

GILMAN THEOPHILUS FIGARO, SR. (GIL)

B I O G R A P H Y

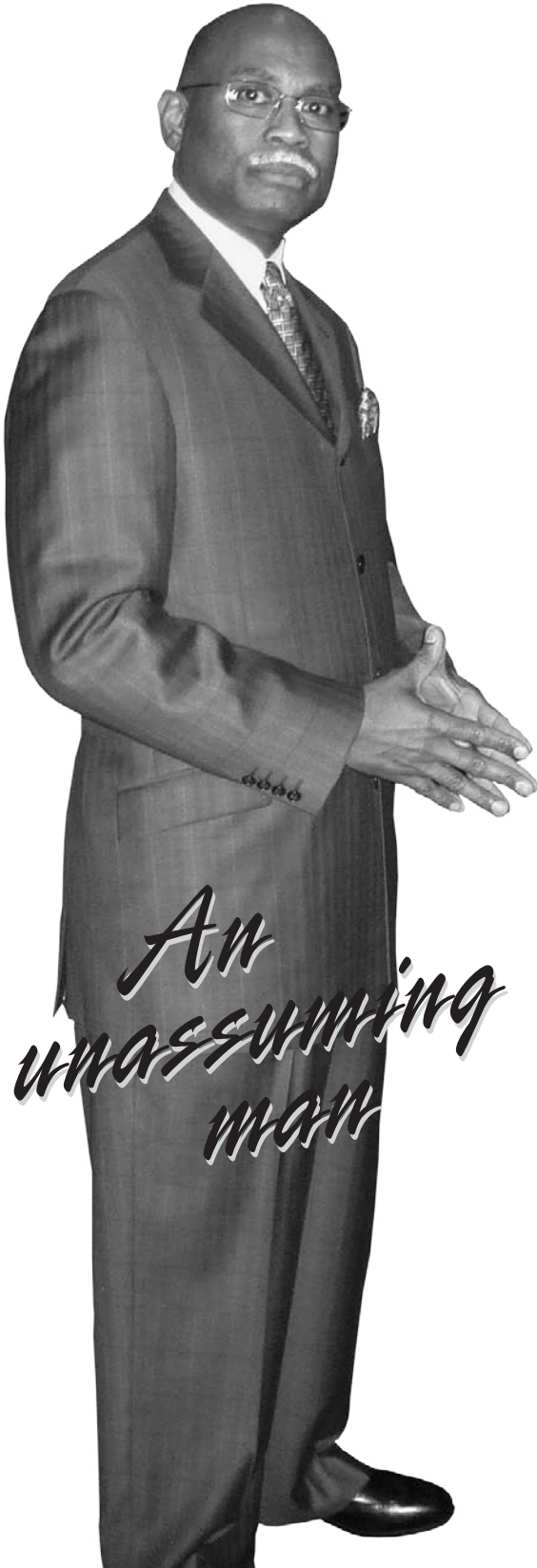
The road to success for many producers and songwriters is often paved with hardships and hard work, which force them to frequently draw upon their inner resources to stay the course and attain their goal even in the absence of popular support. Those who prevail manage to achieve success on their own merit through perseverance and determination, giving testament to their creative talents and dedication to their craft.

Because of these positive qualities, the Mighty Sparrow will always be the Calypso King of the World, and the late Lord Kitchener will always be remembered as the Grand Master of calypso music, just as Ray Charles and Quincy Jones are institutions of music. It is because of these qualities that Gil has found his place among the veteran Caribbean promoters - making his contribution to Caribbean culture through art, dance, music and poetry, as he continues to raise the level of excellence with each of his exciting and entertaining productions.

