“In The Shell”, Paolo Baldini DubFiles’ new album, will be published on 27th March 2024 via La Tempesta Dub. The third solo album of the Italian producer is released eight years after his previous “At Song Embassy, Papine, Kingston 6”, an album/documentary recorded and filmed in Jamaica back in 2015. In this eight-year span, Baldini intensively toured through Europe, United States and Latin America, and worked as a producer for artists like Mellow Mood, L.A.B., Forelock, Noiseshaper, Imperial Sound Army, Dubblestandart, and for well-established reggae labels like Pressure Sounds and Echo Beach.

Differently from his previous albums, in which Baldini’s approach was tightly linked to the tradition of Jamaican dub (and where his works focused on re-editing and re-purposing materials coming from different sources), the starting point for the beat-making of “In The Shell” was the writing of original music, a blank page on which to develop every single track.

This time, the core of the production and song-writing is rooted in the creation of instrumental tracks in the studio; only at a later stage did Baldini look on the outside, establishing the necessary connections and collaborations for the entire album.

The shared element among the songs in the record is the use of a palette of ethnic sounds and samples, recorded and archived by Paolo Baldini himself during his various trips to Africa, and on which he later carried out his unique electronic production and post-production work – the distinctive feature of his musical aesthetics. The personal and family ties that led the Italian producer to visit Sub-Saharan Africa, and especially Senegal, granted him an exclusive observation standpoint on day-to-day contexts which are usually not accessible to those who don’t have a key to participate in the family life of these communities, and allowed him to respectfully use this advantage to record original and unique samples.

“In The Shell” celebrates such “hybrid” vision, which spans from the all-round exploration of black music, through its electronic components, to the beat-making originated from the use of samples. These two narrative threads intertwine, merge, and alternate, giving birth to the sound and rhythm patterns at the foundation of this album.

The sound landscape described in “In The Shell” is a visual and sonic collage where past, present, and future coexist. They are interrelated, but never fully integrated. They retain their specific identity, as if they were oversized fragments in a mosaic where natural, archaic, and pristine landscapes perfectly dovetail with scenarios belonging to the cinematic imagery of science-fiction (sometimes Tatooine, sometimes Blade Runners): a sort of borderless no-man’s land where foreign worlds mix with the glimmering light of digital art.

The instrumental track Fee Free Dub serves as an introduction to the album. The song was born from Baldini’s participation as guest producer to OSA – Open Sound Festival. The event, held in North-Western Italy in 2023, aimed (among other things) at creating an audio library containing more than 300 sounds of instruments coming from the millenary Occitan cultural tradition.

Sunlight comes immediately thereafter: two of the most interesting young voices of the Jamaican scene, Blue and 5 Star Celestial, duet on a broken-beat type of rhythm.

Nice And Easy is the first song of the album featuring a high-profile artist: Kabaka Pyramid, winner of the 2022 Grammy Award for Best Reggae Album. This tune is a blend of hip-hop beat and reggae, two genres dear to Baldini. Mellow Mood, long-standing collaborators of the Italian producer, are also featured on this track. The Italian twins are in fact a constant presence throughout the whole record.

San Dagà is the second instrumental chapter of the album, an amapiano tune embellished by the sound of instruments belonging to Sardinia’s musical heritage, and performed by Supahfly, moniker of multi-instrumentalist Matteo Muscas.

The record continues with Deep Meditation and You’re Not Alone, the two other top-shelf, prestigious collaborations in the tracklist. The first features Jamaican veteran Anthony B, immediately recognizable thanks to his energetic and hypnotic vocal approach, juggling on the mic upon a modern, dub/techno-oriented beat. The second song features the queen of reggae music Queen Omega, who sings on the eclectic Ethiolò Riddim (previously released with versions by Andrew I & Reggie Amma, and Dub Fx). These two collaborations underline, needless to say, the tight bond between Paolo Baldini DubFiles and Jamaica, and once more showcase his ability to figuratively walk through time working with both historic and famous reggae artists and emerging talents coming from the island in the Caribbean.

Praises Be, featuring Jules I, carries a perhaps more distinct roots reggae flavour compared to the previous tracks. Its song-writing and intentions let it fit perfectly in the wake of spiritual, sound system music, bearing witness to Baldini’s broad spectrum when it comes to musical taste.

The following Shililin Kikikin and Mata Mata are perfect counterweights, diving deep into contemporary dancehall: two arrogant, tight beats with fast, breath-taking lyrics. Lasai (from Spain) and Zacky Man (from Portugal) are joined by the elite of Italy’s contemporary (and future) reggae scene: Mellow Mood, KG Man, Forelock and Andrew I, artists whose voices are familiar for the listeners of music released by La Tempesta Dub.

Big And Bad is the last unreleased tune in “In The Shell”, a further dive into the deepest, darkest dub, where the young Jamaican artist Minori duets with Mellow Mood (further proof of the unity between Paolo Baldini and the singers of the most important Italian reggae band, as well as their mutual vibes exchange permeating the works of both).

“In The Shell” ends with Ticking Bomb (again featuring Mellow Mood, Lasai and Zacky Man) and Como Yo, a lyrical and musical tribute to Latin America, born while Baldini and Mellow Mood were touring the continent back in 2022. These two tracks were released in 2023 as singles to introduce Baldini’s forthcoming record.