

JAMESIE PROJECT / ANDREA E LELAND producer

1 Tape N

St. Croix / Cottages by the Sea

Matt Benedict on camera / Andrea Leland interviews: Jamesie, Tom, Derby, Blinky /

00:

J: This here, my known music, I don't do it write no music to me. I could stare up here and if I want to play what that key of that music playing there, I just move away from it and I listen to it and I could set, I play music by the ear. The man that got to play music by writing ----- he aint a musician at all, you understand? You supposed to be a man that could hear a sound, yes, and that is what got a lot of them that they don't like me. Cause every time I go around I listen to what they're playing and when I got it I used to walk with a banjo, and when I hear them playing I go way off and I set the banjo and when I come back I start playing ----- want to know how come. My father, ----- these people house. He use to ---- the soda, we use to wash the back of them 5cent a case, 24 bottle. This one I use to back ----- your mother never buy clothes for you and never buy food. When --- he own this place ---- the people them from Denmark used to sit at that house there ---- and every time me and Cathleen sisten bring them ----- (3:17:00)

Sits down from interview

03:3:20

J: talking about Tom's son

04:03:21

T: So anyway, Matt let's know when we should start

Woman: I don't know, you guys talk about what you want to, but I really loved the story of Jamesie and the bottling factory

04:33

J: I want he to understand I will never, never forget this *moment*. Cause I used to go to school and from school I live in Concardia, I walk from Concardia barefoot till I reach ----- and then I got to take off my shoes put on my shoes when I reach the ----- because we could not afford to buy shoes. Then when I come home I used to walk down from they home, -----that was a pretty pretty place. And all we used to do 5cent I used to do for 24 bottling. 5cent for one to wash 24 bottles, but to we ---- money then, and then you know what happen? Mr. Benedict when the time come never gave us the money, you know, we had a long time they had some coolaid brown thing that they used to bring coolaid in, but he had that, that's what he used to put our money in. Now, I, was living in Concardia, ----- was living just from ----- . And you realize I always say I got the deepest respect for this family. We finish at 8 or 9 o'clock in the night, and they drop we home, they drop we home.

T: Yea, it was about a mile away from our house.

J: And when we reach they never gave with me my money. You know when they gonna give me my money? When my father done open the door, then they hand not me, me father, you understand? When Ms. Benedict wanted to buy, if she bought a shirt, I get a shirt, she buy pants,

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I get pants. ----- the same way. There was ----, my mother, was ---, in the house was a beautiful lady to us.

07:06:15

When was this?

T: This was back in about 1939, about then yea. We were about 9 years old, 9 or 10 years old.

07:18:00

What kinda car did -----?

T: It was a ford station wagon, with the wooden sides. This was classy for that time. My father was a teacher, or was the principle at the highschool up in Christiansted and he had a picnic at the sandy point one time and he made a few cases of rootbeer and he brought it down and those kids just gobbled it up. So he got to thinking, if I manufacture this root beer, perhaps it will sale. So he manufactured this rootbeer in these small bottles and he sold it for 3cents a bottle. Back in 1939, and he gave up teaching and he began to be manufacturing soda.

J: Yea cause the demand was so big.

T: And Jamesie helped up with the washing the bottles. He was only 9 years old and I was about 8 years old, and my job was to make the caps, the caps that you put in the bottle. We used to caps over and over again. So I had a machine that I would put the cap in, hammer it and open it up and we would put it in a bottle and cap it and it would close it down. And he was washing the bottles.

J: Yea. The time when they make them, when they make the soda and they got a case I put it up one on top of the other. And then, imagine these people, I listen, I aint drop ---- done yet, because -----, but that was demand for soda in that time. We used to have a truck come down in the morning and in the afternoon we got one going ----- we come back and then we start to walk back for the next day.

09:51:15

Was it the only soda place on the island?

J: No ---- couldn't walk with them. After Benedict tour the factory went down. Then *broken* in, you understand?