Born of poor parents (poor materially but rich with hope and values) and raised in the small town of San Fernando, Trinidad, West Indies, Gil's earliest musical influences came from his calypsonian uncle, Daniel Emmanuel Jardine Gilchrist (Young Killer/Uncle Fats). At the age of 8, Gil was introduced by his uncle to the world of calypso. His uncle would often take him to the calypso tents when he performed with other super stars such as the Mighty Sparrow, Lord Kitchener, Lord Christo, and Mighty Bomber. Uncle Fats later taught him the art of songwriting and that of creating melodies. This was at a time when the calypsonian and the art form of calypso and steelband music had no place in the predominantly Catholic society. Calypsonians and their supporters were considered outcasts and a disgrace to the more affluent society. Fascinated by the talents, wit, imagination and craftsmanship of the calypsonian, Gil's dream of removing this negative perception became a life-long goal.

As a student in high school, St. Benedict's College, La Romain, San Fernando, Gil joined the school's military band as a trombone player. He also sang in the choir, played soccer and cricket, and was president of the Student Government. He wrote his first song titled 'People' at age 15, and produced his high school's first carnival and calypso show. It was clear that his ambition (apart from his academic pursuits) was to be involved in the promotion and preservation of the indigenous art forms of the Caribbean.

Two years after graduating from high school he migrated to the United States to pursue a college degree in Business at St. Francis College in Brooklyn. He went on to complete an MBA at Long Island University while working many jobs (to pay for his education), including cab driving in the five boroughs of New York.



*An
unassuming
man*





B I O G R A P H Y

*“Celebrating
the richness of
Caribbean cultural
expressions”*

In 1985 he founded the nonprofit organization, “Calypso for Africa Inc.,” to musically answer the call from his brothers and sisters in drought-stricken Ethiopia. He co-authored and produced the hit track, “*Now is the Time*,” the proceeds of which were donated to Ethiopia through UNICEF. This track included 72 calypsonians spanning four generations (from the late Roaring Lion, Lord Pretender and the late Lord Kitchener to Machel Montano and Natasha Wilson) from the Caribbean. The project was launched at the United Nations in 1987 with the legendary Roberta Flack as the Co-host.

Gil’s determination to enhance the integrity and global awareness of Caribbean art forms has never waned. In 1989, he founded and produced the SUNSHINE Awards™ to pay tribute to the creators, performers and promoters of Caribbean art, dance, music and poetry. A special feature of the program is the perpetuation of the SUNSHINE Awards™ Hall of Fame, also established in that year. In 1991, the SUNSHINE Awards received the endorsement of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), the organization responsible for the Grammy Awards. In 1996, the New York Carib News described the program as “the cultural bridge from the Caribbean to the rest of the world for the 21st century” and the United Nations penned its endorsement in 1998. Gil is confident that there will be, in the near future, the establishment of a category for calypso and steelband music on the Grammy Awards, and he sees the SUNSHINE Awards as conduit to achieving that goal. In fact, over the years the SUNSHINE Awards Program has expanded in scope and breath with a global view to include Africa, Asia, Europe, Central America, South America and United States.

Someone who has always placed a great emphasis on education, Gil, in 1998, established the SUNSHINE Awards™ Student Recognition Program. This Program annually recognizes and applauds the scholastic achievements of the top male and female students from a selected Caribbean island. The students are brought to New York to be the presenters of the “Best Recording for Children” category on the SUNSHINE Awards™ and are taken on educational and cultural tours during their weeklong stay in the city.

In 1994, the United Nations selected the theme song for the SUNSHINE Awards™ “*Sunshine*” - penned by Gilman T. Figaro, Sr., Grammy Award recipient, William Salter and Joe Brown as the commemorative theme for the ‘Caribbean Festival’ in Torino, Italy. Gil co-produced, with Joe Brown, Natasha Wilson performing “Sunshine” for this nostalgic CD, released in Europe that same year.

In the summer of 1995, Gil released another CD with the title track paying tribute to his mother. The track, “*My Mother’s Hands*,” was categorized by many Caribbean radio stations as the most requested track in 1995/1996.

