Mark Holder: Still ‘Something of Value’

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“She doesn’t stand out in a crowd//She might not merit a second glance//But to me, she’s a treasure//And I’ll tell the world that she’s something//She’s something//She’s something of value…” Wherever the opening bars of this song is played, Guyanese, especially those who enjoy ‘oldies’ will come up with the name Mark Holder. They might wonder where he is today and what he is doing these days.

[1] Mark Holder

When he produced the album ‘All The Way’ at Coach House Studio in England in 1977/78, in collaboration with Mark Holder, Guyanese international recording artiste Eddy Grant had said that he felt Mark was destined for “greater things than his already considerable success in Africa and the West Indies….” He had added, “Mark Holder, we at Coach House know that you will go ‘All The Way’.” Mark Holder has been ‘all the way’ there and then some.

The “Something Of Value” singer, who will release his latest album ‘All My Love Is For You’ in July, has enjoyed considerable success in his musical career in the years since he has not been on these shores. Though when asked how long ago it was that he left Guyana, Mark’s answer was “As a son of the soil, I have never left Guyana. In my daily lifestyle, Guyana is and will always be in the forefront of my goals and achievements.”

Mark, who is currently negotiating a Caribbean tour, has Guyana on that schedule and hopes to be here in July.

[2] In a series of online interviews with The Scene, which started late last month, Mark revealed that at ‘The Gala’ in Canada—the final celebration for Black History Month this year—he performed one of his new songs, “Rise Up Haiti”. He said he composed this song while he was “viewing a broadcast of the devastation in Haiti and saw a picture of a young rescue victim begging her mom not to let her die. These words touched my heart and motivated me to compose the lyrics.” It also touched others, because at ‘The Gala’ the “enthusiastic audience… were on their feet dancing and holding hands during my performance,” he added.

Mark Holder was born in Georgetown and grew up in Joseph Pollydore Street (what was then D’Urban Street), Lodge. During the early part of his life, Mark attended the Government Technical Institute and achieved a Diploma in Woodworking, which he did while employed with the government as a Stationery and Printery clerk.
However, Mark had always been musically inclined and had started his singing career. “Using the funds from my Woodworking projects,” he said, he produced his first single “Those Thrilling Emotions”, which was recorded with his band Bumble & The Saints in 1966. “This song was composed with the help of my father Percival Eustace Holder and became an instant hit,” he said.

This was in the days of such bands as Combo 7, the Rhythmaires, the Diamonds and the Telstars, he added.

He mentioned what a thrill it was to record both his early hits—“Those Thrilling Emotions” and his highest grossing single then “Something Of Value” which was backed by The Telstars—at the then Radio Demerara Studio.

As his singing career took off, Mark left Woodworking behind and ventured to the Caribbean, where he worked with such musicians as the Mighty Sparrow, Arrow, Peter Tosh, Ken Lazarus and Jackie Opel among others.

In Jamaica, he recorded “Rest Your Love On Me” with Bob Marley in the Tuff Gong Studio.

A chance meeting with Eddy Grant in London and a quickly developing friendship, led to the recording of ‘All The Way’, which has such tunes as “Hold On (To Your First Love)”, “Mixed Up Man”, Get a Taste of The Action”, “Let me Give It To You”, “Calypso Disco” and others.

In North America, Mark has worked with Aretha Franklin, Sweet Inspiration, King Curtis, the Jackson 5, R B Greaves, the Bluenotes, Brook & Dee Dee Benton and many others.

And aside from Eddy Grant, Mark has also worked with other Guyanese such as Johnny Braff, Prince Ally and Dave Martins’ Tradewinds.

Notable among his body of work is “Sweet Caroline”, one of the most successful singles from his album ‘Where There’s A Will There’s A Way’, the title song of which also saw a great deal of success. Mark’s cover of “Sweet Caroline” was the first reggae version of the Neil Diamond song. It was recorded in Brooklyn, New York in 1973 with the band Hugh Hendricks & The Buccaneers. Mark recalled that sales in Trinidad & Tobago broke all records — 41,000 copies sold.

In addition, Guyanese and Trinidadians will always remember his wedding song “The Organ Never Played”.

In Africa, Nigeria in particular, his album, ‘(God Bless) Nigerian Woman’ was a hit in the 1970s and is still being sold today.
Mark also noted the John F. Kennedy Single “American Tragedy”, which he said, “introduced me into the Kennedy Library” and gained him a written recognition from Ted Kennedy.

Then there was the single “A Little White Lie”, which “awarded me recognition by Bill Clinton [for] supporting him during his trying ordeal” (the Monica Lewinsky affair).

The Katrina tragedy brought about the single “Why Why Katrina?” for the victims of this destructive hurricane.

The election of US President Barack Obama led to the CD ‘Yes We Can’ “the title song was composed as I was watching a pre-election address and hearing those famous chants ‘Yes We Can! Yes We Can!’” Mark said.

Some of his other recordings include the ‘Greatest Hits’ album, which he began compiling in New York in 1997 and completed in Canada in 1999. Along with the bonus track “A Little White Lie”, it includes such hits as “Rest Your Love On Me”, Love Brings Love, Hate Brings Hate”, “Togetherness” and of course “Thrilling Emotions”, “Something Of Value”, “The Organ Never Played” among others.

‘Days Of Praise’, Mark’s first gospel CD, was recorded in 2004 in Sunfire Sounds Studio in Toronto.

‘Caribbean Christmas’ was recorded and produced in September 2008

Mark said ‘All My Love Is For You’ his new album set for release in July, is full of surprises with old school and new age beats.

Asked what’s next, Mark said: “Singing and composing will remain my main career path. However, my future goal is to train young up and coming artistes in the entertainment field.”

He expressed thanks to all of his fans for their love and continued support throughout the years. “You are all ‘Something Of Value,’” he said, adding that his motto is ‘One Love, Togetherness, World Peace’.

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