

Pearle Christian: A Life of Musical Inspiration

Her Childhood



Pearle Christian the third child in a family of four girls, was born in Laplaine to parents, Henckell Christian and Muriel Christian nee Mathew. Soon after her birth, her father who had been the Head teacher at the Laplaine Government School, was transferred to the Welfare Division in Roseau. When she reached school-going age Pearle was registered at the Convent Preparatory school. The environment was one where the arts enjoyed relatively high prominence and Pearle remembers her excitement at having been selected to play the wood blocks with the Percussion band in what was then called First Division. She recalls an occasion where she was singled out as an “excellent wood block player” and was described as “having good rhythmic sense”.

At age seven, Pearle’s father enrolled her at the Christian Musical Class where she followed lessons in piano and the theory of music with her uncle L.M. Christian. Choral singing was also something the school engaged its students in every Saturday. At that age, giving up precious play- time on a Saturday was not her idea of fun but in retrospect she realized that the disciplined activity over time was to serve as a good foundation for further study in the area of Music. To this day, she is forever grateful to her uncle for the musical exposure he afforded her and to her father for his vision and unwavering conviction that involvement in musical activity was valuable for the overall development of the human psyche. She later studied the piano with Mrs. Rosemary CoolsLartigue, a fine lady she sites and one of the main architects of her musical life.

Pearle attended the Convent High School and up till now holds very fond memories of her Alma Mata. The Glee Club, the YCS (Young Christian Students’) movement, the Speech Days (End of year ceremonies and performances) were all rich in artistic content, satisfying a thirst for musical involvement in a country where there was a dearth of opportunity for formal artistic education. After leaving High School and the Sixth Form College, she taught for two years at the Convent Prep and then the Convent High School, during which time she continued her musical education with Mrs. CoolsLartigue, doing exams with the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Tertiary Education

In 1976 Pearle enrolled at the Jamaica School of Music (now the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts.) It was the musical wing of the Cultural Training Centre, a complex with a mission to train the artistes of the Caribbean using a Caribbean backdrop as opposed to the traditional Eurocentric one. Consequently, alongside the traditional classical approach to practical and theoretical music education, study of the music of the Caribbean and the use of caribbean forms in classroom music curricula was integral to the programme. It was a turning point in Pearle's life. She began to explore the use of Caribbean folk culture as a source for creative expression. Her student years at the School of music were stimulating, and according to her, her teachers talented and inspiring. In her third year she received the accolade of Best Third Year Student and in her fourth and final year, won the Composition and Student of the Year awards.

Pearle was invited to join the staff of the Jamaica School of Music after graduating from that institution. She worked there for one year in the Music Education Department, teaching in the Teachers' In Service Programme and directing the School's Junior Choir. There she began to develop a taste for Children's musical theatre.

The Division of Culture

On her return to Dominica in 1981, Pearle joined the three-year-old Division of Culture and from then dedicated her efforts to serving Dominica in the field of Cultural Development.

Children's Theatre

Her years of service have allowed her opportunity to pursue her dream of using the folk culture to create contemporary music education material. She has composed and staged six children's musicals – **Ananse and Fire (1988)**, **Song of the Sisserou (1889)** **Ananse and the Pusher (1990)** **Ananse and the Mirrors (1991)** **Maruka (1992)** and **Mama Ella (1994)**. These range from 15 minutes to one hour in length. Her more recent compositions include 3 mini musicals suitable for workshop situations and short term choir activity with primary school students. They are: **Befriending Ma Ziggily**, **Ananse and Commonsense** and **Ma Flora Golden Keeper of the Savannah**. Her other unpublished works include arrangements for flute ensemble, recorder ensemble and for choir. All of these have been used at one time or another by participants at teacher training workshops or with students at the Kairi School of music where she taught for seventeen years.

The Sixth Form Sisserou Singers

Pearle may be best known for her work with the **Sixth Form Sisserou Singers**, a choir she has directed and moulded for the past 16 years. The choir is just as committed to shaping the character of its choristers as it is to presenting quality choral music to the Dominican public. The group works mounts an annual production geared at providing a varied and entertaining package of choral music to delight the young and old alike. A big attraction of these productions is the Caribbean folk Section. Over the years Pearle has arranged well over fifty Caribbean Folk song for choir and accompanying instrumental ensemble.

Flute Tutor

Pearle studied the flute at the school of music in Jamaica and on her return to Dominica taught the instrument at the Kairi School of Music. When that institution closed down, she continued teaching from home. Many of the flautists heard playing in churches and with the Sisserou Singers Folk Ensemble are or else were at one time her students.

Publications

Pearle co-authored with Michael Burnett, **Caribbean Adventure** (a collection of Caribbean Folk Songs arranged for classroom ensemble,) and **Reggae Schooldays** (a collection of original reggae songs for classroom ensemble. She published a collection of four Caribbean pop arrangements in a document entitled **Sound Pack Vol 4**. Again with Michael Burnett she contributed submissions on Reggae and West Indian music to the **New Oxford Companion to Music (1983)**

Pearle's involvement in choral music has been consistent over the years. She was a founding member and manager of the National Chorale throughout the 20 years of its existence. She sings with the Dominica Folk Singers one of the longest surviving folk choirs on the island. She has been a member of her church choir – the St. Alphonsus Folk Choir from her teens. She teaches the flute and is the director of the Sixth Form Sisserou Singers. In 2000 Pearle initiated the formation of the Dominica Association of Music Educators.

In 2001 she attained a Master's degree in Music Education (General Music) from The University of Texas in San Marcos, Texas. Her awards include a certificate of Commendation from the Music Lovers Government Band for her work in Music Education (1987), She was recognised for outstanding work in Arts and Culture by the Dominica

Academy of Arts and Science in 2008 and was presented with the Meritorious Service Award for her contribution in the field of Cultural development by the Government of Dominica in 2008.

Two of Pearle's favourite poems are Desiderata and If by R. Kipling, her favourite psalm is Psalm 23, her favourite spiritual line is "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" Jer.31:3 and her motto is "Anything worth doing is worth doing well".