

## Donovan Germain : 4 decades of passion and commitment to the music industry

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He was completely stumped by The Sunday Gleaner's first question because as he put it, describing himself is not something he's used to. Although there is much to be said about producer extraordinaire Donovan Germain, his humility would not allow him to boast about his many accomplishments. But when The Sunday Gleaner insisted, we were right on the money.

*"People say I have a level of humility and patience that is great" said Germain. In the next breath, he began to speak about his level of commitment to music highlighting his love and passion for an industry he has contributed some four decades to. "I have been in the music industry from 1972, and if that's not commitment I don't know what is. You know how long that is? And it's been a journey that has been both challenging and immensely rewarding," he said as he recalled his genesis in the music business. "I was maybe about six or seven years old when I was used to live at Nelson Road, which is off Waltham Park Road and Maxfield Avenue and we used to have a sound system there by the name of El Toro and they used to play like every Saturday, and I used to look forward to seeing them set up the boxes and hearing them play. I used to get excited about it and I think that's where I first developed my love of and appreciation for music."*

Germain then migrated to the United States where he landed his first job as a clerk at Keith's Record Store in Brooklyn, New York. He recalled that he ended up buying the store and started his journey as a distributor through the push and support of veteran producer, Gussie Clarke. Still, somewhere deep inside Germain was the need to do more. It was an urge he could not shake and having recognised that he had what he describes as the "taste and ear" for music, he decided he wanted to get into music production.

*"The first song I produced was called **Sentimental Reasons** by Joy White, that was 1978. Then, I did this song by The Tamlins called **Don't Break Your Promise**, which put things on a whole new level for me" he said. "I remember being in the store in New York and I got this call from London and it was Island Records calling me, telling me they wanted to distribute the song because they found it to be a commercially viable song. That, in itself, was a defining moment for me because I kept thinking to myself, 'I just started in this music thing and I am getting calls from a major label'. I decided I was going to do this thing as a profession. I mean I was ecstatic."*

At the time Germain, who majored in accounting at college, was working on Wall Street. He quit his job there to focus on music full-time. The latter, he said, was one of the scariest decisions he made in his life but not one he regrets. *"When you're young, you're fearless, but one of the things that gave me an awakening to the industry I was going into was going into a tuck shop in Brooklyn and seeing Roland Alphonso who to me was a superstar and he was selling records from a 'dulcimina grip'. That was frightening to me because this was a man I considered an icon and shouldn't be seen in a tuck shop selling records, but that was when I realised that the business I was going into was no joke business and you can be up one minute and down the next. And in the back of my mind, my mother wasn't in agreement with me going into the music as her only child and so I knew I had to work even harder to succeed. I knew I couldn't fail and I had to be conscious with the decisions I made in this business. As a KC old boy, I could not yield."*

And fail he did not. Germain went on to work with some of the most established acts in the industry including the likes of Tenor Saw, Buju Banton, Beres Hammond, Freddie McGregor and Marcia Griffiths, to name a few. According to him, his A-list catalogue was testament to his work ethic. He expressed that as a consumer of music himself, he had to make sure that the work he was pushing out was quality productions and songs he would buy and that became his benchmark for success. *"I used to ask myself when I am making a song if I would subject myself to the harshness of the cold weather to go and take my money and buy that song in the record store and that was my benchmark. I wanted to give the same quality music I wanted to get" he said, pointing out that he has not lost that fire he started music with back in the '70s. "I love music and my love for it supersedes everything and so I don't even see what I do as work. I just get up and have an idea and I execute it. I have the same love and the same passion for music today that I had when I just started out. It's a constantly evolving industry and I am always listening and learning."*