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ONE LOVE: Foreign Correspondent

Airs Tuesday July 18

Jamaica's rich music heritage got hijacked by a vicious and violent brand of homophobia. But along came a new generation of artists who, with a little help from the Internet, are wresting it back. Eric Campbell reports.

Bob Marley and his homeland Jamaica were synonymous with reggae and its message of peace, justice and equal rights.

How then, after Marley died, did Jamaica earn such a poisonous reputation that Time magazine once ran a headline, "The Most Homophobic Place on Earth?"

Boom, bye- bye, in a faggot's head, the tough guys don't accept fags, they have to die – lyric from dance hall artist Buju Banton

It grew from dancehall, a raw musical sub-culture that exploded onto the scene in the 1990s, exposing a deep homophobia among some of its exponents.

This small core of "murder music" artists thrived in a country where Christian churches and strict Rastafarians rail against gays, where murder and illiteracy rates are epic and where a so-called "Buggery Law", providing jail terms with hard labour of up to 10 years, is still on the books.

Jamaica's proudest brand, its music, had been tarnished.

Bit by bit though, the tide began turning. Homophobic artists were shunned by international promoters and their online sales took a hit. So they began cleaning up their acts. They had little choice.

They either have to say 'I'm taking this hard line fundamentalist Christian position' or they say 'Hell no, I want to live, I want to eat, so I'm going to forget about that' – reggae historian Dr Carolyn Cooper

Now a new generation of reggae artists is seizing the stage – and channelling Marley – with songs of tolerance.

Why can't you accept me as I am? – lyric from Do You Still Care by Tanya Stephens.

The people who spread homophobic messages don't represent all of Jamaica. They don't represent half of Jamaica – Tanya Stephens

Artists like Stephens and rising star Etana are finally giving young gay people a licence to be themselves.

Anything that creates divide and separation, I'm not part of it. If you look back at Bob Marley festivals, it was everyone - black, white, gay straight – Etana

***One Love*, reported by Eric Campbell and filmed and produced by Matt Davis, airs on Foreign Correspondent Tuesday July 18 at 9.20 pm, then at 10.30 am Thursday July 20 on ABC TV and 6.30 pm Sunday July 23 on ABC TV News. Also on iview.**