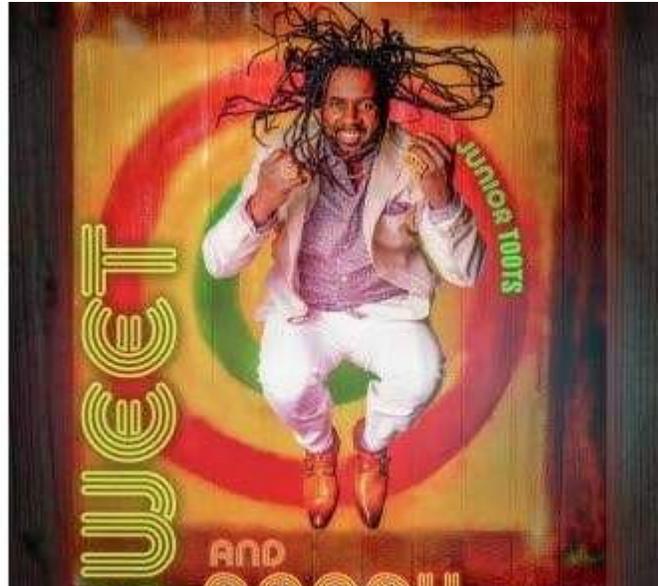


Junior Toots gets 'Sweet and Dandy'

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Legacy, tradition and pride are three very important tenets for Clayton “Junior Toots” Hibbert, son of the late veteran Jamaican musician Toots Hibbert.

This was very apparent as he shared information on the tribute to his late father with a remake of *Sweet and Dandy*, the winning entry from the 1969 Festival Song Competition. The latest version of the song was released on December 8, on what would have been Toots' 78th birthday. The older Hibbert died on September 11 of COVID-19-related complications at the University Hospital of the West Indies in St Andrew.

“I'm an independent musician and for the past 20 years I have been working on developing my musical craft. I have always been aware of the legacy of my father and always wanted to make him proud. Some time ago I did a version of *Reggae Got Soul*, the last time I saw him I played it for him and we was so happy with what I had done with it. I told him I wanted to do *Sweet and Dandy* and this time he wanted to had a hand in it so when he went back to Jamaica he laid the track, a more reggae-based track and sent it to me. I added saxophone, trombone, backing vocals to it. When I played it for him he really liked it and was happy. He kept saying, 'My boy', which is what he always said whenever we were sharing a moment like that,” Junior Toots told the **Jamaica Observer** during a telephone interview from his base in California.

That interaction between father and son was in the summer of this year. Junior Toots noted that one month later his father was hospitalised and never recovered.

“I know he is not here physically, but spiritually he is stronger than ever. I don't feel like he's gone. Yes there is a part of me that misses him, but even stronger is the part that believes in the continuation of his legacy. We are both Sagittarius, our birthdays are just one day apart so we have had a strong bond since I was young. I remember going to rehearsals with him as a child at Jimmy Cliff's house, so his spirit is still alive and with me,” he shared.

Junior Toots added that he has opened performances for his father over the years, as well as performed with him on stage. He would, therefore, see it as an honour if he were asked to become the frontman for The Maytals, his father's band, when next they hit the road once the current pandemic subsides.

“I have a good relationship with the members of the band, they are like my uncles. We have not formally spoken about it, but I am open to the possibility and think it would be powerful... it would be fantastic. COVID is dragging out so I just have to wait to see if this opportunity presents itself. I would love to perform with The Maytals, these are men that I admire and respect a lot.”

Junior Toots readily admits that his vocal style is not a carbon copy of his father's but at the same time noted that there are similarities. He shared that his while his music is conscious reggae, he blends it with other influences including reggaeton and hip hop in order to reach and incorporate a wider fan base.

"The seed nuh fall far from the tree," he joked. "I am my father's son and so I carry the powerful elements and energy that my father was known for. It is a blessing to be his son and be here to carry on his work," said Junior Toots.

Although he grew up surrounded by music at home, school and church, Junior Toots' foray into entertainment was as a dancer and choreographer, earning a spot as a regular on the TV show *Club MTV*, hosted by Downtown Julie Brown. He said the move towards music was a gradual process inspired by his late father.

"Over the years just seeing him I started to develop my singing voice and just became more comfortable in front of large audiences when I would open for him in the US, South America, Europe. I just wanted to impress him, so I worked at improving my craft."

"The response to my version of *Sweet and Dandy* has been overwhelmingly good. I first sent it to some of the members of The Maytals to get their feedback, then to my brothers and the reviews have been good. A lot of people who didn't know that Junior Toots existed now have a chance to hear a special cover by a son, which is unique. I'm just trying to carry on a tradition," he said.