



# 'Ghana's Bob Marley' spreads message of brotherhood

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(CNN) -- Dubbed "Ghana's Bob Marley," reggae sensation Rocky Dawuni is known not only for bringing his upbeat vibe to audiences across the world, but also for promoting social issues through his extensive humanitarian work.

The acclaimed singer-songwriter first fell in love with reggae at a young age when he heard a Ghanaian military band play a Bob Marley song. He was instantly hooked. "I remember totally being drawn to the words and also the message and the intentions of the music," he told CNN's Isha Sesay.

Now based in Los Angeles, Dawuni has recorded five albums and performed alongside global stars such as Stevie Wonder on some of the world's biggest stages.

But perhaps his most impressive feat so far has been the creation of the Independence Splash festival in Ghana, an annual event that attracts thousands of music lovers and also raises awareness for a series of social causes, including provision of clean water and education for girls. An edited version of the interview follows.

## **CNN: Can you describe the first time you ever heard reggae and the feeling it created in you?**

Rocky Dawuni: The first time I heard reggae music was (in) Michel Camp, which is a military barracks in Ghana where I was born. There was a military band called Hot Barrels which used to ... do covers. I was interested in music, so every time I used to hang out at their rehearsal. And then one time, they started playing covers, Bob Marley, and I remember totally being drawn to the words and also the message and the intentions of the music. It was really love at first sight. And since then I also realized that my calling too was in that direction, using music as that tool to articulate all that I see around me.

## **CNN: When did you first realize you could sing?**

RD: Right from the onset, because our environment in Africa, everything is music. When a child is born, everybody's singing, when there's celebration, everybody's singing. So at that time, I just joined in everywhere and I realized that I could ... make up melodies, I was like, this could be an interesting path for me. Then I started growing in my confidence, I started researching about it and then it just took off from there.

## **CNN: You grew up being motivated by spreading a message -- how was that received as you were playing your first concerts?**

RD: The thing that I believe about messages is that you have to understand that the message is always higher than the messenger. So you always have to put the message in such a way that you don't

become preachy, because we're all on this journey together, everybody who's part of this human family.

Me having that platform doesn't mean that it makes me a person that can be able to point people in the right direction -- I just open options and I create the environment, and that environment creates dialogue. And it's just like, when we start talking amongst each other, we'll figure it out. So I believe in the subtlety of the message.

## **CNN: Which is more important to you, critical acclaim or commercial success?**

RD: All of it has its place, but in the long run, my intention ... is that I want the music to be in the hands of everybody, so I don't look at it more as a commercial thing, I look at it in terms of the message and the communication. I want everybody to experience what I have experienced, I want to communicate with everybody. I want everybody to feel and understand what message I'm trying to carry across.

I want everybody to be part of this new brotherhood of all of us. I call it the brotherhood of all of us because everybody is part of it. It doesn't matter what your background is, what's your religion, what's your cultural background, what's your gender. It doesn't matter. We are all together in this world. We are sharing the same space, we are breathing the same air.

## **CNN: Every year you put on a concert called the Rocky Dawuni Independence Splash, talk to me about it.**

RD: Ghana was the first sub-Saharan country to be independent. So I realized that Ghana's independence day, its importance was not only a matter of celebrating the day, its importance was that this day could be a day we could use to reflect on where Africa is. And right now ... Ghana has really taken the leadership role when it comes to having democratic institutions, stability and even economically.

So Ghana has really been able to do all things that I feel ... we need to share with the rest of Africa as we were the first independent country. So I felt that the concert was a means to start this celebration whereby all Africa comes and in doing so, there's the music and there's also all the dimensions of us interacting with each other. So every year, no matter where I am, I go back and then have this event and then also I started using it for social causes.

We've worked on everything from water issues to girl child education issues, to hand washing, sanitation issues, HIV/AIDS. For me, I feel that my talent, whatever God has given me, my abilities that God has given me, is for me to utilize for that purpose.