

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Alwyn Baptiste, Sr., VI Music Legend, Dies At 62

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ST. CROIX -- Alwyn Alexander Baptiste, Sr., leader of the legendary World Famous Xpress Band and owner of the longstanding Backyard Studios, where almost every recording artist on St. Croix have recorded music -- from Christian to reggae, soca and calypso -- died on Thursday afternoon of Sarcoma cancer. He was 62.

A sign of his legend, expressions of sorrow and reflections of his great and long history in the music industry here have been pouring in on social media as news of his passing spread, most of them tagged to the Facebook page of one of his sons, Alwyn Baptiste, Jr., known by his music moniker "Daddy Jones".

"An icon is described as a person or individual that symbolizes something. I lost one of my icons today," wrote Kevré L. Hendricks, a member of the Fusion Band.

"I've had the opportunity to play alongside this great man several times. We spoke about a lot of things and he taught me a lot of things! I appreciate every conversation and every moment we've shared! One of the greatest men I ever knew! To a musical legend, a friend, a role model, a great person, rest in eternal peace, Big Al," wrote Iaryn "Swanks" Williams of the Stylee Band, one of the most popular music groups in the Virgin Islands.

"I don't know what to say. Al Baptiste, Sr. was more than a bandleader to me. He was a friend, a confidant, a teacher, a supporter. He was with me with guidance and support throughout most of my professional music career. He was there in my three St. Croix Party Monarch wins, and listened intently when I competed in St. Thomas. When I joined the Xpress Band, he taught me most of what I know about the business side of music. I'm going to miss the "just cool Super Dude." My music career will have a void now, and I will carry on in his memory," wrote Toby Derima, Xpress Band's drummer.

The expressions continued into Friday, not only from those in the music industry, but fans, friends and family, all of whom recall memorable moments that they shared with Mr. Baptiste.



re, it was only fitting that
on Mr. Baptiste's passing.

From left to right: Alwyn Baptiste

Sr. and Jr.

"We all knew that Al had been sick for a few months now and offered our prayers for an improvement of his health, but when I received the news of his passing on Thursday, I was floored. My mind raced back to the countless musical contributions he has made to our community and the region over his decade-long career as a professional musician, and I smiled, because I know Al will continue to live on through his music," Senator Kenneth Gittens said in a press release issued this afternoon.

According Mr. Gittens, Mr. Baptiste was a self-taught musician whose love for music dates back to his childhood, growing up playing in church in his native Antigua. The senator acknowledged Mr. Baptiste's love for the territory, and said the community embraced his person, and also his great contribution to the islands.

Mr. Gittens described Mr. Baptiste as a veteran musician, noted songwriter, talented music producer, arranger, gifted engineer and composer, keyboardist and manager of the Xpress Band. “

"Al comes from a musical family and has been sharing the stage with his brother Dean Baptiste with Xpress Band and their duo BSharp Band for decades. He has also been sharing the studio with his son, the equally talented Alwyn Baptiste, Jr., at Backyard Studios where many talented Virgin Islands musicians received their first chance to be heard," Mr. Gittens said.

"Because of his illness, Al and Xpress Band were missed as the traditional last band of the Crucian Christmas Festival Parade last month. He was also missed at the Junior Calypso competition where he provided backup music for the children for years and was loved. The love from the community was evident as a “go fund me” account was set up to ease the burden of his medical bills was able to raise more than \$8,000 for Al in just a matter of days.

“Al was a man of great character, he was a dynamic musician and his passing dealt a hard blow to the entire community. My heart goes out to his entire family, his band members and to my dear friend, his son Alwyn, Jr. , who is on staff at the 31st Legislature of the Virgin Islands," Mr. Gittens said.

Senator Kurt Violet also acknowledged Mr. Baptiste and lauded his decades-long contribution to the territory.

"I am saddened by is death. He was a musical icon who was a mentor for many of the young musicians in the Virgin Islands. He was a major part of the St. Croix Festival and was the chair of the Calypso Committee, and was instrumental in reestablishing the show. He was a leader of what we referred to as the only adult band, Xpress Band, and his musical genius will be surely missed," Mr. Violet said.

Feature Image: Alwyn Alexander Baptiste, Sr.

Image Credit: [Best Island Fete](#).