

Patrick "Johnny" Gomes

Biography

Patrick "Johnny" Gomes is one of the most well known persons in the Antiguan/Barbudan community in New York. Johnny, as he is known to all, is involved in a number of Antiguan/Barbudan activities around the tri-state area and has distinguished himself in many different arenas.

Johnny is an accomplished pan man whose experience with pan music dates back to his early teens when he apprenticed under the tutelage of the well known Antiguan pan man, Arthur "Bum" Jardine. In those days between 1963 and 1968 Johnny played with Brute Force, South Side Symphony and Texaco Astronauts, which Bum formed when he left Brute Force in 1967.

Johnny is the captain and lead horn player of the popular City South Steel Orchestra stationed in the Bronx, New York. The band, with two popular CDs under its belt, is well known particularly for its Christian music, and has delighted congregations in many tri-state Caribbean churches. The influence of City South Steel Orchestra in the Caribbean churches of Queens and the Bronx has resulted in more than a half dozen churches forming their own steel bands, which Johnny facilitates through his administrative expertise and contacts in the business of pan building, tuning and arranging.

For many years Johnny taught pan successfully at Youth Theatre Interactions, Inc., a performing arts school and repertory company whose Instructional Program is designed to teach participants about their cultural heritage through a creative medium. He currently teaches pan at the Grace Moravian Church, in Springfield Gardens, NY. He produced his own pan music CD, a blend of Caribbean and American instrumentals called "A Soft Touch", which every pan lover would be proud to add to their collection.

But Johnny is far more than a pan man. Johnny learned to play keyboards after he migrated to New York in 1968 and because he learned so quickly and did so well, he soon started playing as back-up to the Mighty Sparrow (the World Calypso Monarch), first with the Jaguars, then with Sam and the Caribbean Express. Johnny has toured the United States, Bermuda, Canada and the USVI, playing music with these groups and the Mighty Sparrow.

Mr. Gomes is now a solo artist using tracks to accompany his pan music. He has played at several prestigious institutions in the U.S. including the Waldorf Astoria and Studio One in New York City, The United Nations, and the Town Hall off Broadway. He is in strong demand at weddings, cocktail events, church services, etc.

Johnny has now relocated to his home country Antigua and Barbuda and has continued his love for entertaining at many of the hotels including Sandals, Pineapple Beach Resort and Keyonna Beach Club.

In his spare time Johnny enjoys playing soccer, watching his favourite tv show, Law and Order and listening to World Music.

THE NOMINATION OF PATRICK "JOHNNY" GOMES

Patrick "Johnny" Gomes was born on July 27, 1946 in "Pig Village" Antigua to Ena Crump and Arthur Gomes. He grew up in the Ovals area of St. Johns City South, Antigua. He attended Foundation Mix School (Miss Davis School), the St. John's Boys School, and then on to Faith and Hope School (Miss Goodwin School). When he was just 14 years old, he fell in love with music and after school in the afternoons he'd go to Nevis Street to learn to play the steel pan under the tutelage of Arthur "Bum" Jardine. He took quickly and easily to steel pan music and so a few years later he entered the "Ping Pong" solo competition and came in second to his trainer, Bum Jardine. The next year Patrick came first.

Patrick used to hang around the Brute Force Steel band and wanted to start a Junior Brute Force steel band but some of the elders did not support that move; hence the formation of the South Side Symphony Steel Band in early 1965. It was later in 1965, the same year it was formed, that South Side Steel Band made history when it became the first steel band to perform in the St. John's Cathedral on Monday December 20. As per the Workers' Voice newspaper of Wednesday December 29, 1965, "History was certainly made in Antigua during the evening on Monday 20th instant when the South Side Steel Band let the hallowed rafters of our (big church) St. John's Cathedral ring and re-echo with glorious sound and an enthralled and sympathetic congregation listen in quiet worshipfulness." Patrick "Johnny" Gomes was a member of that band on that day and he fondly recalls the two tunes they played: Silent Night and Bells of St. Mary.

In early 1966, Arthur "Bum" Jardine and Johnny Gomes formed the Texaco Astronauts and Johnny became the defector captain of the Astronauts. Later that year, they formed an all-girls steel band and they were called the Cosmonauts. Johnny would take up playing steel pan 6 nights per week in hotels and during the daytime for those 6 days he'd play pan at Kensington Court. This persisted for the next two years when Johnny yielded to his mother's urging to come to the United States and explore living here. He brought his pan with him.

