

## Dick Gaughan and Jason Wilson bridge reggae and Scottish sounds



By [Alexander Varty](#), July 14, 2011

The casual listener might consider reggae and Scottish folk music as different as chalk and cheese, but Glasgow-born Dick Gaughan prefers a more pungent metaphor. Confronted with a Calgary Folk Music Festival workshop that put him on-stage with hip-hop act Arrested Development, dub-poetry pioneer Mutabaruka, and Toronto reggae musician Jason Wilson, the veteran singer-guitarist remembers thinking that he was going to stand out "like a sardine in a bowl of oranges".

"But it was one of the most magical afternoons I've ever had, because we all just pitched in and jammed," he adds. "It just went on and on and on, and it was great fun."

The *Straight* has reached Gaughan in Courtenay, where he's about to play the Vancouver Island MusicFest with Wilson and his band. That magical afternoon in 2009 has led to an ongoing creative partnership with the younger musicians, thanks in part to the fact that there's no one better placed to unite the two forms than singer and keyboardist Wilson. Growing up in Toronto's polyglot Jane Finch neighbourhood, he absorbed a steady diet of Yellowman, Gregory Isaacs, and Bob Marley. But his parents were Scots, and the folk music they played at home is also encoded in his DNA.

"The parallels and similarities are far more than one would expect at first blush," says Wilson, who contends that Irish and Scottish folk styles entered Jamaica at the same time as reggae's African roots. "The best way I've been able to explain it is they're both rebel musics. They're both protest musics, to a certain extent—and reggae is also a folk music, you know."

Returning to the phone, Gaughan stresses that he doesn't care to make distinctions between musical styles.

"It's all noise, eventually," he says, laughing. "That's what it comes down to, you know, and stylistic questions are never anything I've troubled myself with. I play music. That's it, and I'll have a go at anything."

"If you get musicians together, provided they're open-minded and there's no egos getting in the way, they'll find a point of contact," he continues. "If you listen to what the other person's playing, eventually you go, 'Hey, I know how this goes!'"

He and Wilson agree that the structural differences between reggae and Scottish country-dance music are essentially a matter of rhythmic emphasis, and that the jazz-trained musicians they're working with are more than capable of bridging any gaps.

"Most of the time," adds Gaughan, "we're just flying off the top of our heads—which is great, because I have a very low threshold of boredom. That's why I love playing with other people, and playing with Jason and the band is a joy."

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