10:10:10

So you guys went to school all day?

J: I used to go to school.

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T: I wasn't in school school, but, I can't remember...

J: I used to work at catholic school.

T: Catholic school, yea see, I was at a public school.

J: That was, you were with Mr. Brown.

T: Yea Mr. Brown

J: And you couldn't reach there to here no, when ask you hear the bell ring, be out on the front porch, when you in trouble they come in the room.

T: And you didn't want to go in that room!

J: No, tell you to drop your pants!

T: He had a strap that was about that thick, and, man that thing hurt

10:55:15

A razor straw.

T: Close, not quite as wide

J: When he tell you to drop your pants, he had a boy ----- to wash ---- right? He wanted them on top of the ----- lashing ---- I didn't use to go there but I know because one of my sister, my auntie son used to go there, and what happen he come in town and he start pick up kidnap and he going into school, why you gotta kidnap them, take them out *wrapper* and pack it. So, what he doing, in the schoolyard Mr. Brown is up on the front watching, so when he reach up Mr. Brown see him tell him to come, when he reach up Mr. Brown say him empty your pocket, start to take out the kidnap. Said, your mother tell you come to school and kidnap? He said no Mr. Brown he said well I will take them out and lay them down. You understand? So let me tell you, Mr. Brown was no little man, and when you get lick in school from him, you better don't go home and tell your mother you get lick

T: Cause you'll get more at home

J: This isn't the trouble your looking for. This is why I'm saying, respect, that's why you see me, I got eight children, 4 boys 4 girls, I got 32 between great and grand, you understand? He's never called me yet for none of my children. You understand? The same way this family, because we was well taught to, if you go round and you hear big people got anything you ----- you aint got no time, you think you could sit down big people in composition and you sit down.

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You listening, you drunk, you crazy? When he, if something go wrong, like sometime bottle explodes, explode, from the time the bottle explode you know Mr. Benedict from up where he was can hear that he come down want to ----- somebody a coke.

T: And once, if it happen to him, my father was holding a bottle and putting in the juice and it exploded and it cut him right there, it cut off the tendon to his thumb, and of course the blood was everywhere, and we took him to the hospital you know, and,

14:20:00

Dangerous, rootbeer can be dangerous.

J: Well let me say you something, evil. Evil, the next thing that they ----- if we come in early, you understand, and we come in around 4 o'clock, we gonna wash bottle today but tomorrow, the sun is up, you gotta clean the yard help clean the yard, clean around the yard, you understand?

T: That's the way it was back then

J: --- clean house, then man had to clean the bed, the room where they live. You understand, Mr. Benedict he was a beautiful man to people. He help a lot, a lot. You could tell anybody I lived there, and i----- help a lot of people. They help a lot of people.

T: My cousin

J: When you hear, when Ms. Benedict cook, ----- go sit by the self, and we sit by ourself, we ----- with us too, telling you man I had a wonderful time with them remember I have been telling you Catalin, I tell you this.

16:05:14

For years, yea, for eyars, I just never realized it was you. What, when you were 9 or 10 and working on the bottling factory, did you, there was radio on the island right?

T: There was radio back then, yea

What kind of songs, do you remember anything from that time?

T: Not at that time, later on when I was 13 or 14 I remember I ----- songs were being played.

J: That radio, had no radio station, when you want to hear music you had phonograph,

T: We used to crank it out, we had one. The records were about a quarter inch thick, put the ---- on there, the needle, and a big speaker, boy I thought it was interesting.

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17:02:00

Do you remember what songs you used to play a lot?

T: I remember the songs we used to play it wasn't ---, it was songs like *red sails in the sunset* you know stuff like that.

J: We didn't have like what he have now. Mostly we had a lot of west, outside western music.

17:18:00

Nothing much had been recorded here, right?

T: And my father liked to play classical music, and he was kids, we didn't like classical.

