

Lester “Ska” Sterling O.D.



On Saturday, September 15th 2018 the first J.A.M.E (Jamaican Music Experience) Award Presentation will pay tribute to this Jamaican music icon, Lester Sterling, for his invaluable contributions and profound influence in the creation and evolution of Jamaican music and culture.

Lester Sterling has been involved with Jamaican music since its genesis. He was born on January 31, 1936, in Kingston, Jamaica. He started playing music at the tender age of nine years old. He has played an active role in its evolution through his association with the Skatalite. He started his musical career, in the late forties, at the Alpha Boys School in Jamaica. The school was founded in 1880 and run by Sisters of Mercy, led by Sister Ignatius.

He began his musical career as a trumpet player for the Val Bennett Band in 1957 and went on to play with Bryon Lee and the Dragonaries. He soon developed a passion for playing the Saxophone, and with a little help from Roland Alphonso, was proficient enough to join other musicians to form The Skatalites, at the beckoning of producer Clement Dodd, founder of Studio One, in 1964. After the Skatalites disbanded for the first time in August 1965, Sterling went on to record with producer “Sir” Clancy Collins. He kept the traditional “Jamaican Ska” influence that was started with The Skatalites. Sterling recorded such hits as, “Can’t Sit Down” and his version of “Afrikkan Beat.” He went on to play with many groups and recorded with some of the island’s top producers including Mr. Dodd, Duke Reid and others. “Popa-Lick” and “Banga Rang” are among the favorites accredited to him.

Lester was the one responsible for the formation of the Skatalites group in the United States. In 1978, Mr. Sterling migrated to the United States. He held many odd jobs, which could not replace his passion for playing music. Eventually, he decided to reform the Skatalites within the same year. This was the first time, since 1965, that there was a resemblance of the group under the “Skatalites” name outside of Jamaica. The new band members consisted of the following musicians: Lester Sterling – Alto Saxophone, Alonzo Connell – Trumpet, Ron Wilson – Trombone, Charles Dougerty – Tenor Saxophone, Winston Grennan – Drums, Eugene Grey – Guitar, Tony Ramsey – Bass, and Junior Pollock – Keyboards.

With the success of the group formed in America, Sterling rejoined the Original Skatalites band when they reformed in 1984, for Reggae Sunsplash concert and has been touring and recording with them ever since. Lester Sterling was awarded the Order of Distinction on November 16, 1998 for his distinguish contribution to Jamaica’s Music. Music remains his passion.