



It's Pioneers month (December 2002) here at TrojanRecords.com, so we've sought out an insightful interview with the group's Jackie Robinson from January 2001. All questions put forward by Laurence Cane-Honeysett.

Q Laurence Cane-Honeysett: Can you tell me a little about the early days?

A Jackie Robinson: The Pioneers were formed in the early '60's to mid 1960's, with Winston Hewitt, Sydney Crooks and his brother, Derrick Crooks. I think Winston Hewitt migrated to Canada. He was replaced by Glen Adams around 1966-67. The group broke up subsequently.

Q So how did you become involved with the group?

A I met Sydney Crooks at West Indies Studio early 1967 and together we reformed the group as a duo. Our first single, - written by Sydney - was 'Gimme Little Loving', which went to number three in the Jamaican charts. The follow-up, written by both of us, was 'Long Shot Bus Me Bet' which went to number 4 in the Jamaican charts. Incidentally, both were in the charts at the same time. Subsequent releases that we co-wrote were 'Tickle Me', 'Catch The Beat' and 'Jackpot'. At this time we were recording for Joe Gibbs on his Amalgamated Records label. 'Jackpot' was covered by the (UK) Beat around 1980 on their 'Gold' album and was featured on the B side of their top three hit, 'Mirror in the Bathroom'.

Q After your spell with Joe Gibbs, you moved to Leslie Kong's Beverley's label?

A In 1968 we switched labels to Beverley's Records and invited George Agard to join the group. As a trio, our first release was 'Never See Come See, Easy Come, Easy Go', which went to number 1 in the Jamaican charts. The follow-up to that was the international smash hit 'Long Shot Kick De Bucket'. This was a big hit not only in Jamaica, but also in the UK and because of it, we toured England, and the group decided to settle there. Though 'Long Shot [Kick de Bucket]' was our first international grass roots hit, it was 'Let Your Yeah Be Yeah' that traversed us to the British pop charts with a top 5 hit.

Q Before moving to the UK, you also recorded as the Slickers.

A We used the name Slickers to record a song called 'Nana' because of contractual obligations with Beverley's Records.

Q When George joined, the group really developed its distinctive, classic sound. He has a very unique singing style

A Yes, I agree that George is very talented. He is also a very accomplished pianist.

Q I read Dennis Walks was briefly in the group – is this right?

A No, Dennis Walks was never a member of the Pioneers.



Q You cut some nice solo sides back with Joe Gibbs and after moving to the UK, you did a few more. Did you ever think of going solo?

A No, I never stopped singing with the Pioneers, even though I had a thriving solo career as an artist and bit part actor. My first solo efforts in 1974 were covers of 'Homely Girl' in reggae - a smash - and 'Warm And Tender Love'.

Q I know you've toured a lot, both in the UK and abroad – weren't you the first Jamaican act to play in Asia?

A Yes, we were the first reggae group to tour Japan, in 1975.

Q Did the group remain active throughout the eighties?

A The Pioneers in fact worked with UB40 around 1985 with a song that we wrote and recorded, called 'Starvation', which was a charity effort for the Ethiopia famine. We also participated the recording of 'Let's Make Africa Green Again' for the Ethiopia famine relief put on by the British Reggae Artists.

Q Later you moved to the US – when was this?

A I emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1989, but we still worked together as the Pioneers. We performed in Potsdam, Germany at the Ska-fest concert and other performances in the UK and two years ago, the Pioneers entered the Jamaica Festival Song competition.

Q And how about your solo work?

A Last year I worked with Eddie Grant and his Frontline Orchestra as a backing vocalist in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago in a live performance transmitted through out the Caribbean and also the UK. I also recorded a single, which is to be part of the Fathers Album project by UB 40 and is scheduled to be released later this year (2002).

Q And what are your plans for the future?

A For the future, the Pioneers will be performing at a reggae festival in California plus many other projects in the pipeline. Sydney and George live in Jamaica, while I reside in Florida, USA.