



## **BIG YOUTH – Natty Universal Dread 1973 – 1979 (Blood & Fire)**

As inconceivable as it may seem to most, Mick Hucknall does actually have a valid role to play in some of our lives, mine including. He, I and many of you share something palpable, being a deep love of 70s reggae, unquestionably the Golden Age of the genre. Mick's passion for this music led to him co-founding Manchester's Blood & Fire label in 1993.

This year has seen wonderful archive material reissued in original form on Virgin's Front Line imprint and continued consistency from Pressure Sounds, but it is Blood & Fire that is the 4AD of the bunch. By this, I mean that the dedication to presentation and content of maximum quality is paramount. It's difficult to fault the originality and beauty of 4AD's packaging, but there were odd blips in the roster. Blood & Fire's output to date, however, has been staggering. They ferret around the globe for the rarest of platters to supplement straight reissues or for unique compilations, then house them in exquisite packaging crammed with photos and text penned by reggae archivist and the label's A&R Director, Steve Barrow.

To cap another great year for the label, their latest gem and a perfect Christmas gift for anyone who enjoys gritty conscious reggae is a 51-track, 3-CD compilation of self-produced material by Manley Augustus Buchanan, known to the world as Big Youth, on his own labels between 1973 and 1979. It's breathtaking, of course with all you would expect from Blood & Fire in place. This is their 35<sup>th</sup> release and with the exception of compilations that draw on the catalogue, I've bought the lot. If I've aroused your interest, this is as good a starting point as any to recognize atonement for Mick's heinous pop-crimes. Blood & Fire: it does exactly what it says on the tin.

## **TOM SHERIFF**

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