

FIRST JAMAICAN MUSIC SUPERSTAR



On May 05, 2020, we lost one of the most forging influence of Jamaican Music and Culture Millie “Millicent Dolly May” Small. Whenever I hear the song “My Boy Lollipop” by Millie Small playing, it evokes fond memories of my childhood growing up in Jamaica. I am sure there are many like me, who can attest her music leads to nostalgic reflections of a time, although difficult for the average Jamaican, show signs of hope for the innocent child and promise of a bright future for the newly independent Jamaica back in the 60s'. She was the first Jamaican to sell over a million records, “My Boy Lollipop,” first Jamaican to top the charts in both the US and UK, first Jamaican Superstar, first Jamaican to have a television program in Finland, just to name a few accomplishments.

Millie “Millicent Dolly May” Small should go down in Jamaican music history as one of the foremost contributor to the popularization of Jamaican music. She created pathways and torn down barriers which enables others such as Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, Desmond Dekker and others to realize their successes. Of course, she started out with the Legendary Producer Clement “Sir Coxsone” Dodd, founder of Studio One, before later being signed to Island Records. Let me not forget the marketing genius of Chris Blackwell. You have to give credit where it is due. I must say, was it not for Blackwell’s marketing strategies implemented with the prescient Bob Marley, Jamaican music would still be trying to get global veneration and acclamation.

In 2018, I called on a friend living in England, Mr. Winston Francis, and asked him to connect with Ms. Small. I told him the purpose was to commemorate her, through my organization True Tribute Organization Foundation Inc., for the work she had done in being one of the most influential ambassadress of Jamaican Music and Culture. He was able to speak to someone who knew her. However, it was very disappointing to hear, she was in seclusion and refused to do performances or interviews.

Yes, she did receive the Order of Distinction from the Jamaican Government in 2011. However, they need to take it a step further, not only give casual mentions because of a persons’ popularity or pacify for acceptance, but properly acknowledge and educate future generation about the important contributions of people such as Millie Small, the Skatalites, Don Drummond etc., who enhanced Jamaican prominence in the world. Most individuals outside of Jamaica are more knowledgeable of these individuals, know their history, have respect, and show a greater appreciation for our Music and Culture than the average Jamaican. After living in the United States for forty-nine years and involved in various aspects of the music industry as a performer and consultant for over thirty-five years, I can attest to that fact. It is really shameful.

Today, the average individual between the age of ten and twenty, living in Jamaica, do not know some of the great influences of Jamaican Music and Culture, although they might have gotten some kind of award from the government. Hence, the establishment of True Tribute Organization Foundation Inc., in 2014, whose purpose is to assist in educating about the history of Jamaican Music and Culture. So that people like Millie Small and others like her is not just a fad, but perpetually cognizant in the minds of our future generations. She will not be forgotten.

LeRoy Graham Jr.

True Tribute Organization Foundation Inc.