



# Artist of the Month...



TROY JENNINGS

## Gita Blakeney-Saltus

Q & A with Scott Hill



### What age were you when you started singing?

I was a bit of a late bloomer. I sang in the Choir when I was young, dabbled in musical theatre while at the Berkeley Institute and thereafter was in a Madrigal group at Gould Academy. My thirst for musical expression truly began in my twenties, and I approached it with dedicated passion and purpose.

### Have you been educated in the music (arts) arena?

If so, elaborate. I have had various forms of vocal training over the years, most of which have been classical. I am always seeking new and creative forms of artistic and professional development. I will continue vocal tutelage, for as long as there remains a song in my heart. My voice is my instrument and it must be cultivated with care and attention.

### Why jazz? What inspires you and why?

Jazz music as well as classical and gospel, permeated my household throughout my life. My father has very eclectic tastes in music, and exposed me and my sister Gina to various genres, which undoubtedly was the genesis of my love for music. I have always had an affinity for Jazz, both melodically, and moreover lyrically. My mother really defined me through my name "Gita", which is Hindi, and means "song". She always fed my voracious appetite for books, hence I find that the simplistic beauty of words and having the opportunity to interpret and stylize a song is beautiful gift for a vocalist. My inspiration is drawn first and foremost from a place of spirituality, and through the joys and the challenges of my life. The essence of my life is "giving" of my heart and soul. The support of my loved ones, especially my husband Gary, and my family is always a source of tremendous strength and encouragement. I now watch my niece Leah and nephew P.J. play violin. Now that is inspiring!!

### What was it like when you brought out your first CD? How many CD's do you have now?

It was exhilarating and humbling all in the same breath. I have two major CD projects: "My Favourite Things" and "Angel Eyes". I am also featured on "Inside my Mind", by Vic Glazer, and "Christmas in Bermuda", by Lynda Lovett. My projects have been acts of birth, and are like my "babies."

### How did your jazz evenings begin at the BNG?

*Jazz with Gita.* As the Director of Development of the Bermuda National Gallery, my role is that of building relationships and partnerships that will generate funding to ensure our continued growth and sustainability. Intrinsic to this process, is an element of implementing creative and exciting ways to engage our donor community, and create opportunities of awareness of the BNG. The Champagne & Jazz with Gita series responds in a wonderful way to this need, providing me with a stage to "share my gift of song", with the backdrop of our fabulous exhibitions. The great news is that we partner with wonderful sponsors on each occasion.

### How long have you performed with your band?

Well I have worked with several people and various combinations of musicians over the past 20 years, including Robert Edwards, whom I worked with, both here and abroad for over 10 years. I have presented the Champagne & Jazz Series with Tony Bari, Stan Gilbert, Ronnie Lopes for the past 4 years, and most recently I am enjoying the experience of working with John Lee, Lionel Edwards, Andwele Simons, Robert Lansing, Dwight Hart, Julio Jimenez, and the talented teen, Ben Lusher.

### Elaborate on opening for Gladys Knight? Also, is there anyone else that you would like to mention.

I have had the honor of being the opening act for some major entertainers over the years, including Chris Botti, Jonathan Butler and Angie Stone. Most recently I, with "my sister in song", Sheila Smith and Steve Darrell, opened for Gladys Knight at the "Feel the Love" concert. It was truly a wonderful display of Bermuda talent, and musical camaraderie. One of my most enriching experiences was a performance at the Copacabana at the birthday celebration for the legendary Isaac Hayes. I was invited by Isaac and prefaced my performance by speaking of my Island home, and it was wonderful being an ambassador for my country.

### Who have been your mentors?

Many people have helped shape "Gita" the songstress, including a myriad of teachers, and musicians from the obscure to the renown. I love Shirley Horn, Nancy Wilson, Sarah Vaughn and so many, too numerous to mention. I pay homage to all those local musicians who have paved the way for me to have a career in music in my community. I have always been in awe of the showmanship and professionalism of my Uncle Gene Steede, who join other legends, Hubert Smith, The Talbot Brothers, Lance Hayward, Pinky Steede, Violetta Carmichael, Ghandi Burgess. Because of their legacies, I am privileged to do what I love, and love what I do.

### Has your style changed at all from the beginning of your career up until now?

Evolution is a constant, and I would hope that there continues to be more of me as I interpret the classics and create new songs. Jazz is clearly the genesis and will always live inside me, but there is R&B, Reggae, Socca, Classical, Latin, Gospel and other derivatives of music that are waiting to be fully actualized.

### What would you have to say to young musicians today?

It has been said that "Success is when Preparation meets with Opportunity". Preparation should be constant, development of your art form should be constant, opening your heart and mind to opportunities of growth should be constant. Be not afraid to dream and set high standards of excellence. BE PREPARED WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF. Strive for a healthy balance of Humility with Confidence. and be sure to understand the "business" of music. Good work ethic is a must to endure in an entertainment career, and don't be afraid to ask for assistance. You can never receive if you don't ask. Above all be true to yourself and your talent, authenticity can never be mistaken. YOU ARE A CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE..NO LESS THAN THE TREES AND THE STARS.YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO BE HERE..AND WHETHER OR NOT IT IS CLEAR TO YOU. NO DOUBT THE UNIVERSE IS UNFOLDING AS IT SHOULD.(DESIDERATA)