

If you love reggae, you've heard Andy Bassford play guitar. It's that simple. Starting with Horace Andy's 1977 classic "In The Light," through 2018's Grammy-winning Sting/Shaggy duet "44/876" and beyond, Andy has recorded or performed with a staggering array of Jamaican artists: from the Abyssinians to Zap Pow.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Andy began with classical training on violin and viola. He then picked up harmonica, electric bass, mandolin, and tenor banjo. A B.B. King PBS TV broadcast inspired Andy to switch to guitar. A quick study, Andy was playing in rock bars before he could drink in them. Then Andy saw the Jimmy Cliff film "The Harder They Come" and fell in love with reggae. He quickly discovered Hartford's large Jamaican community had its own record shops and venues, which he began to frequent. Andy joined a local band, the Mighty Venturians, the week he graduated from college.

Studio One veteran Horace Andy heard him with the Venturians and hired Andy to play on his classic album "In The Light." It sold well, but when no tour materialized. Andy returned to the rock circuit, also playing in Latin jazz, folk, country, and new wave bands.

In 1980, Horace and Andy reconnected. Horace invited him to Jamaica to record again. The project never happened. But Andy fell in with a crew of young rebels, seminal dance hall producer Junjo Lawes and the Roots Radics band. Together they recorded Michael Prophet's "Gunman" and the Wailing Souls' "Fire House Rock." Andy decided to stay in Jamaica to pursue studio work.

Word spread quickly, and in January 1981, Andy joined Lloyd Parks and We The People, the top backing band in Jamaica. The group toured with Dennis Brown and played marathon stage shows and dances. It was an unparalleled learning experience. By now Andy was also part of the Kingston studio A Team, recording with Sly & Robbie, the Wailers, and many other reggae producers and artists.

Returning to the US in 1985 for family reasons, Andy stayed with Dennis Brown until 1988. He then spent twenty-two years with Toots and the Maytals, culminating in 2004's Grammy-winning "True Love." Andy has also toured with Yellowman, Super Cat, and the Skatalites. Between tours, Andy recorded for Coxsone Dodd's Studio One label until the latter's passing in 2004. In 2003, the Jamaica Federation of Musicians honored Andy for Outstanding Contributions to the Jamaican Music Industry. After his run with Toots, Andy began performing with reggae bass legend Derrick Barnett's Statement Band in 2007, and Jamaican jazz master Monty Alexander's Harlem-Kingston Express in 2010. He continues to appear with both groups as well as playing on sessions and teaching.

In April 2018, Andy released his first solo album, "The Harder They Strum," a guitar-based remake of the original soundtrack that inspired him. His version of "007 (Shanty Town)" received regular airplay on Sirius XM The Joint for three years. Andy performed as a solo artist at festivals and began touring the Northeast with Boston-based Naya Rockers. Andy then collaborated with Atlanta's Piper Street Sound on "Black Eyed Peace," an EP of original music released in 2021.

Outside of reggae, Andy has recorded with Rihanna, Natalie Merchant, Bobby Keys, Graham Haynes, Rosco Gordon, Jennifer Holliday, Felix da Housecat, Matt Andersen, and Adam Pascal of "Rent." He has performed with Aretha Franklin, Percy Sledge, and Lavern Baker.

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