In 1996, Gil Figaro, Sr. documented another chapter in the history books of Caribbean music. He wrote the script, produced and co-hosted the First Annual Indo-Caribbean Music Awards in Port of Spain, Trinidad, for Jamaica Me Crazy (JMC) Records. The theme was “Reflections.” The Trinidad Guardian, reflecting on the quality and success of the event wrote, “Adopting a format akin to the Grammy Awards, the program’s flawless execution was a personal triumph for its producer and host, Trinidad and Tobago national, Gilman Figaro, founder of the Calypso and Steelband Music Sunshine Awards™ staged annually in New York.”



Gil Figaro addressing United Airlines 10th Anniversary of Landing in Port of Spain, Trinidad, Reception on October 12, 2013



2002 Sunshine Awards. L-R: Gianna Figaro-Sterling, Gil Figaro & Nikki Crosby



2002 Sunshine Awards. L-R: Gil Figaro, Actor Geoffry Holder, Movie Producer, Grace Blake, Artist Bosco Holder.



L to R, Colin Powell and Gil Figaro in the 2001 University of the West Indies Gala in New York City. Gil Figaro with 2008 SUNSHINE Award recipient and actress of NCIS New Orleans, Carol Christine Pounder (CCH Pounder)



Gil Figaro in Uganda Africa in 2008

The SUNSHINE Awards audience in 2006



Gil Figaro addressing an audience at an event in Bklyn, NY

Gil's high quality productions and scripts persuaded Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York, in April 1998, to contract him to write the script and produce its First Annual Steelband Festival titled "The Pride of the Caribbean," which featured well-known panists Andy Narell and Robert Greenwich. The flawless execution and professional delivery of this sold-out event secured him the invitation to produce four (4) more shows for their 1998/1999 season. Gil went on to produce and direct an evening of Caribbean comedy, "Laugh Till You Belly Bust" and the Center's first "Christmas in the Caribbean" program. Both shows were a huge success, resulting in the production of "Laugh Till You Belly Bust, Part 2," and popular demand for a repeat of "Christmas in the Caribbean" in December 2000.

In 1998, Gil's concern and compassion for humanity and the less fortunate compelled him to accept an invitation from Air Jamaica Limited to set up and head a musical project for the people of Montserrat, who lost families, homes and jobs as a result of a series of volcanic eruptions on their island. Gil once again got together with songwriter, Joe Brown, and co-authored the "Song for Montserrat." The result was the "Family in Action for Montserrat Project," which brought together an ensemble of 119 top performing artists representing the entire Caribbean region. World-renowned performers such as the Mighty Sparrow, Rita Marley, Carlene Davis, Chalkdust, David Rudder, Arrow, Junior Tucker, keyboard player and arranger, Frankie McIntosh, Platinum and Gold saxophonist, Charles Dougherty and Miguel Bassail from Puerto Rico are among the artists who recorded the song for distribution on CD, cassette and video.

Gil was invited to attend the United Nations International Day for Disaster Prevention and Reduction Conference in Geneva, Switzerland on October 14, 1998. There he introduced the 'Family in Action for Montserrat Project,' and screened the video for the participants in the audience. In his opening statement, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, remarked that the "Song for Montserrat" was one of "hope and faith."

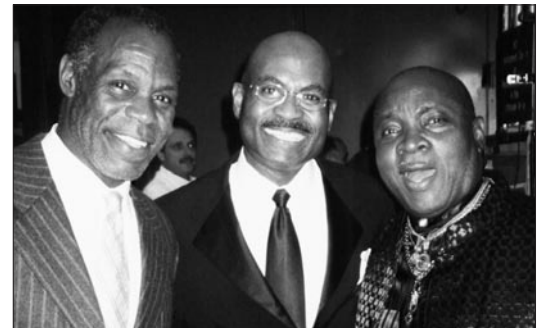
The "Song for Montserrat" is currently under consideration by the Guinness Book of World Records for possible listing for the largest number of artists (119) performing on a single track.

In that same year (1998), Gil received "The Heritage Award" from the renowned Hawks International organization for his contribution to the upliftment of the artform of calypso and steelband music.