17:36:00

So what music did you ----- was like, in other words, anyone was doing live music then...

T: Yea, I remember about then, the Benjamin Raft, remember Benjamin, It wasn't him but it was another brother of the Rafts, he had came and had his restaurant one time, what they did, they turned it like that and he sat down and started to play it. And that was the first time I ever heard, and I, that was the most wonderful thing I ever heard. I mean, it really turned my spirit you know? And I think, well, who taught you how to play the guitar?

18:14

J: My father

T: Oh, your father taught you?

J: Yea, but he was something else.

T: What do you mean?

J: Well because, what happened is, every Saturday they down in Concordia Man Jones, -----, Mr. Clack, and oh seven other, but they every time they want to go get a drink, my father would lean the guitar up, and then I get it, and one day I said to myself, I want and check my finger and when it touch the guitar string I ain't know who tell me to do that, my father told me, he said come here. This time me got me short pants, he said, let me tell you something, when you see me put this down don't put your hand on it ok, let me give it to you. I think he done there you know

19:30

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when I got home now, the woman who wasn't my mother, you understand? Now, she cook fried fish and *fugee* but when go home, I think I gonna get fish, with the *fugee* You know what they give me? It was a *grunt* fish, as she do, cut out the head, the part right up to the fish, and give me the head. And then shove a lot of gravy on it. So father said, Jamesie, be careful with the ----- I used to sing a lot when I was young. So, there was a man named Mr. Macho, he do furniture. And I get out of the house when ----- sit down, and I meet him, and Mr. Macho said take time Jamesie be careful of the bone, you know the bone, one of the bones stopped cross my throat here. Now, then it started 14 years, and it start to bother me. So I start to, what you think my mother-in-law do? She come, and boss me one *cuff* cross my neck. And what she boss me *cuff* cross behind neck. I didn't know my grandmother, so my grandmother come up at least, my grandmother name was Anita Williams. She said, Helena why you *cuff* my grandchild for? She said because I tell you be careful of the bones she said but you aint get your children then, which is my sister and brother by her side, she didn't give them no head, no she didn't. So my grandmother carried me then, and as a grandmother do, she just take the bread, the inside of the bread, and she just dip it some the *gravy* and she put it in my mouth, and she tell me tell me swallow it one time. And I swallow it, and that move the bone. You understand? So when I come back and I start feeling good, and I went down, my father said come. He said well look there was a name named Mr. Landen was selling a guitar for \$20. My father give Mr. Landen \$15 then my father give me the guitar. He said I sorry for what happen, and he give me the guitar. And that's where me start with *Cyril* and some other buys, and you know *Sardine Can*, well you know how we used to sound the boy, he no string it no, he used to just take a glass bottle and I play the guitar, and then another fellow Paul, and he get, we had a squash, and so we used to play up and down the road, you understand? And when I didn't catch myself, -----*Melendez*, the restaurant up the road there, he carried me when ----- grove, he had a senator was who, I can't remember, no no no it was a Puerto Rican, he was a senator and had that *radio* station there, that was in the 40s, and when he buy me, he carry me to the -----, remember in Christiansted, -----used to sell instruments, no you were gone. And that's the way I get my instrument. I am to sure you, how people was in these times. To make, for I to be that, my wife used to teach, my wife used to teach Catholic school and she used to teach 3rd grade, and I used to walk and I used to pay \$25 a month, that's what Mr. ----- give me to pay. And I didn't have the thing, 6 months for equipment, and one night we come to the *Cooler* to play, to dance, and when I went back I living in -----, Mrs. Sonya break my house, and I had to set a hole for a septic tank for another house. And they took everything, the only thing they didn't get from me a garden hose or the guitar. And they throw in the hole and light in the fire, you understand? Yea! And then I met your father right -----, like just comming out, so he said to me, I hear this story. He said, well, let me tell you, don't worry about that, he and Johnny -----, Johnny -----, and they is the one giving me back my instrument. His father, you understand? That's why you see me, I have the deepest respect for this family here. I tell them about ----- before even I tell you. Because I don't make no mistake and ----- they got to know that, they gotta know that, ----- lock them up get them food out of my tax money when ----- the mayor. ----they supposed to be run, its supposed to go that, its nice people who song.

