



## CasiNotes: Wailers' lead singer sounds a lot like Bob Marley

By Chuck Darrow Posted on Fri, Mar. 13, 2009

It's the kind of story a Hollywood studio would find too far-fetched to green-light:

An obscure teenager who has never so much as done a song at an open-mike night is recruited to replace one of the most beloved and important musicians in the history of pop music.

Crazy, no? Maybe, but also absolutely true.

Meet Elan Atias, who in 1996 became lead singer of the Wailers, the group reggae titan Bob Marley fronted until his 1981 death from cancer. The Wailers - including sole original member bassist Aston "Family Man" Barrett - headline tomorrow at Trump Taj Mahal.

"I was only 19 at the time, and I had never sung with a band before. I'd never been on stage," related Atias over a crackly cellphone connection from the Caribbean island of St. Maarten.

"But my voice was compared to [Marley's]." More to the point, it was compared to Marley's by then-Wailers guitarist Al Anderson.

"I met Al at a club in Los Angeles," said the L.A. native. "I was going to do a demo album for Virgin Records and needed a guitarist. It turned out he lived two blocks from the studio."

Struck by Atias' uncanny vocal resemblance to Marley, Anderson insisted that he join the Wailers. The youngster's first gig was hardly a low-key affair.

"I was thrown in front of 6,000 people," he said. "That's how it happened."

So how scared was he? "I was not scared of being in front of all those people," he offered. "What I was scared of was messing up the lyrics."

Atias obviously survived his trial by fire. Since then, he has won critical acclaim for his vocal approximation to the man who is considered nothing less than a prophet by millions worldwide.

For instance, just last Monday, a review in the Greensboro (N.C.) News Record proclaimed that thanks to Atias, "It sounded like somebody had either resurrected Marley or recaptured his voice."

Nonetheless, Atias suggested his intent as the Wailers' lead singer should not be misconstrued or overstated. "I don't look at it like I'm trying to fill Bob's shoes," he insisted.

"I'm not trying to be Bob." No one, however, may be more appreciative of Atias' situation than the singer himself.

"It's a pleasure for me [to perform the Marley canon], because it's the stuff I grew up with and listened to all my life," he said, adding that Marley's music "helped me in my toughest years. It helped me find who I am and what I love to do."

Marley's messages still resonate today, he continued. The centerpiece of the band's current tour is its nightly recreation of Marley and the Wailers' 1977 album, "Exodus," which Time magazine proclaimed the greatest LP of the 20th century.

According to Atias, "Exodus" songs - including "Jamming," "One Love" (coupled with Curtis Mayfield's classic, "People Get Ready") and the title track - continue to speak to people, especially those too young to remember their composer.

The tunes, Atias said, "help them find themselves at a time when they're asking a lot of questions and trying to find out what life is all about."

[http://www.philly.com/dailynews/features/columnists/20090313\\_CasiNotes\\_Wailers\\_lead\\_singer\\_sounds\\_a\\_lot\\_like\\_Bob\\_Marley.html?viewAll=y](http://www.philly.com/dailynews/features/columnists/20090313_CasiNotes_Wailers_lead_singer_sounds_a_lot_like_Bob_Marley.html?viewAll=y)