At the 1999 SUNSHINE Awards™, Gil presented a check to the United Nations Development Program for the island of Montserrat. This check represented the proceeds from the sale (made through the SUNSHINE Awards™) of this recording. At the same event, Gil was honored with a Proclamation by the Manhattan Borough President, C. Virginia Fields, "recognizing and commending him for celebrating the richness of Caribbean cultural expression through the presentation of the SUNSHINE Awards™". The Proclamation also commended him for the founding in 1998 of the SUNSHINE Awards™ Student Recognition Program. He received another Proclamation from the President of the Borough of Brooklyn, Howard Golden, in 2000.



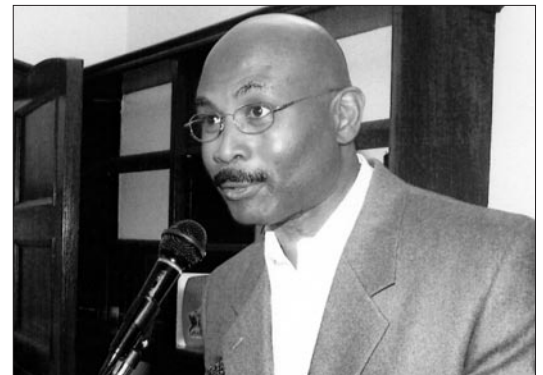
Hosting the Citibank Customer Appreciation Day at Central Park Zoo on July 28th, 2004. Gil Figaro and famous animal trainer and host of the TV show, Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures, Jack Hanna.



L-R: Actor Danny Clover, Gil Figaro & Mighty Sparrow at the Happy Birthday Haiti Celebration, Carnegie Hall, NY Jan. 3, 2004.



L-R: Harry Bellafonte, Gil Figaro & Mighty Sparrow at the Happy Birthday Haiti Celebration, Carnegie Hall, NY Jan. 3, 2004.



Gil at the launch of Dr. Hollis (Chalkdust) Liverpool's Book, "From The Horse's Mouth" on January 26, 2004 at Brooklyn Library.



Gil Figaro in Uganda Africa in 2008

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Over the years, Gil has won the respect of people in and outside the music industry, and he is frequently asked to produce and direct music events in a number of different arenas. Among these were the University of the West Indies 2000 and 2001 Galas, **“Building A Legacy,”** which paid special tribute to the former United States Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Retired General Colin Powell, and the world renowned actor, Sidney Poitier. Gil produced and directed the evenings’ entertainment, which highlighted performances by the Calypso King of the World, Mighty Sparrow and Arrow, the writer of the popular hit, “Hot, Hot, Hot.”

In 2001, Gil received the **“Immigrant of the Year”** award from The Immigrant Journal of New York City for his outstanding support, contribution and friendship to the diverse immigrant community of New York City. In 2003, he received the **“Caribbean Heritage”** award from Bergen Community College of New Jersey for his outstanding achievements in the field of performing arts.

In 2003, Gil actively participated in the bicentennial celebration of the Haitian revolution. He contributed his time, talents and voice to the recording project titled, **“Happy Birthday Haiti.”** This CD was produced by the world famous Haitian drummer / percussionist, Jean Jean-Pierre, to commemorate and highlight the significance of the 1804 Haitian revolution. “Happy Birthday Haiti” included narrations from actors, Ossie Davis, Danny Glover, actress, Susan Sarandon, and Gil Figaro. On January 3, 2004, Gil hosted the “Happy Birthday Haiti” concert / program and the release of the CD for a sold out audience at Carnegie Hall in New York City. In that same year, Gil hosted the CitiBank Customer and Employee Appreciation Day at Central Park Zoo in New York City.

In 2004, the International Music Council, funded by the Ford Foundation’s Peace and Social Justice Program invited Gil to the World Culture Forum in Sao Paulo, Brazil to participate in a Roundtable on “Calypso and Social Justice”. This Roundtable was convened to assess the social justice dimension of Calypso music. The work of the Calypso King of the World, Dr. Slinger Francisco (The Mighty Sparrow) was examined in the context of development, fairness and respect of cultural rights and human dignity.

