

UB40

Moseley Road Art School 1968 - 1973

Reggae Pop Band



Birmingham's most famous and internationally successful band

Named after the unemployment benefit form, UB40 was formed in 1978. A multi-cultural line-up of English, Scottish, Irish, Yemeni and Jamaican parentage, they typified Birmingham's working-class community and the melting pot of Balsall Heath.

Ali Campbell (guitar and lead vocals), Earl Falconer (bass), Brian Travers (sax) and James Brown (drums) were all in the same class at school. They were joined by Ali's younger brother Robin (lead guitar) and Norman Hassan (percussionist). The Campbells were sons of folk musician Ian, with a family tradition of Scottish ballads and folk singing. Their unique music uses synthesisers, guitar, sax and dubbing techniques. They addressed political topics of the day, appealing to dissatisfied youth.

UB40 began performing in 1979 and by the end of the year they were invited to accompany the Pretenders on a UK tour. Their debut album '*Signing Off*' is considered the greatest reggae album from a British band.

In 1980 Michael Virtue (keyboard) and Terence Wilson (toaster) joined the band.

Their first single '*Food for Thought*' entered the top ten in 1980, the start of a long series of chart successes. UB40 achieved more than 25 singles in the UK charts, their first No. 1 hit '*Red, Red Wine*' was performed at the Nelson Mandela tribute concert in 1988. They were the first western pop group to be invited to tour the Soviet Union in 1986.

In America and Europe, they performed more than any other UK band with up to 200 performances a year. They conquered the American market with cover albums of favourite hits including Elvis Presley's '*Can't Help Falling in Love*'.

100 million records sold worldwide

In 2003 '*Swing Low*' was selected as the official anthem for English Rugby in the World Cup, with the multi-cultural choir United Colours of Sound.

In 2008 Ali left for a solo career after a disagreement over management. Ali's youngest brother Duncan was introduced as the new lead singer in 2010. The band is currently split into two, the original UB40 comprising three of the founding school pupils, and the other UB40 with Ali and Michael Virtue.

