

# Bermuda is where the music is

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**By Nancy Acton**

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Marcus Dagan has travelled the world entertaining people with his smoky voice, seductive piano stylings, and endless repertoire of original and classic songs, but home is where the heart is, and there is no doubt that his heart is firmly in Bermuda — which is why he is so proud of the fact that his newest CD, now available in local stores, is what he calls “a real Bermuda product” — right down to the ‘Buy Bermuda’ logo on the back cover. Entitled ‘Bermuda Sessions’ and recorded at Platinum Studios, it was produced by himself, Randy Lambert and Steve and Shondell Easton. It features Mr. Lambert on guitars, and John Woolridge on keyboards.

Mr. Lambert also collaborated on Mr. Dagan’s original arrangement of his song, ‘My Dreams Are Gathered Safely In’ — in the composer’s opinion, taking it to another level.

The cover design features a beautiful colour photo of a Warwick beach.

In one of those fortuitous, unplanned moments during a recording session, Bermudian singer Wanda Ray Willis, who was visiting from the US to perform in the Music Festival at Dockyard, happened to turn up at the studio and immediately offered to sing back-up on ‘All My Dreams Are Gathered Safely In’ in place of another backing singer who failed to show.

“I knew instantly she was the one. It was like Hollywood walking into the studio — a moment of pure serendipity,” Mr. Dagan says.

The idea of cutting a new CD had been in the entertainer’s mind for some time, and he wanted it to reflect his association with Bermuda, since wherever he goes he talks up the Island, as well as performing songs he has written about here.

‘All My Dreams Are Gathered Safely In’ is something Mr. Dagan has included in his repertoire for quite some time, and in talking with him it is obvious that it is particularly meaningful, so there was never any doubt that it would be included on the new album.

It was when he found Just Platinum, however, and got chatting with owner/producer Steve Easton, that the decision was made to record the song. “As we began recording ‘Dreams’ the song began to change, and my website creator, Rene Ambrusch, suggested I contact Randy Lambert, who is absolutely brilliant, just amazing. As the song began to develop with the guitar, Randy suggested a little change in the chorus which added a whole new dimension to it, so now he is the co-writer of the music and the song,” Mr. Dagan says.

Earlier, Mr. Easton had mentioned keyboard player John Woolridge, and when the latter returned to the Island he too became involved in recording the CD. “In 1976, when I did a concert at City Hall, my bass player was a 19-year-old kid called Wency

Woolridge, who was even then one of the best bass players I have ever heard, and now I am working with his brother John, who is an absolute genius, an incredible musician," Mr. Dagan says.

So, with Mr. Woolridge on board it was decided to record three more songs, which is how the late jazz musician Bobby Scott's song, 'This is My Country', came to be included on the CD. "Scott wrote 'Taste of Honey' and 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother', and he was my mentor, who always told me, 'You can do better'," Mr. Dagan says. "'This is My Country' was the last song he wrote before he died. I have always wanted to record it, and with Randy and John involved we took it to another level from its original ballad form. Now there is a very good chance that this new version may receive major radio/TV exposure in the US."

Interestingly, for as long as it has taken to arrive at the final version of 'All My Dreams are Gathered Safely In', another Dagan original, 'Keys', was written in just ten minutes.

"It is a very unusual song featuring Alice Pratley on violin, who also plays and sings on 'Those Were the Days' — another song in my repertoire which has been a favourite with audiences everywhere. Alice is in London, England, but thanks to the wonders of technology we e-mailed her the music, she played the violin and sang, and sent it back. She is part of a wonderful quartet called Graffiti Classics, and was on the Norwegian Majesty, and also played in our concert on the Square in St. George's last year," Mr. Dagan says.

While 'Bermuda Sessions' only has four songs on it — plus a bonus of 12 screensaver photographs of the Island taken by Mr. Dagan — it has taken quite a while to complete the CD, not least because the entertainer spends only a few days a week here, and also because he says, "Steve Easton is a perfectionist — a rare quality these days". Despite this, and various hiccups, it has been a labour of love.

"I really believe in the magic of music and, when it is ready, it is ready," Mr. Dagan says philosophically. "The coming together of all these diverse talents is amazing to me. I am so pleased that I met these people. From this pool of talent I already have a project in mind for next year."

'Bermuda Sessions' will be sold at the Music Box, Sound Stage and Kathy's Kaffee in Hamilton, and at the Cafe Latte, the Carriage House and other outlets in St. George's. Additional outlets will be announced in due course on Mr. Dagan's web site [www.marcusdagan.com](http://www.marcusdagan.com) and [info\[AT\]marcusdagan.com](mailto:info@marcusdagan.com).

The price is \$15. Meanwhile, listeners will hear it being played on VSB AM and FM from time to time, as well as on DJ Mark Puckerin's Sunday evening smooth jazz show on at KJAZZ 98.1. In fact, Mr. Dagan's music is well known to VSB listeners as both Shirley Dill and Nell Bassett are avid fans, and receive many requests for his previous CDs.

Mr. Dagan credits his first gig in Bermuda in 1976, as an entertainer at the then-Rum Runner restaurant on Front Street (now Café Cairo), with launching what has become an international career.

"In 'All My Dreams are Gathered Safely In' I acknowledge my start at Rum Runners with the line, 'Here I am back in the Island where first my voice was heard'."

In fact, he has been coming "home" to Bermuda for many seasons on one or another of the Norwegian Cruise Lines ships, and was responsible for organising several concerts on the Town Square in St. George's featuring fellow entertainers from both the *Norwegian Majesty* and the *Norwegian Crown* as a thank-you to the Island, which the crews all love, and St. George's in particular.

Mr. Dagan is currently on the *Norwegian Majesty* travelling between New York and the Island until September 16.