In 2005, Gil produced the CD titled **“Then, Now and Forever – Volume 1”** as a tribute to his uncle, calypsonian Young Killer (Daniel Emmanuel Jardine Gilchrist). This CD features a number of his uncle’s well-known calypsos, as well as several of his own unrecorded songs. This project has a very special meaning for Gil, as it brings together his own music with the work of the man who taught him everything he knows about the art of creating music, and who instilled in him love and respect for the indigenous art forms of calypso and steelpan music.

In 2006, Gil was the proud recipient of his alma mater’s, St. Benedict’s College of La Romaine, San Fernando, Trinidad, Golden Jubilee Award in recognition of his unparalleled contribution to the performing arts. At this 50th Anniversary celebration

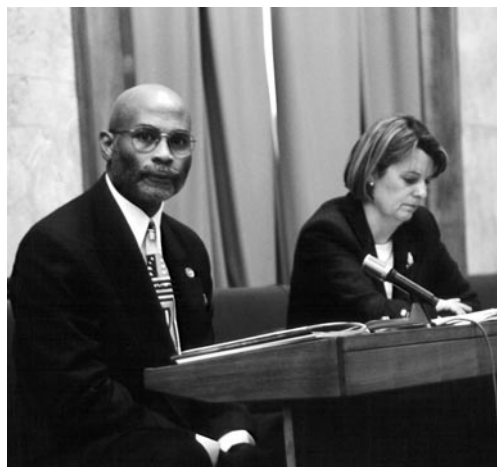
of his alma mater, Gil reflected on the life and philosophy of the Founder of St. Benedict’s College, Dr. Basil Matthews in his keynote address.

In 2007, he received the “Producer of the Year Award” from Unique Events for producing and directing the ‘Reggae in Symphony’ program series at Brooklyn College in Brooklyn, New York.

In 2011, Gil produced with legendary music producer, Joe Brown the CD titled, **“Nihil Omnino Christo”** (Christ Above All). This historic CD which includes a combination of music and speeches commemorates the 100th Birthday of Dr. Basil Matthews, the Founder of his alma mater, St. Benedict’s College and the 55th Anniversary of the school. In 2012, the SUNSHINE Awards Organization, under Gil’s leadership, secured approval from the Catholic Archbishop of Port of Spain to erect a statue of Dr. Matthews on the school’s compound. Proceeds from the sale of the CD will go towards the erection of the statue. On June 8, 2013, the Caribbean American Business Association (CABA) paid tribute to Mr. Figaro and presented him with the “Caribbean American Business Association Community Award” in appreciation of his outstanding and dedicated service to the performing arts and his community. At this same event the State of New Jersey Senate declared a “Senate Resolution” in his honor. The “Resolution” was signed by the President of the Senate, Stephen M. Sweeney and attested by the Acting Secretary of the Senate, Jennifer A. McQuaid. In 2017, Gil released another CD titled, **“4 Times Blessed”** which was dedicated to his grandchildren.

Gilman T. Figaro, Sr., songwriter, scriptwriter and producer, or “Figgie” as he is called by his Caribbean fans, is synonymous with “quality productions.” His untiring determination to build upon what the founding mothers and fathers of Caribbean art forms have given us is his way of trying to perpetuate their legacy. Gil has earned his place of respect in the music community, in and beyond the boundries of the Caribbean, through hard work, dedication, commitment and his pursuit of excellence. A man of many talents, driven by his passion for the Caribbean and its artforms, Gil is also known for his vision and firm belief that there are no boundaries to creativity. For someone who has accomplished so much and who continues to make a significant contribution to the World, through music, Gil Figaro, Sr. is still surprisingly seen by his friends and peers as being a very modest and unassuming man making a difference in people’s lives.

Gil travels extensively in the capacity of a corporate executive and as the Founder and Chairman of the SUNSHINE Awards Organization.



Gil in Geneva October 1998, addresses the UN Conference on National Disaster.



Gil working with Rita Marley on the “Song For Monsterrat” Project in 1998.