

the SLACKERS

New York ska pioneers bring good vibrations to College Station

BY AMY DAUGHERTY
The Battalion

What started as a group of guys rehearsing in a rat-infested basement on the Lower East Side of New York City in the early '90s has transmuted into an eight-piece ska band that carries with it some of the last true Jamaican ska beats from the '60s.

The Brooklyn boys now known as The Slackers began as a five-piece band, playing a mongrel of pop, punk and ska.

They were a revival of sorts of England's two-tone movement of the late '70s and early '80s, which included bands like The Specials and English Beat.

Victor Ruggiero, lead vocalist and keyboardist for The Slackers, said in an interview with Skakaze magazine that ska legends such as The Specials have been very influential.

"All I ever really wanted to sound like was The Specials," Ruggiero said. "In a way, that's all I ever want to sound like."

The five original members — Ruggiero, Marq Lyn on vocals, J. Scanlon on guitar, Luis Zulueta on percussion and drums and Marcus Geard on bass, are still members of The Slackers' ensemble.

They have been joined by David Hillyard on saxophone, Len Pine on trombone and vocals, and Jeremy Mushlin on trumpet and vocals.

After the addition of Hillyard, former member of Hepcat, and Mushlin, formerly of the All-Stars, the band's sound moved in the direction of more traditional ska and reggae.

In 1996 The Slackers' first album, *Better Late Than Never*, was released on Moon Records.

The typical ska music of the time was portrayed throughout his album, with such tracks as the reggae/punk song "Run Away" and the ska swing song "Sarah."

It was not until 1997, however,

that The Slackers found their true sound with their Hellcat Records release *Redlight*.

Between their title track, "Cooking for Tommy," a tribute to legendary Skatalite Tommy McCook, and the album's reggae tune "Watch This," *Redlight* quickly became a success.

The Slackers' fame has reached beyond the United States to places as far away as Amsterdam.

Geard said in a press release that The Slackers' music is more appealing to mature audiences.

"I think the VH-1 audience is a perfect traditional ska audience," Geard said. "I think they dig the groove and the vibe more; they're more sophisticated and don't get put off by Latin and jazz influences."

Geard said he thinks it is hard for people to find The Slackers' music anything less than appealing.

"The beat's infectious, and then the other influences make it more interesting," Geard said.

Their latest record, *The Question*, was released in 1998 by Hellcat Records. It consists of more than an hour of original music and covers such topics as alcoholism, innocence and lost loves.

The Question utilizes ska's blends of several different types of music including pop, soul, jazz, R&B and reggae.

Jeff Abarta, who works for The Slackers' artist development team, said the good vibrations are what he likes best about the band.

"For me, the main thing I love is the vibes," Abarta said. "They're amazing musicians and I'm not taking away from that, but it's the vibes I like best."

Abarta said he thinks The Slackers play uplifting music.

"There's something about their music that makes me feel good," Abarta said. "I don't like trendy ska, like the Mighty Mighty Bosstones. I like the more traditional stuff."

The Slackers' ability to incorporate several types of music into their sound has helped garner their large following.

"Their genuine fondness for rock steady, reggae, jazz and ska is what I like," Abarta said.

"They have a true appreciation for those that came before them."

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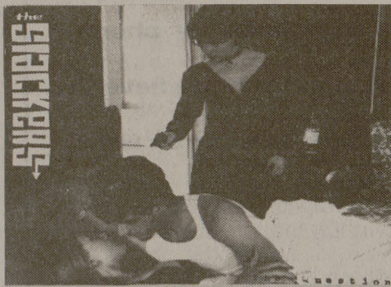
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The Question
CD Courtesy of Hellcat Records

If finding music to bounce to is on the agenda, then The Slackers' latest release *The Question*, will hit the spot.

If the Jamaican beat ska and the more traditional ska beats do not get listeners moving, then the lyrics of Slackers' vocalists Victor Ruggiero and Marq Lyn will.

The Question consists of more than an hour of original music performed by the 8-piece band with bubbling vocals, horns and guitars, and swinging rhythms.

The album sounds reggae-ish at times, and at other times it just shouts traditional ska. The record has few cheerful lyrics, but the majority of the album still manages to sound upbeat.

Most of the songs consist of lyrics about betrayal, lost loves and sadness, all cleverly disguised in each song's jumping beats of each song. An especially good track, "No Love," has lines like, "I can never sleep, I can only weep/ You know, it's no good to be in love."

From the way many of this album's tracks sound, it is obvious that these guys must have been burned pretty badly by love.

The Question gives an inviting combination of jazz, reggae, pop, soul and R&B that ultimately translates into some really great ska — mad props to The Slackers. (Grade: A)



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SLACKERS

The Slackers will perform Friday night at the Crooked Path Ale House.

— Amy Daugherty

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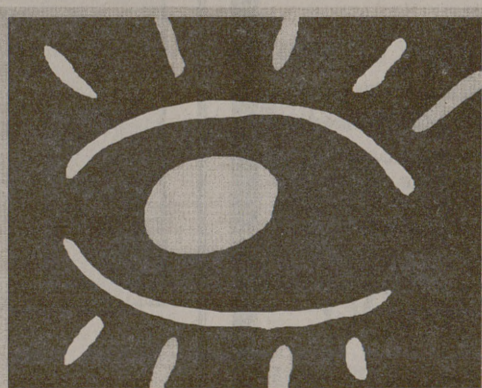
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