

Razor—Red X

something. It is one round trip, bringing us almost exactly where we were at the beginning, and it is just terribly irritating •

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Reviewed by Marva Jackson

Stepping Razor—Red X

Directed and written by Nicholas Campbell, produced and photographed by Edgar Egger, with Lloyd 'Rocky' Allen, Edward 'Biggs' Allen, Andrea Davis and Ras Leon. A Nicolas Stiliadis and Syd Cappe Production for SC Entertainment International.

*"It is only the truth that can make man free."
Peter Tosh*

Visionary musician Peter Tosh, co-founder of the trailblazing reggae group The Wailers, lived by the truth the way some people live by the sword. Some say that he was murdered at the age of 43 because of his penchant for honest, direct questioning of the role of politicians and the rich in the oppression of people. Others say that Tosh's death may have been due to his financial commitment to a friend, who was intent on buying a Jamaican radio station which would have placed Rastafarian liberation philosophy front and centre within Jamaica's cultural arena. These points are brought home by Nicholas Campbell and Edgar Egger, makers of the film *Stepping Razor—Red X*, as they piece together a compelling work that gives serious consideration to the many rumours and speculations which have arisen about Tosh's untimely death. By allowing Jamaican voices to take over the film, the filmmakers have created a vivid, powerful documentary built around the autobiographical *Red X* tapes (an oral

journal of socio-political analysis, spiritual beliefs, and mystical experiences recorded by Tosh from 1983 until his death in 1987), as well as interviews with family, friends and acquaintances. Bringing to life the Trenchtown of Tosh's youth, this lush, heady film is full of romantic legends and vital actualities which comprise the real stuff of Peter Tosh's life. Within a couple of hours, viewers are introduced to a boiled down history of Jamaica's contemporary political and musical history from Rastafarian and non-Rastafarian perspectives. Peter Tosh's life is sketched, using archival images of the Jamaican ghetto, electoral struggles, and recordings by The Wailers from their inception as an early rhythm and blues group.

Stepping Razor—Red X is a wonderfully culture specific film that makes no excuses for Tosh, but allows viewers to experience the life of the man who is often described as the revolutionary Wailer. The film is special because of the way voices of organic and other Jamaican cultural workers and intellectuals, such as Dermott Hussey, Joe Higgs and Garth White (so rarely heard in the mainstream) are used. This is definitely a story of Rasta—powerful with divergent faces of Rasta men who embrace Rastafari within a Jamaican context. However, there is some attempt to weave women's voices throughout, including interviews with Tosh's mother Alvera Morris Coke, and his cousin Pauline Morris, along with his wife Marlene Brown, and others who knew Tosh.

Viewers are swept along in a Rastafari *mise-en-scène* unveiled in the essence of ganja, with a man who simply believed in the truth of poor people. Opening with Coke's memories of her only child, *Stepping Razor—Red X* is a potent inquiry into the events surrounding Tosh's death; into the impact of the star system of the mainstream music industry on the evolution of The Wailers; and of the dynamic trio—Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and Bob Marley—as individuals and as friends. Awash in the sounds of



Peter Tosh:
"Without truth there is no consciousness"

Rastafarian drumming, roots reggae lyrics, and rousing music, *Stepping Razor* grips viewers in an intensely personal conversation with Tosh, a man full of contradictions, who was fearless in speaking out against social injustice, yet seemed increasingly fearful of duppies (ghosts). In the end, we are affirmed in the understanding that "without truth there is no consciousness," and embracing everything—fear, truth, anger, compassion and action—makes us human • *Marva Jackson works at Full Frame Distribution and writes a column for Metro Word.*