

Big time radio, a respected reggae label and dancehall dominance are all the domain of Massive B.

Words: Jesse Serwer
Photo: Jessica Miller



Bobby Konders has been running this dancehall thing in New York for a minute.

"I've been doing this three years now," jokes the don behind the Massive B sound system and record label during a commercial break from *On Da Reggae Tip*, the Sunday night radio mix he and Massive B emcee Jabba have been holding down for New York City's Hot 97 since 1993. While Konders' sarcastic quip is appropriate, given his role in pioneering the in-joke heavy banter that now typifies urban radio mix shows, it couldn't be further from the truth. Bobby Konders' roots as a dancehall DJ and producer actually date back to the 1980s, a decade when he was better known for deep house productions like "The Poem."

"As a kid in the '70s, I heard reggae on alternative radio shows," Konders recalls wistfully from the surprisingly disheveled lobby of Hot 97 shares with New York City's KISS-FM and CD 101.9. "You know when stuff just catches you? It held me. When I started DJing, the people I was around wasn't too much into it, so I was playing American music, early hip-hop, dance, and funk but I went to reggae dances myself. When I got big in Manhattan

in the late '80s doing some house stuff, I was that Yankee kid who played reggae and dancehall with the house."

As house became a mainstream phenomenon at the outset of the 1990s, Konders promptly lost interest. He turned his attention to the music that originally caught his attention as a teen moving back and forth between his hometown of Easton, PA, and various family outposts in New York City—and which typified the vibe in his adopted home of Central Brooklyn.

Holding onto his house pseudonym Massive Sounds, he assembled a handful of major label ragga hip-hop singles (Mikey Jarrett's "Mack Daddy," Supercat's "Ghetto Red Hot") at D&D Studio with future Fugees sound architect Salaam Remi. At the same time, Konders began breaking dancehall onto New York radio while doing lunch mixes for Inner City Broadcasting's WBLS. Shortly thereafter, he founded Massive B as an outlet for the bashment remakes of classic rub-a-dub riddims he was making with the likes of Half Pint and Burro Banton.

More than 10 years later, Cutty Ranks, Ninja Man, Johnny Osbourne and T.O.K. have all released 45s and 12"s on Massive B. With connections in yard that run deeper than any other American DJ, Sizzla, Elephant Man, TOK and Bounty Killer all regularly chat Bobby Konders riddims, with Vybz Kartel joining the fray to voice his latest, "Rah Rah." He's had his hand in the production of classic dancehall albums like Bounty Killer's 1996 breakthrough *My Xperience*, and recently inaugurated Greensleeves' new legal mixtape series with his *Mad Sick Head Nah Good*.

But what separates Bobby from other dancehall DJs and producers is his appearance. White, nearing middle age, with long, just-past shoulder length red hair, he is the antithesis of dancehall's young, black and shiny image. Talking around a number of questions pertaining to his status as dancehall's lone visible white figure, Bobby eventually offers: "I always stuck out. I was always that white motherfucker on the playground who played basketball."

His whiteness is a fact that, due to his heavily patois-inflected speech, is often lost on listeners.

"Still to this day, if they don't come to West Indian parties, they might not know," he acknowledges. But whether it's holding down dances with Jabba and the rest of the Massive B sound system at spots like Caribbean City in Crown Heights or Q Club in Queens, or supplying mixtape booths in Flatbush, Brooklyn, or Jamaica, Queens, Konders' work is evident wherever the presence of West Indian culture is felt in New York.

Konders' influence is at its apex inside Hot 97's sound studio at 395 Hudson Street, on the southwestern fringe of Greenwich Village. It's there that he and co-host Jabba play a pivotal role as tastemakers for what amounts to the whole dancehall-listening world outside the West Indies. As the main reggae selectors on the country's most widely heard and influential urban radio station, Konders has the capability to break tracks into Hot 97's daily playlist, a major path to US stardom for dancehall artists. Arguably it was spins from Bobby and Jabba that helped guide the likes of Sean Paul, Elephant Man and TOK from yard and ghetto celebs to American pop stars.

"Bobby Konders never got comfortable," Jabba explains of his colleague's longevity between *On Da Reggae Tip* roll calls. "If you want to book Massive B you aren't going to talk to a secretary, you are going to talk to me or Bobby. He's always calling Jamaica, looking in his mail for the new joints, out in the streets. If the streets aren't with you, you're finished and the streets are with Bobby Konders and Jabba, and we are with the streets."

The official Bobby Konders mixtape, *Mad Sick, Head Nah Good*, is out now on Greensleeves. www.greensleeves.net. Check out Massive B's catalog of amazing releases at www.massiveb.com.

