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# Steel Pulse, Chronixx, Morgan Heritage, and Third World Remember Vaughn Benjamin Of Midnite / Akae Beka; VI Community Holds Vigil as Fans Gather Across the Globe to Honor the Reggae Visionary

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Shenneth Canegata **November 14, 2019**

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## Vaughn Benjamin

The sudden death of influential roots reggae visionary, Vaughn Benjamin, of Midnite Band and Akae Beka on November 4th stunned the Virgin Islands and the reggae community around the world. Steel Pulse, Chronixx, Morgan Heritage, Jesse Royal, Third World, Lutan Fyah and other stars in the reggae community expressed their shock at his passing, as fans around the world held vigils to honor and remember the visionary's global contribution.

Vaughn was born on the island of Antigua and moved to St. Croix at eight years old with his family. His journey and passion for conscious reggae began with Midnite Band, formed in 1989 with Vaughn as the lead singer and creative lyricist, while Ronnie Benjamin Jr., his brother, worked diligently to hone the “sound” that would eventually be termed “the Midnite sound.” The brothers are the sons of Antiguan music legend, Ronnie Benjamin and Jenita Benjamin.

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He was a creative musician, a visionary, a lyricist, and an exceptional vocalist who amassed a catalog of over 70 albums in his lifetime. His lyrics addressing the oppressed, social, political, and economic issues sung in concert with the infectious “Midnite sound” garnered Midnite enormous exposure, eventually catapulting them to the status of “one of the world’s most influential roots reggae bands,” touring all over the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Australia for 25 years.

Fans gathered in Germany, Africa, Brazil, Sweden, France, Dakar, Jamaica, London, the United States and other parts of the world to celebrate the life of, Vaughn, lead singer of Midnite and Akae Beka.

### **Governor Bryan**

“The world has lost a legend and our Virgin Islands, a talented son of the soil. Vaughn was much more than a reggae icon. He was a teacher and an inspiration to many of us. Our condolences go out to his family, friends, and his many fans.”

### **USVI Ambassadors**



Legendary reggae artist hailing from the island of St. Croix, Vaughn Benjamin has passed away. Benjamin was the lead singer of Midnite and solo artist, Akae Beka, releasing dozens of albums during his career. Akae is revered as one of reggae music's greatest stars with a distinguishing voice that many artists deemed as masterful.

Arlene Coggins-John of St. Croix expressed to Shenneth Canegata, Vaughn's sister, that Midnite / Akae Beka are loved and well known. Ms. Coggins-John said that when she was in Germany on military tour the Germans expressed excitement that she was from the Virgin Islands. They told her that they loved Midnite Band. She said it was the first time she heard about the band.

On her military tour to Panama, Ms. Coggins-John said that Panamanians also spoke of their love for the band. "He left a mark on the world because God put him here to spread peace and love," she said.

### **Steel Pulse**

"I know we are all finding it hard to believe that one of the most genuine soldiers of the Rastafarian musical fortress, Vaughn Benjamin, is no longer here in flesh with us. This was definitely a shock to my system, because it is exactly 2 years ago to the day, upon hearing this sad news, that I presented Vaughn a "Life Time Achievement Award," on behalf of the DARC FOUNDATION in New York city.

It was in the mid 90's while on tour in St Croix, I was introduced to a group of Rastafarians, rehearsing in a broken-down looking building. It was then that I met Vaughn, spitting serious words of fire in his songs and he made it clear to me, that his band was coming to "chant down Babylon" in a way that none of us already existing reggae musicians, have ever done before. Ras Vaughn Benjamin, aka, Akae Beka, kept his word.

Such disappointing news to have been delivered to us all, when it has become evident that in order for us to keep the flames of protest burning within the music, Vaughn Benjamin had been an integral part of the process.

Our heart and prayers go out to the Virgin Islands, the devoted fans, the family, brothers Ron and Abja, who I have reached out to yesterday....On all fronts; there will definitely be a void...

May the light of Midnite, Rest In Power!

### **Morgan Heritage**

"We've lost an icon of the culture. We shall miss you brother. Vaughn Benjamin of Midnite. GONE WAY!!!! TOO SOON!"

### **Chronixx**

"Thank you elder soul .... For the 1500 insights that I gave us."

### **Third World**

"The words, sound, and power of Vaughn Benjamin live! Rastafari lives. Rest well brother, Akae Beka, Midnite."

### **Jesse Royal**

"Truly saddened to hear this news! Truly one of the purest genuine souls that I've ever come across and the lessons and reasonings are truly indelible."

### **Lutan Fyah**

"In a life full of complexities and challenges, it's crucial to have a support system consisting of real brothers and friends. My brethren was just that to me and to many more people in this earth. His presence alone blessed the people around him and his message I will continue to spread through my music."

### **Accra, Ghana**

"I was present in Washington DC between 1996 and 2000 where I could see Midnite perform for 5 hours on any given night at a local bar or club. This is when Vaughn was a young man and his brother Ronnie was on the keyboards. The heights of music, lyricism, vocal strength, kinetic intensity and melodic genius were otherworldly. Anyone who was in Washington DC during those years know what my words cannot capture. They also knew that we were witnessing a historical moment whenever we saw Midnite perform live. We can tell our grandchildren that we were there.

Vaughn Benjamin's lyrical prowess, use of double and triple entendres, fierce grasp of history and philosophical epistemology, his multifaceted approach to melody, his prolific output, mastery of timing and vocal syncopation, his insistence on using a slowed down trance like one drop rhythm to decorate his masterfully poetic words puts him in a class by himself as my generation's greatest singer songwriter in any musical genre, and I do not say this lightly. He simply was the pinnacle and I am blessed to have witnessed timeless greatness in the flesh.

Vaughn's passing leaves a hole in the heart of us all as a sober reminder that even superheroes can die. A reminder that we are all subject to the immutable laws of life irrespective of how magical we are while living. Most geniuses do not live long lives, although their impact lasts for thousands of years. Enjoy the walking geniuses around you while you can. One day, you will only be able to enjoy them only through the artifacts they leave behind.

Brother Vaughn, thank you for adding countless hours of joy and disbelief of how great one singer/songwriter can be to my toolkit of inspiration. You will always be "The Blue Lotus of the Nile." - Heru Ofori-Atta -

Vaughn's songs hit the Billboard Reggae Album top ten chart many times.

A mural of the influential reggae icon was painted in Marseille, France on the wall of the Marseille Town Center.

Vaughn will never be forgotten. His voice will continue to ring out. Legacy .... he left his mark on this world.