

Carmelo Miller

### ***Free Rein***

I truly believe that core to every human action is the desire for freedom. As for me, I have never experienced greater freedom than when I'm creating or performing music.

I grew up on a street in Jamaica that, ironically enough, was named *Carmelo Drive*. It was there that my mother introduced me to piano lessons – a weekly exercise I very soon came to despise. Let me be clear; it wasn't the music that I despised, but the rigidity of the lessons taught by a well-intentioned instructor. To me, the lessons created an unnatural tension between a fluid song, which wanted to live and breathe, and the tightly controlled manner through which it was being taught. So, some may think it strange that, after such a rigid introduction to music, my love for it grew out of the most restrictive and formal of institutions: the military.

As a military cadet, I marched with the band. I lined up in queue, back straight, following many orders barked my way in rapid succession. The music, while just as traditional as what I had learned during piano lessons, was a lot more fun to my 14-year-old mind. And yet, I still found the need to make it my own.

I threw myself into learning to play several band instruments, and it wasn't long before I was promoted to Drum Major. As Drum Major, I encouraged experimentation in the drum corps and would regularly rehearse contemporary pieces. On one parade, I decided to have the Drum Corps play a song outside of our usual repertoire. It was a mix of African Kumina and Caribbean Soca, beats charged with raw energy that inspired a pep in my fellow cadets' steps.

Needless to say, my immediate supervisors were livid.

The Commanding Officer summoned me and the entire Drum Corps – my “co-conspirators” – to his office, where I expected to be given a stern reprimand involving some combination of pushups, peeling potatoes, and latrine duty. Instead, we were instructed to replay the song and ended up with the officer's startling approval of my brand of march music. As our supervisors looked on in disdain, the song was added to our repertoire and soon became a popular sequence that gave the cadets a renewed sense of energy at the end of a long parade march.

That music, my reinventing of it, changed minds and changed the course of my life.

### ***Reaching for the stars***

The University of the West Indies in Jamaica is a sprawling amount of real estate blanketed by thick and colorful foliage and is the foundation of many laureates and world leaders. It is also the foundation of my reggae-dancehall duo, Route 76. Bernard “Mega V” Wisdom, a friend and classmate, was the other half of the duo. We worked with DASECA, the same producers of Movado, Bugle and Serani. Together, over the course of seven years, we wrote and released our music, including the songs “Jim Screechy”, “Matterhorn”, “Cops”, “My Island” and “Sinner's Prayer” to a growing fan base at venues both big and small. Our performance at Sting

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2003, a career highlight, was given to a stadium filled with people singing along to our lyrics while dancing to our beats.

As our fame grew, so did our opportunities.

In 2005, I was selected to play the role of “Pressa”, a local Jamaican taximan personality who was part of a national telecommunications ad campaign. Though I didn’t sing during the campaign, I was performing and my cache in the entertainment industry was boosted to an all-time high.

In the background to all these opportunities, I was working to complete my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in geology and to win a position as the inaugural Chair of A. Z. Preston Hall (my dormitory/ fraternity). Route 76 continued pushing to establish ourselves in the wider music industry, working with other super producers such as Sly and Robbie. In collaboration, we released “Live Another Day” on the Pop Style Music, Westbury Music, Winga Twanga Music labels. We also worked with Arif Cooper to produce “Man a Gallis,” which was on the VP Records NY record label, the same label that distributed Sean Paul’s first breakout album “Dutty Rock”.

I was on my way. The stars were aligned, but to reach them, I needed to be on the rocket. I had some hard choices to make.

### ***Reggae and Blues***

After graduating from university, I moved to Canada in 2006, a year after getting married to the love of my life. As I settled into marriage, into a new country and creating a family, I pursued two careers, each one leveraging the talents and skills I honed along the way: Professor of Earth Sciences at a prominent college in Toronto and music producer under my independent label, The Miller Creative.

However, singing remained a strong part of me, calling me back to my high school choir days and my energized stage performances across Jamaica. While in Canada, I often indulged in singing for family and close friends. However, it was during one particular gathering, when I had the chance to sing for my father-in-law and moved him to tears, that the call to return to the stage really took hold of me. Once again, I felt the freedom of being able to create, inspire change and affect people positively with my music.

In 2012, I began writing and singing as well as producing music, taking all the influences from Jamaica and my new home Canada.

My life experience from the African diaspora in the Caribbean to the immigrant experience in North America has fused many cultures within me. This fusion inspires my music. I explore my musical creativity through a blending of reggae/dancehall and Afrobeat with jazz and blues, producing a new genre. I call it Reggae and Blues.