 400,000 copies.

Spanner Banner (born Feb. 6, 1959, in Rock Hall, St. Andrew, and christened Joseph Bonner), on the other hand, has not been as successful as his brother; but he has, and is having, his fair share of success as a singer and songwriter.

Having grown up on a steady diet of Bob Marley songs, Spanner was inspired to enter the music business. Pliers was the one, however, to make the first move. When Pliers got a break in 1987, Spanner began recording, but it wasn't until 1989 that his first single, "Life Goes On" on the Technics Label, was released. And what a single it was. Spanner Banner achieved phenomenal success with the song, which was regarded as a gem for its inspiring and positive message. Though simple, the lyrics of the song were profoundly effective. Here's an extract: You think of the sunlight in the day and the moonlight in the night/Fishes are dancing in the rivers rolling by/There is still a blue sky until another baby cry/I wonder why some people sigh/Just think of the life that you can live and the things that you can give/Remember every day to think positive and live/Oh yeah, life goes on/Life goes on because everyday another baby is born.

Spanner Banner's follow-up releases were not as successful, but were equally positive. Songs like "Live and You Learn," "Michelle" and "Tease Me," recorded on the Jammy's label. "I write songs through inspiration and experience," says Spanner. These are the type of songs I love to write. It's the conscious side of the music that has always appealed to me. Still variety is the spice of life, and as you get older you get other experiences and different inspiration to write other types of songs."

After his sudden flight to popularity, things slowed down a bit for the mild-mannered Spanner. But he began "sparring" with Pliers and Chaka Demus (this is before the duo became a hit), attending numerous studio sessions. Out of these sessions came two very significant recordings--"Terror," which Spanner recorded with Chaka Demus, and "Gal Whine," which Pliers recorded with Chaka Demus. Both songs did well in England. "Gal Whine" was No. 1 for 13 weeks on the Black Echoes Chart. The success of these songs had Spanner, Pliers and Chaka touring London for most of '92, performing to sold out venues.

If '92 was good, then '93 was great. Spanner landed a recording contract with Island/Mango. The album contains the wizardry of Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare and is released on

their Taxi label. A few singles from the new album, SpannerBanner, were released in '94. They are "Farewell My Summer Love" (a Michael Jackson original); "Michele"; "Universal Love," with DJ Tony Rebel; and his latest "Chill," which is reported to be creating some waves overseas.

Spanner Banner's biggest success to date has been as a songwriter. He wrote Pliers' part on the gold-selling single "Tease Me." Apart from this, Spanner has not been able to significantly capture the attention of the Dancehall massive. First, it is important to note that his demeanor and image are quite unlike that of the typical Dancehall artiste. He's mild-mannered, quiet--almost unassuming. Now that image, unless he doesn't take it on stage, will certainly not excite many fans at a stage show. How does he feel about all this?

"Well, I consider myself a Dancehall singer, but mi deal wid it pon a smoother kind of level," explains Spanner. "You have Dancehall singers that flex like how mi flex, but the difference wid them is that them record their songs on the popular riddims because of the producers they work with. But my songs are more on an international level. As a result, they're not on the popular riddims.

"But I have songs that can do well in the dance halls," continues Spanner. "One is on the album with Chaka Demus and Pliers, and one with Red Dragon. I'm very interested in keeping the Dancehall fans back home happy, and I will. I did it once, and I know I can do it again and again."

We threw out some other questions to Spanner: Are you worried about the dropping of artistes from major labels? "Well, mi nuh really worry 'cause Bob Marley say wi nuh fi worry 'bout a ting 'cause every little ting ago be alright. From yuh inna the business yuh haffi keep on fighting. There are a lot of ups and downs. The music is still growing and many of our producers and managers are inexperienced and will make mistakes. So, when things like that happen, a man haffi know say him haffi tek up back him whip and start fight 'cause a just so it go. We a black people and wi haffi keep fighting."

How would he like to be marketed overseas? "Well, just as a natural Jamaican youth. Mi nuh wan deal wid nuh kind a sex symbol or nothing like dat. Just market mi as a heartical youth with a message. I'd like to be remembered as a

man who is creative and use up him inspiration so that others can follow, just like Bob Marley and them man dey."

With Spanner's conviction and belief in his ability, plus the awesome talent of the likes of Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, and the backing of Island Jamaica/Polygram, it seems the message is clear, it's now time for serious business... the "chillin" is over.