

ENTERTAINMENT

PULSE EDITOR: MONICA HANDE

Mutabaruka mixes poetic message with his music



As a stop-off on his national tour, Jamaican reggae singer and songwriter Mutabaruka will perform in Eugene Wednesday at the WOW Hall. The musician has so far released nine albums, all voicing social and political concerns.

Courtesy of Lethal Records

■ Revered Jamaican reggae singer Mutabaruka plays at the WOW Hall Wednesday

By Brodie Lewis
for the Emerald

Reggae music was introduced to the masses by the voice of Bob Marley, who drew attention not only for his musicianship, but for his message as well.

On Wednesday night, one of the most promising of his reggae inheritors brings his own message to the WOW Hall.

Mutabaruka, a reggae singer and songwriter for the last 20 years, will bring his politically-charged music to the WOW Hall in a rare Northwest appearance. Muta, as he is known to his followers, has amassed a legion of U.S. fans, with recent appearances at national concerts such as Lollapalooza and the Tibetan Freedom Concert.

Muta has been likened to Marley himself. He, like Marley, practices Rastafarianism, a religion with Jamaican roots, and combines his faith with his intellect to create powerful songs about social ills.

He started out as a poet, publishing three books of his work in Jamaica. He then decided to broaden his audience by putting his words to music. He has since released nine albums, all of them political-minded.

"I would compare him to Gand-

hi or Cesar Chavez more than I would to most musicians," said Bob Fennessy, a WOW Hall spokesman. "I have more respect for him than for any other musician that has ever played here."

Fennessy, who has seen Muta perform several times, said one of the musician's greatest attributes was that he "challenges people's ways of thinking. He wants his listeners to realize the situation that they live in."

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WOW Hall spokesman »

When not on tour, Muta spends his time in Jamaica running the health food store he owns. A strict vegetarian, he refuses to wear any animal products and has not worn shoes for many years as a testament to his faith. He also hosts Jamaica's most popular radio program, "The Cutting Edge." Bootlegs of the show, which many say started the roots revival in Jamaica, are popular items, even appearing in foreign countries.

Currently, he is touring in support of his latest album, "Muta in Dub." The album takes many of his earlier popular songs and remixes them into dub versions. The idea was to take songs that people already knew and understood and turn them into something that people could dance to. This would definitely change the atmosphere of his stage show, which is traditionally more slow-paced.

However, some fans say Muta's recorded works, no matter which albums, are almost boring in comparison to listening to him in concert.

"Mutabaruka is a poet above all," said Sarah Chylek, co-manager of the beer garden at the WOW Hall. "And his presence is unlike that of any other reggae artist and really can only be experienced live. You miss half of his meaning when you don't see him in person. He has ideas in his heart that have to come out in his music."

Ric Bracamontes, Muta's U.S. booking agent, said the current tour promises to be better than previous tours for several reasons.

"This is his first tour in over three years," he said, "and every time an artist takes time off like that, it creates a sort of mystique and usually draws more of a crowd."

He added that this is the first time Muta has toured with his own band in over five years, which makes a world of difference.

"Last time he toured, it wasn't with his own band, and nobody knew his style, his moves, or his expectations," Bracamontes said. "Now that he is with his own, however, it adds a whole level of excitement. The show is about twice as energetic."

Doors open at 8 p.m., and the show will start at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$14 at the door and are available at the WOW Hall, located at 291 W. Eighth Ave., and the EMU ticket office.



Ultimately, the experience he gains in Ecuador will change the lives of the kids in his neighborhood back home.

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