

# ziggy marley

Elemental  
Tonic for  
a Wounded  
World

*Love is My Religion* offers an afferent proclamation and prescription for the human condition.

By **Shane Kite**





**Z**iggy Marley, the eldest son of legend Bob Marley, spoke to us during a break from his current tour about his evolution as an artist, and his second solo CD, *Love is My Religion*—a cohesive, groovy mix of global sounds based on empathy, understanding and freedom. We found Ziggy to be both revelatory and gracious: On "Love," he provides a funky sonic salve—a much-needed auricular road-map—for a world rife with division and conflict.

**Nikki Style:** *The title of your new album, Love is My Religion: I can't think of a more appropriate message with all the divisiveness and war in the world.*

*On the title track you sing: "I don't condemn, I don't convert, this is a calling have you heard, bring all the lovers to the fold, 'cause no one is gonna lose their soul." What inspired you to explore these themes?*

**Ziggy Marley:** Well, this is after years of searching and contemplating within my mind and looking at all different aspects of myself and where I'm from and my culture, Rastafari, and all these other types of philosophies. I've come to the conclusion that the establishment of religion historically, and as we see it now could never be the way of God. It is impossible with the track record of religion. Not the way we know it. I don't know what happened to make it so extreme. But there's something wrong with those saying 'I have the right to teach you about God,' because there's too much division. It doesn't work. And the only way we can fix it is to come to an understanding: The way to bring people together or to spirituality is to love them, it's not to condemn or to judge. It's to love. In my greatest dream, I wish that everybody would stop being Christian, Muslim, whatever, and just say, "You know what, love is my religion."

**NS:** *What about all the sounds I'm hearing on this record? I hear soukous, Malian melodies, Latin, flamenco-style blues, ska, rocksteady. Yet it's seamless, interconnected, cohered.*

**ZM:** My way of playing has never been so strict and rigid that I could not grasp or play another idea: I'm an experimental musician. So is Bob Marley, Miles Davis, Fela Kuti [the Nigerian Afrobeat funk master, musician, activist]. These are true artists that I aspire to emulate, in the aspect of their freedom, their freedom of expression.

**NS:** *On the track "Be Free," you seem to address the struggle to maintain one's sense of balance, or community, amid reactions to an uncertain world. You sing "the governments' got too much control... I'm losing control, as little by little my rights erode..." and then to "...be free, break out of captivity."*

**ZM:** A lot of people may think that's about America. But it's really about everywhere. Because the freedom I speak about is no longer a physical freedom: It's a mental freedom. All of us are being oppressed by the ideology that they are putting on us on a particular day or place, whether it be fundamental Islam or the religious right, any of these ways of thinking that it's 'we versus them.' A certain sector of the Western society is being influenced by the voices of the politicians who tell them, 'this is the trip,' and it's fear. Or, 'We have to give up our rights to do this.' And in some parts of the Islamic world, it's the same thing. There are these voices telling them, 'the Western world is wrong: we have to destroy the West.' Those voices are really imprisoning the mind. So overcoming them requires gaining a freedom to understand, and to love. Love is the only thing that is truly free, or can truly free one. You know, that's my take on it.

**NS:** *You seem to include yourself in the searching for how to walk through the world and its conflict. On "Into the Groove," you sing, "... catch the wave (I'm going to catch the wave)... free your slave (I'm gonna free my slave)."*

**ZM:** It's letting go of my pride, letting go of my ego, just letting go of all of that shit that imprisons me. Some guys were saying like, 'oh the album is... it's too soft.' Well, I'm not afraid to be soft. I've been tough already. It's like: I'm not scared to be free to have that emotion. That is the freedom that I've gained this time, the freedom to be gentle and loving and emotional, as well as be tough if I have to be.

**NS:** *The album is well balanced, though, it grooves. It's not as if you're hitting people over the head with all these heavy themes.*

**ZM:** Yeah man. I tried for that balance. Over the years I've learned how I need to approach things. I don't want to beat people over the head with the message. I want to give it to them in a way that they can receive it and come to it on their own, and not get offended or put off by me being over-aggressive.

**NS:** *There's a light-heartedness too. Like I was wondering, for instance, if "Black Cat" was actually inspired by a real cat?*

**ZM:** [He laughs]: Yeah... Yes, it was. It was.

**NS:** *I just imagined you up in the Hollywood Hills somewhere, composing and writing, like Laurel Canyon, and this cat comin' along?*

**ZM:** Yeah, you know it... [starts laughing]. So you know about Laurel Canyon and all that? The cats... there's some stray cats walking around there [starts laughing again]... I finished most of the lyrics [in L.A.] in a guesthouse behind another house of a friend of mine, where I spent a lot of time—days and nights—up in the hills. It was off of Coldwater... Coldwater Canyon. I felt the spirits there.

**NS:** *You seem remarkably relaxed with yourself and how you've evolved as an artist, particularly for someone whose father is such a legend. How did you get to this place where you stand on your own?*

**ZM:** For me, it's been a growth. I've reached a point in my life right now to where I see my father, as my father, yes. But more, I see him as a brother. Just like how I see Miles and Fela. I feel like I'm part of a brotherhood, a fraternity of musicians. Each of us go through that same struggle of artistic freedom that, even when my father was doing his music, there were many criticisms from a lot of people from his culture who thought he was selling out or doing this or that. The same thing for Miles, it was never an easy thing for him to get across—to get across what he wanted, and to be free. To be free to express what you feel as an artist is never really an easy thing, where everybody jumps and says 'Yes, we understand what you're doing, and we love you.' No. We're going to get criticized, belittled. But it usually comes around. So I know that and my father knew that. He wasn't as big as he now is, you know, when he was around. So, I've just always been a musician, just like my father. Music is what I do. It's what I love.

*Ziggy Marley's Love is My Religion is out on Tuff Gong Worldwide Records, distributed independently and available exclusively at Target stores and online for \$9.99*



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