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David Rudder 6.0 in pictures

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G **vibe**

Bobby Mohammed...

A steelpan legend re-emerges



Bobby Mohammed, third from right, front row, 1966 St Joseph's Convent San Fernando garden party.

At the age of 22 in 1965, Lennox "Bobby" Mohammed became the youngest arranger to win a Panorama title with the San Fernando-based band Guinness Cavaliers. They would repeat this in 1967 after placing second in 1966. In 1992 Mohammed was honoured with one of this country's highest national awards, the Humming Bird Medal Gold. Now a sprightly and very spiritual 71-year-old, he reflects on and tell us of his re-emergence on the music scene.

When and how did you get into the steelpan instrument?

As a musician from small, way back in 1958 when Narlin Taitt, ping-pong soloist champion, brought the first tenor pan home by us. My brother Selwyn started to play first. I kept accompanying both Narlin and Selwyn on the piano. And Gondoliers Steelband moved home by us and I started to play the cello pan.

Was it something you had to work hard at or did it come naturally?

Larry du Boulet, the first arranger for Gondoliers, started giving me the idea how to play the cello pan with three sticks. Being a piano musician, having learnt from my mom Enid, chords were easy for me

getting personal

WITH NASSER KHAN

to play and I improvised a bit. I must say that music and God are in my blood and soul.

Describe your rise to becoming the arranger of Guinness Cavaliers?

Larry Du Boulet had left the band and I was asked to arrange. Our repertoire was varied: mambo, waltzes, classical, boleros, Castilians and, of course, calypsoes. We (Gondoliers) got the Guinness sponsorship playing at Tavern on the Green in Port-of-Spain and were known as Guinness Gondoliers. However, the band split up and Cavaliers was born out of Gondoliers. We also got the Guinness sponsorship to be called Guinness Cavaliers. I was appointed to lead and arrange the music.

Following your glory years in the 1960s Bobby Mohammed disappeared from the scene for quite a while, what happened?

Disappearing from the scene for so long was and is the will of God. I always wanted to know about God because of a great experience that I had so many years ago. I was always asking many questions, however, and never seeking God for myself. In the height of Guinness

Cavaliers successes, I had a nervous breakdown. Now, however, I know how great God is and who He is in the person and spirit of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

Volume I and II of The Life History of Steelband Icon Lennox Bobby Mohammed—In the Light of Pan Music, tells my life story and my disappearing from the scene and all that took place in my life. It was documented by Dr Brader Brathwaite, educational psychologist, with 22 of the Guinness Cavaliers tunes being played as she narrated my life story about three or four years aback. All I want to say is God is a great, great God and all that I do now in music is to honour Him.

What new music do you have to offer? What is the name of the new CD, what tracks are on it, and where can we get it?

Most of the people who know me, really know me as the steelband captain and arranger of Guinness Cavaliers, although I arranged for more bands. Close ones know that I really was a piano player (by ear) doing it from very small—seven years old. I have had eight steelband CDs done and three keyboard CDs produced. The last one, Keyboard Music Vol III is out. It's called Rejoice and has four of my original compositions—a parang, pop, calypso and a gospel piece. This CD has mixed songs—

When You Tell Me that You Love Me, The Robe, Rejoice as the theme song, C is for the Christ Child and This is the Moment, to name a few of the 18 songs.

The record shops and outlets that have Rejoice so far are: Music.Com; Eden's on High Street, San Fernando, opposite the library; Babita's Roti Shop in Dumfries Road, La Romaine; also getting it to Variety Records, San Fernando; Off the wall, Gulf City; Crosby's in St James, PoS; Cleve's Record Shop, Frederick Street; Kams Records; Just CDs in Diego Martin, and at the airport. Also from me at 652-3370. Mr Phillip Allard of PA Studio in San Fernando is doing a good job on producing the CDs.

I have a lot of piano and keyboard music that is so unique and wonderful, all to be released one after the other; classical and gospel mainly, as well as popular tunes and a lot of composed songs which I wrote. People may ask so long we are hearing about this, what is happening? Everything will happen in God's timing.

Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

I was born in Siparia Old Road, and when I was about between seven and nine years, we (the family) moved to Lazzari Street, Mon Repos, San Fernando. We grew up, my sister

Lynette and my two brothers, Selwyn and Lester with myself in Mon Repos with our grandparents and parents.

Who were the people who have influenced you the most in your career, and in life in general, and how did they? Who are your role models, or who inspires you?

Well, I never took pan or steelband arranging as a career. It was just a great love. Today the pan players, arrangers, etc, have it as a career. Narlin Taitt, Junior Pouchet (who to me was one of the most imaginative, beautiful and sensible arrangers—very creative, very unique which I recognised.)

