

Mr. Keith Gumbs – Musical Arts

Keith 'Tampa' Gumbs was born on 4 September 1939 to parents Lucille Gumbs and Joseph Nathaniel Gumbs. Keith, like most Anguillians of that time, was born in his mother's home in George Hill; delivered by nurse/midwife, Clarita Mason. He enjoyed a happy childhood, nurtured by his mother Lucille and the extended George Hill community.

Keith first discovered that he had a gift for music when, as a boy he would tamper (the source of his nick-name) with his father's mandolin. Soon he was not just tampering. It was not long, before Keith was playing the mandolin even better than his father. Joe, who was a popular man in the Anguillian community, frequently attended community activities entertained the gathering when the opportunity arose. He often took his young son along, and over time Keith replaced his father as the entertainer at many community events. Before he was a teenager, he was playing at the Anglican Church's annual Emancipation Day/August Monday Bazaar at Burrowes Park.

Sometime in the early 60s, Keith migrated to St Thomas, heeding the youthful yearning to broaden his horizon and earn a better living. However, though he played the mandolin more than his father, much to Keith's chagrin Joe Gumbs could not bear to part with their beloved mandolin, so he had to leave it behind.

After moving to St. Thomas, U.S.V.I., Keith developed an interest in playing the saxophone. Once again, self-taught, he excelled. But before launching his career as a musician, Keith worked in several establishments doing various jobs. Among them were construction and maintenance work with Zinky Smith and assistant to Kenneth Fleming (Zylphus Fleming's son) at V.I. Syrup - a soda company. While working these jobs, he continued to hone his skill on the sax. After some time he was so accomplished, he was able to get jobs on the entertainment circuit, not only in St. Thomas but in St. Croix as well.

In the early 70s he played with several Anguillian musicians who lived in St. Thomas including Frankie Rogers (saxophonist), Felix Fleming (trumpeter and guitarist), Tyrone Hodge (drummer) and Kenneth Fleming (saxophonist), among others. Over the next two decades he formed his own bands – Keith and the Flamingoes followed by Keith and the Mellowtones - which performed at many establishments around the island. In addition to his frequent gigs in St. Thomas and St. Croix, Keith came to Anguilla on every possible occasion and performed frequently at the Super Cinema in The Farrington. On one of those trips, he introduced Anguilla to the 'bathpan bass' which he had seen being play in St. Thomas. He even did a few years teaching stint at home where he was the woodwork teacher and choir instructor at the Valley Secondary School.

In 1983, Keith organised a concert in Anguilla with Paul 'King Obstinate' Richards from Antigua and it was at that time that he decided he was staying home...for good. When he left St. Thomas, he had every intention of returning, but the lure of home was too strong that last time. He started entertaining in Anguilla at various hotels including Cul de Sac Hotel and later the Mariners Hotel and Coccoloba Resort. He also did a regular Sunday afternoon gig at Uncle Ernie's in Shoal Bay for many years.

Keith is also an accomplished, self-taught keyboardist and has undoubtedly made an invaluable contribution to the musical landscape of Anguilla. During the revolution, Keith and the Flamingoes raised funds for the cause, from their Sunday gig at the Sundowner Nightclub. He is renowned for his prowess on the saxophone and continues to inspire musicians in Anguilla and in the region.