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Play One for Dave Marcellin: An Obituary



Dave Marcellin, 1955-2011. Photo courtesy Russell Durity

Today, Friday 29 April after the joy of the "Trey Songz experience", an artist I was admittedly initially unaccustomed with, but whose performance and stagecraft I was greatly impressed with, came the news via a SONGBIRD that news was spreading of the passing of Dave Marcellin. At 2:00 a.m. in the morning, Facebook pages were noting "RIP Dave Marcellin." The confirmation came via a BBM of death by heart attack and complications from medications. This is devastating news to jazz, jazz education, and superlative musical artistry in Trinidad and Tobago.

I will be forever grateful for the confidence he placed in me and [Production One Ltd.](#) for doing things together, he being frustrated and hurt by charlatans parading as music businessmen. Dave stated his plan to work with us to complete his recordings in a live setting. I heard some original music being rehearsed by him and his band of all stars prior to a departure to Barbados earlier this year for a revamped jazz festival. Caribbean jazz would have been greatly enhanced by his canon. The ideas we shared on the notion of a Caribbean Jazz Piano series featuring the best of English, Spanish, French and Dutch Caribbean pianists were fruitful. Dave, along with Clive Zanda and Monty Alexander, to me represented the best in innovative fusion of the native

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rhythms of the English-speaking Caribbean with the improvisation necessary for this thing we call jazz here.

UTT has also lost a visionary who was creating a cabal of young jazzists and reinforcing the standards of jazz excellence necessary in this global village to survive the competitive spirit that improvising musicians have long had. Production One Ltd. was the beneficiary of his support with the initiation of a collaboration with UTT to have workshops with our visiting music acts for students and interested musicians. This would augur for a continued mutual benefit for artist, student and promoter. The possibilities are in abeyance with Dave's demise. We can only hope that opportunities are not lost.

Dave was the supreme jazz pianist in these islands, and I say this with no contradiction or sense of hyperbole. Playing Jimmy Cliff's *Many Rivers to Cross* as accompaniment for 3 SONGBIRDS was a veritable amalgam of jazz, gospel, rhythm & blues and reggae on solo piano. To hear him play was to be convinced that the risk that those pioneering musicians took in transforming jazz from swing to bebop was justified. Dave was an icon for an audience that listens to jazz music rather than dances to it, but he could swing too. Dave played music, whether "straight" jazz or its Caribbean innovation with physical abandon. The contortions of a musician in the throes of ecstatic experience, a la Keith Jarrett, are manifestations of a connection with the instrument that is directed by music.

Production One Ltd. stands committed to excellence in concert production and widening the audience for live music in Trinidad and Tobago. Dave Marcellin would have been a featured artist at our tenth anniversary Jazz Artists on the Greens 2012. Plans were in train for that production. Dave did not have a recorded collection for future audiences to listen to; our loss. At this point in the arc of our existence on this planet, one encounters persons who can inspire or instruct. It is the hope that the lessons learnt are lasting, and the experience enriching. To Dave's family, and his family at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, we in Production One Ltd. offer our sincere condolences. We look to his colleagues in the musical fraternity in these islands to continue Dave's mission of enriching the space with art and artistry.

Rest in peace, brother Dave Marcellin. Let the heavens dance to his music. Let's all play one for Dave.