My brother Selwyn, Ruthven Davies and Pollonais (known as Polly) from Sea Bees Steel Orchestra close to us, they used to vamp the bass which was something I used to hear outstanding when they played. When Allan Gervais from Point Fortin tuned our pans in 1965, the same year I had that great spiritual experience (that was a gift I think God gave me) and Cavaliers came down the track in that Panorama, God alone knows what happened. God propelled Cavaliers, myself and Allan Gervais straight into the height of the pan world. Don't ask me. God alone knows. He is so great.

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'Music and God are in my soul'



Lennox
"Bobby"
Mohammed.

As regards who is my role model, I never looked at anyone as such. Things would strike me like I explained how people operated, but God was always guiding me so strong, whether I knew it or not, and I always wanted to find Him after that spiritual experience. Jesus is my role model though it may not look so. He knows each and every one of us. He is my Saviour, I shall not be moved.

What school/institutions did you attend?

I attended Siparia Road CM School, Mon Repos RC School and Presentation College, San Fernando.

If you could pick a singer to perform just for you, who would you choose?

That would be the girl who sang my compositions who I don't see now, Miss Petal Dowlat.

What do you want to still aim to accomplish with your talent?

I withdraw myself sometimes; God who is in charge knows why. However, I need someone who can help me to manage all the CDs; all my music and whatever is the Lord's will for me in the musical world. Still, to market everything and get it to the record shops and the people, I feel is a great part. But knowing more about the Lord is our greatest assignment, which is very clear. But personal relationship is necessary in everyone's life. His special gift to me is the music, heavenly music, and people may take it to mean it's only gospel, but heavenly music sounds beautiful. Heavenly music is to glorify God with.

Name three calypsoes (soca included, if any) and three non-calypsoes, if you had to choose to arrange.

Three calypsoes: a) Hurricane b) Bassline c) Hasely Crawford.

Three non-calypsoes: (a) My Heart Will Go On, (b) The Power of Love, (c) The Rose.

What daily motto or credo do you live by, and in three words, your recipe for success?

God is in complete control in whom I have absolute faith. Recipe

for success—just believe in what you are doing and in God.

Of all your shows, concerts, performances, which would you like a first-time audience, listener, viewer to experience?

The unbelievable 1965 Panorama; 1967 at Naparima Bowl—Cavaliers accompanying a San Fernando choir—Christmas Carols; 1966—Steelband Music Festival, acts I & IV.

Tell us about your inspiration to do the type of "work" you do.

Anytime I get in the mood, I would just go to the piano, in the past and now also. I would just play on straight, just playing and record on a tape recorder. It is what God allows me to put down. However, when composing a piece I just play, add and subtract music as well as words until I am satisfied. This is it. I can write whatever type of song I want, calypso, parang, gospel, pop, also writing from the Bible (Psalms, or chapters taking parts, like Ephesians, St John, Proverbs, etc). I may not write word for word but almost all is correct, as the message has not changed; so the listener can understand.

Of all your accolades, prizes and awards, which do you rate as extremely special?

I appreciate and thank God for all. I don't thank Him enough. He has blessed me so much to just sit quietly and then He knows what He is doing in my life.

What goals and ambitions do you still have?

The hope I have is that when the people hear any music that I do, they should see God. But with certain ones done, I believe they will see Him and what is yet to come. By His mercy, goodness and grace I know they will see Him.

What is the best compliment you have ever received?

Many people who know me and still hold me in high esteem as an arranger when they go back to times like, Is Paris Burning, 67, My Brother, Your Sister, Ting Tang, etc. What a

great compliment.

Describe yourself beginning with B and M your initials?

Belongs to Jesus; Master—God made you a musician master, but He is My Master, My Saviour and My Lord and I am His child.

What inspires you?

Just knowing God is there, I'm inspired. I could just go downstairs, begin to play and write or just play beautiful hymns and songs—composed ones, etc.

What was the most difficult decision you ever had to make?

I've been in different situations but they always work out, short or little longer; they work out. Just remember, God is watching and there's a hymn that says, "There is an unseen hand that leads the way, I cannot see."

How can we find out more about you and keep up to date with your latest news? Telephone numbers, for example.

It will be a pleasure to hear from your readers. My cell numbers are 469-1430, 750-3856 and number at home is 652-3370. Please feel free to call.

What are your plans for the future?

Where He leads me I will follow.

BOBBY'S MUSIC

Anyone willing to assist with the marketing of his material can kindly contact Bobby Mohammed at **469-1430, 750-3856, 652-3370**.

■ There is a one-hour interview with him on YouTube at tinyurl.com/kh8wntf