When he got to New York, he met up with a few Antiguanians and was introduced to the Jaguars, a jazz band, learned to play keyboard in the band. Through this band, they were recruited to accompany calypsonians from the Caribbean when they performed in the US. They became the main band to accompany Sparrow on his tours across North America. Johnny and the Jaguars accompanied Sparrow at the Madison Square Garden in NY and the Newark Symphony Hall in New Jersey. The band would also accompany Lord Kitchener, and all the top calypsonians who came to perform at the Mother's Day Show at the Madison Square Garden. Although jazz was a steady preoccupation, he kept honing his steelpan playing skills. He would help arrange for steel bands in the area including the BWIA Sunjet Steel Orchestra and played with them at the world-famous Ed Sullivan Show (May 23, 1970).

In 1990, "Johnny" got back fully into steel band playing at the urging of Glendon "Kelloggs" Edwards who got him the steel pan he uses up to today. He helped form the City South Symphony with initially 6 members. "Johnny" also did promotions for and played with

Antiguan calypsonians including the Mighty Swallow, King Short Shirt, and King Obstinate. He also promoted for the Burning Flames Band back in 1985.

It was in the early 1990s that Patrick Johnny Gomes help form the City South Steel Orchestra (CSSO) and focused on advancing steel pan music in the tri-state area Caribbean populated churches and produced two full length CDs (a Christmas and a Gospel). Through Johnny's instrumentality, some of these churches were assisted to start steel pan orchestras and himself assisted in training the young people to play the pan. Coming full-circle, Johnny brought CSSO to Antigua to partner in concert to help raise funds to restore the St. John's Cathedral, having done so in 1965.

Patrick "Johnny" Gomes, often dressed in his distinctive Antigua & Barbuda madras vest, can be found across the United States playing his steel pan. Representing his home country, Antigua and Barbuda, he has played in Washington DC at the Organization of American States (OAS) affair, the United Nations, Consulate General of Antigua and Barbuda-NY hosted events, among others. As captain of the City South Steel Orchestra, he led performances at the Independence Anniversary worship services and Gala. Johnny led joint performances with Harry Belafonte. Johnny always describes himself as representing Antigua and Barbuda. He has gone to play at St. Patrick's Cathedral and St. John the Divine both in Manhattan, NY. Additionally, Mr. Gomes is not a stranger to performing at Bloomingdales, White Plaines, NY; Ridgewood Savings Bank, Bronx, NY; the Surf Club on the Sound, New Rochelle, NY; and the Russian Tea Room, New York, NY. Sandals Resorts, Antigua is another establishment that Patrick Gomes has been known to be a regular fixture.

Patrick served for a number of years, before passing it off to others similarly inclined, as a steel drum instructor at Grace Moravian Church, Queens NY, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Bronx, NY, and the Youth Theater Interaction, Yonkers NY. His influence is far reaching, and his impact is wide and far and manifests in the lives of the numbers of young people he has enabled.

Patrick Johnny Gomes extends himself beyond steel pan to advance the culture and heritage of Antigua and Barbuda. He is a founding member of the organization for Antigua and Barbuda Constitution Reform and Education (ABCRE); a member of the Antigua and Barbuda Progressive Society, the longest extant Caribbean organization in the United States of America; a founding member of the Antigua (and Barbuda) Soccer Club. He was privileged to serve as the Vice President of the Antigua and Barbuda International Support Organization (ABISO).

Mr. Patrick "Johnny" Gomes has received numerous awards from various organization in the diaspora for his stellar and sacrificial service and commitment to advancing the cultural heritage of Antigua and Barbuda. Among his most cherished honors are the following: the Award from the Antigua and Barbuda Cultural Society (June 20, 2009), the Worldwide Society of Antigua & Barbuda (October 18, 2001), Special Merit Award from the Friends of Ottos Comprehensive School (May 27, 1995), 2017 Caribbean Man of the Year award from Neighborhood Technical Assistance Clinic (October 13, 2017), and the 12th Independence Anniversary Celebrations – New York (November 1, 1993). This last mentioned still

reverberates deep in his being because of the caption written on it: "For his untiring efforts to promote his country, to bring nationals in the diaspora to the service of their nation, and for being always ready to help."

It is against this backdrop that I nominate Mr. Patrick "Johnny" Gomes for national honours as a member of the Most Precious Order of Princely Heritage for his contribution in the field of heritage and cultural endeavours through steel pan music.