26:15:20

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T: He, made this, he made this banjo. This was handmade by Jamesie and as a present to me. I sit down just about every day , not all day long cause I have a lot of work to do, but when I tired and resting, you know, I sit down and....

J: Ok, I want to hear one of your songs now.

T: Well how about you?

J: No give me one of yours and then I gonna give one.

J: Ok, yes, get me a little thing now

T: Ok, well start off with, there's a few of them. The only one I really know is *Weird Woman*.

J: Ok

T: All the words and all, you know sing them all

J: Yea, you see, I really don't know the whole line

T: Ok, well, I could start off with that and go from ther, when Cathleen gets back. We could warm up, something like *Caroline. Where you been last night Caroline*.

J: C? No, that, no

T: No, wrong key

plays

29:13:19

J: Soon as I mark it closer

T: Ok, Mr. McIntosh, well, um, that was good. Ok, ----- um, how about if I do the -----
--.

J: Judy! Judy! Come a minute. He know it. He knows it. He the man, this song -----

T: That my best song.

J: Yea I don't know it, he knows it.

B: I don't know it. My song is the one with fish in it.

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J: The song with the woman

B: Oh ----- I don't know it. Mine is the one with the fish in it.

J: Ok, you wanna hook this on him?

B: Come on let me do it.

J: I tell you how it goes, like that....

T: Ok, can you hear me Matt?

33:15:00

T: So that's *Weird Woman*. I would like to hear...

Tuning instruments, talking softly, then play another song.

37:01:22

Did you make that up?

B: Yea

37:20:12

Your father also played right?

B: Yea. He used to play the saxophone. Played the guitar too, but he used to do a lot of picking.

J: You too. You, that, that was a beautiful day. He used to just walk, children used to just follow him, just picking that guitar man.

T: Picking it huh? It wasn't a banjo, it was a guitar?

J: Yea

B: We gonna play in G, or, uhh.... E or F. This one. The second is this here. Now, go to the F down, C, and then B. Right.

J: Oh, yea.

B: Well, that was it. Let me go...

T: Good afternoon... Is that a banjo?

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D: Ok, I sit off again and I will play, but I will play a C. Not a calypso C, a C.

B: An open C?

D: Yea

B: Yea well I don't know....

D: Give me a D string. Ok, I will play in G. --- A, B, C

Derby, Jamesie, Blinky playing a song

J: Mr. Benedict, you see what *you* doing? Ok, you'll catch me. You know how it is.

Play another song

50:00:29

D: This song ----- with all the open noise.

50:15:25

Ok, you know I have to get in here at some point. I hate to interrupt but these guys would never introduce themselves and you would never know if I don't say something who they are. This is "King Derby" Camille Masidon. He was crowned king of Calypso on this island eleven times in a row, and he's pretty good. This is a first cousin to this man. This is Jamesie Brewster. He's been playing music since he was 9 basically. Uh, he's had one of the best scratch bands in the island. He's the truest person to the form of scratch, we are doing a documentary that centers around Jamesie and the music in the Caribbean and St. Croix. And this is also a first cousin. As is this, Sylvester McIntosh aka "Blinky". He, has been a road master champion, he's in the national archives in Washington D.C. His mother is one of the famous singers here, in the old style, of *Cariso*. Say it.

B: *Cariso*

And well, you guys won the national heritage award in Washington D.C. So if you guys want to talk about yourselves feel free. I just wanted to introduce you and make sure that everyone knows how important they are in the culture and history. And they are all first cousins, and in my mind they are the three kings of St. Croix.