

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. Says Goodbye To Alwyn Baptiste, Sr. In Celebratory Homegoing

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ST. CROIX -- If you arrived at Miracle Revival Deliverance Tabernacle, located in Beeston Hill, just minutes past 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, there was no parking to be found at the church, nor the nearby Beeston Hill Health and Fitness Club, or even the Beeston Hill Medical Center.

Your best chance would be Hermon Hill, as Virgin Islanders from near and far, visitors, family, friends and dignitaries -- among them Gov. Kenneth Mapp and Lt. Gov. Osbert Potter, former Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen, Senators Sammuell Sanes, Novelle Francis and Positive Nelson, and former Senator Adlah Donastorg -- gathered early at the church, packing its lower floor of over 500 seats, and overflowing to its

second floor, to pay final homage to a man deemed a legend of Virgin Islands music, with an influence that affected all the industry's circles.

Alwyn Alexander Baptiste, Sr., died of Sarcoma cancer on February 25, at the age of 62. And while the loss remains a difficult reality for family and those who were close to Mr. Baptiste, the funeral service yesterday was intentionally celebratory. Mr. Baptiste's brother, Dean Baptiste, who MC'd the homegoing, gave lighthearted jokes throughout the event, eliciting laughter from the crowd.

As was expected, an assortment of artists and musicians played and sang throughout the service, many of whom had recorded in some fashion at Backyard Studios, Mr. Baptiste's popular recording house where reggae, soca, calypso, dancehall, gospel and other genres of music have been recorded. Mr. Baptiste was noted as being very generous as well, and at one point the crowd burst into roars of laughter when Mr. Baptiste's brother, Dean, said that those who still owed recording fees should pay those monies to him.

[Funeral: Alwyn Alexander Baptiste, Sr,](#)

Midway through the service, a group of singers performed a rendition of You Are The Source Of My Strength, sending shivers through the church and receiving a standing ovation from funeral attendees. A performance from Janet Rouss Cochran ignited emotions as well, and Lady Ali, a close friend of Mr. Baptiste, who credited the musician for propelling her music career, sang one of the first calypsos she wrote, Life Is For Living.

The diversity of the gathering was a telling display of Mr. Baptiste's reach. He worked with musicians spanning multiple generations, and helped kick-start many careers. He toured with the Mighty Sparrow, recorded 28 albums and left an indelible mark on the Antigua music scene as well, which is Mr. Baptiste's native land.

Long before the funeral, people were expressing their fond memories of Mr. Baptiste, reliving the shared moments that left lasting marks on their lives.

"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, the day Mr. Baptiste died.

"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.

[Funeral: Alwyn Baptiste, Sr.](#)

And Toby Derima, drummer of the World Famous Xpress Band, founded by Mr. Baptiste and will be celebrating 30 years of existence in July, credited not only his abilities as a

musician, but also his knowledge of the industry, to Mr. Baptiste.

"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," Mr. Derima said.

But perhaps the most revealing moment of Mr. Baptiste's musical genius at Saturday's funeral, came when a representative of the Antiguan government, known as Jonas, who knew Mr. Baptiste personally and is also a music producer, described Mr. Baptiste's keen ear and natural gift of music.

[Funeral: Alwyn Alexander Baptiste, Sr.](#)

"I met Al in the early 90s when I recorded at Backyard Studios. I did three albums for King Smarty Jr. I recorded songs for Scorpion, Farmer, Stumpy and the list goes on. I would just like to give one experience.

"Everybody knows this song for Calypso Jim called Exercise. When Calypso Jim brought that song to me, I told Jim, 'that was stupidity; I'm not doing that song.' And he went to St. Croix and he brought the song for Al. Al called me and said, 'Jonas, that's a big song.' I couldn't help but say, '[chupse](#).' When Calypso Jim came back to Antigua with the music, I listened to it and I still said chupes. Everybody started hearing the song on the radio and they were loving it, and I still was saying chupse.

"The song ended up being the biggest song in Antigua that year, [beating the world-famous Burning Flames for the Road March](#). And Al was the one who was the genius behind that song."