

## Ernest Ranglin - Full Circle!

Older jazz guitar fans will already be aware of Jamaican guitarist Ernest Ranglin who was in Ronnie Scott's house band in 1964 and recorded several tracks including 'Swing-aling' and 'So-Ho' with Graham Bond, Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker. These were released on an Island Records EP in 1965 as Ernest Ranglin & The GB's. Sadly this is unavailable at present, but a CD of recordings from Ronnie Scott's archive called 'Soul D'Ern' is well worth checking out.

I recently heard a cassette of the GB's recording, courtesy of Jack Bruce's former songwriting partner Pete Brown, and noticed that there were two guitars playing on the recording - with the rhythm guitarist sounding more acoustic. Intrigued as to who the second guitarist might be, I phoned Ranglin at his home in St Mary, Jamaica, to ask about this. "Yes, I do remember recording Swing-aling and Soho - so-named because I used to work at Ronnie Scott's in Soho - and I overdubbed rhythm guitar on these recordings, using a different sound." recalled Ranglin. Evidence of the arranger at work - even on what was essentially a jam session! Ranglin arranged a massive pop hit that same year for Millie Small - 'My Boy Lollipop'. So how did this come about? "Well, I was the musical director at Island records at the time. I had set up Black Swan records when I came to England in late 1963 - I am a Gemini and I am on the cusp between June and July and the sign of this is a Swan. This was part of Island records which put out a mix of pop and R & B artists, including Boris Gardner, Keith & Enid and Wilfred Edwards. We recorded Millie Small in 1964 and had a big hit with this in 1965." Obviously 1964 was a very busy and successful year for Ranglin, playing jazz at Ronnie's and with the GBs while having pop success at the same time! So where did life lead next? "I went back to Jamaica in 1965 and became musical director for Federal Recordings for the next 10 years. At the same time I was doing things for Studio 1 and also for Duke Reid's Treasure Isle label - such as Tommy McCook and the Supersonics, Justin Hinds and the Dominoes, the Paragons with John Holt. I was working as an arranger and playing as well. Various recordings for the Gayfeet label featuring Baba Brooks the trumpeter were really my stuff - but I was contracted to Federal so I could not say so at the time. We did lots of singles and I would mostly play bass. In fact, I played bass on nearly all the Prince Buster records. I was contracted exclusively as a solo guitarist to Federal - so I was restricted to playing rhythm guitar or bass or maybe arranging on other labels. During the 70's I did a lot of studio work cleaning up records for Coxson - adding new bass or guitar parts - prior to mastering." But what about featured albums? "Well, I made my 'Ranglin Roots' album in 1970 and released this in 1972. Later in the 1970's I recorded 'Ranglypso' for MPS as a one-off and I made many records with Monty Alexander at that time. In 1978 I left Jamaica and went to live in New York. In 1981 I went back to Jamaica, then in 1982 I moved to Florida. I recorded one album in Singapore around 1987 called 'True Blue' which was more jazz and one in Florida called 'We Want to Party' which was reggae with some jazz influence. I recorded 'Play the Time Away' which was mostly compositions by the engineers and myself on Grove Records and 'Tribute to a Legend' on Kariang Records - all Bob Marley tunes, apart from the title tune which was my composition - in Jamaica in the early 90s. More recently, I recorded 'Below The Bassline' in 1995, 'Memories of Barber Mack' the following year, and 'In Search of the Lost Riddim' the year after that."

I also spoke to Executive Producer Trevor Wyatt at Palm Pictures. Wyatt explained "I am the A & R man responsible for 'Below the Bassline', 'Memories of Barber Mack', 'In Search of the Lost Riddim'. We started a line with Island called Island Jamaica, and then decided to start Island Jamaica Jazz . The first album was "Yard Movement" with Monty Alexander - who has worked extensively with Ernest. This helped put the relationship back together with Island. Although Ernest had worked with Island till about 1965, he had lost touch through the 70's and 80's while recording for MPS. We came up with the concept of "Below the Bassline" doing reggae standards with a jazz drummer and double bass player with Monty Alexander. On Barber Mack we used Sly Dunbar which gave it a different feel. Then we went out to Senegal to try something rather different again - a more roots-style approach - given that many Jamaicans were originally from West Africa. This was an experiment which worked pretty well and we have been touring this since July '98. We have just finished a European tour on which Ernest has been playing to bigger crowds than ever in his life and playing better as well - at the age of 67. It is an exhausting schedule which would be tiring for anyone - let alone an older person." So what about forthcoming recordings? "We have just recorded an album for next year's release, scheduled for Feb or March, with Tony Allen, who was the drummer for Fela Kuti for many years, along with Joe Bashorun on keyboards and Orefo Orakwue on electric bass. We have Chris Franck on percussion and second guitar, Lekan Babalola on percussion, a Chanteuse called Sylvia Tella - and on horn we have Denys Baptiste and Courtney Pine. We recorded at Lansdowne - which, coincidentally, is where "My Boy Lollipop" was recorded. So Ranglin has finally come full circle!"

### **Selected Discography:**

Now is the Time - 1999 Compilation CD - MPS 559 912-2  
[This best recordings from MPS recorded between 1974 and 1980.]

Below The Bassline - 1996 CD - Island Jazz Jamaica IJCD 4002  
[The now-classic album which re-launched Ranglin's career.]

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