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Songbirds: Pioneering Women in Jamaican Music

Heather Augustyn

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In a music world that was rougher than rough, where men took monikers of royalty and machismo like Duke and King and Lord; where boastful ringleaders fired guns into the air after descending a throne carried by their legions of followers, bandoliers crisscrossing their chests, ermine on their shoulders; where violent gangs stormed dances to “mash up,” breaking sound system equipment and smashing bottles of beer on brick walls, how was a little girl with a sweet song in her soul to have a chance? Some Jamaican women found a way. They endured harassment and received little or no pay to perform as backup or alongside or in front of the male musicians. They sacrificed family and home for a life in the spotlight, or they brought their babies with them on the road. They took over the studio and made it their own, or they suffered unimaginable violence, even murder. They changed the course of music all over the world. These are the never-before-told stories of the women who tried and persevered and made it, no matter what their struggle. These are the Songbirds: Pioneering Women of Jamaican Music. Featuring exclusive photos and dozens of interviews from the women themselves, or those who knew them, Heather Augustyn, author of three previously-published books on Jamaican music history, brings to life the stories of these inspirational women so that their music can be savored and their lives finally celebrated.

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