

WINDRUSH

WINDRUSH VOICES: MONA BAPTISTE

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INTRODUCTION

Mona Baptiste, the renowned Trinidadian singer, captivated audiences with her soulful voice and mesmerising performances during the mid-20th century.

Motivated by the pursuit of artistic opportunities and a desire to share her musical talent, she migrated from Trinidad and Tobago to Britain in a bid to become a famous star.

She subsequently achieved this, both in Britain and Germany, recording many songs and appearing in numerous films. She left an indelible mark on the music industry and was one of the pioneering members of the Windrush generation.



**NEXT: GROWING
UP IN TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO**

WINDRUSH VOICES: MONA BAPTISTE



PREVIOUS:
INTRODUCTION



NEXT: FROM
TRINIDAD TO
TILBURY DOCKS

GROWING UP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Born 21 June, 1928, Mona Baptiste started out life in Port of Spain – the capital of Trinidad and Tobago.

Raised in a prosperous family alongside her four sisters, she experienced the vibrant cultural scene of the city during its esteemed “golden age,” marked by the emergence of the steelband and the flourishing of Calypso music.

Baptiste showcased her exceptional singing talent at a young age. By the time she was only 14 years old, she was captivating audiences through radio broadcasts and live performances.



DISCOVER WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE CARIBBEAN AT THIS TIME.

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FROM TRINIDAD TO TILBURY DOCKS

At the tender age of 21, Mona Baptiste embarked on a significant journey aboard the HMT Empire Windrush.

Although the prospect of leaving her homeland filled her with nerves, she recognised Britain as a thriving centre for

music, offering an opportunity to showcase her exceptional talent and potentially reach a wider audience.

She travelled first class and after a voyage spanning almost a month, the ship arrived at Tilbury docks in Essex on 22 June, 1948.



PREVIOUS: GROWING UP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



NEXT: BUILDING HER CAREER



WATCH MORE ABOUT THE ARRIVAL OF HMT EMPIRE WINDRUSH.

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BUILDING HER CAREER

Despite being officially recorded as a clerk by immigration officials, Baptiste wasted no time in pursuing her music career upon arriving in London.

In fact, upon disembarking from the Windrush, she made headlines by posing with a saxophone alongside fellow West Indian members of the RAF, an iconic image symbolising the ship's historic maiden voyage.

Within a few weeks, she graced the BBC's Light Programme alongside Lord Beginner and Stanley Black and his Dance Orchestra, kickstarting her journey as a guest vocalist touring with renowned musicians of the era.

Alongside radio appearances, Baptiste also delighted audiences on stage with various jazz ensembles, even embarking on nationwide tours of ballrooms and music halls alongside the esteemed jazz singer Cab Kaye.



PREVIOUS: FROM
TRINIDAD TO
TILBURY DOCKS



NEXT: CALYPSO
BLUES



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ICONIC IMAGE OF MONA BAPTISTE CAPTURED ON TILBURY DOCKS, ESSEX, 1948.

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CALYPSO BLUES

By 1949, Baptiste earned praise from the British press, heralding her as a rising star. In 1951, she began recording music.

One of her most famous songs, *Calypso Blues*, was released that year, her first single for Melodisc, a label that was focusing on the increasing demand for black music.

Originally penned and performed by the African American jazz legend Nat King Cole, the song captures the sentiments of migration, evoking a longing for a simpler island life left behind and the challenges faced as an immigrant.

Baptiste, with her enchanting charisma, added her unique style and interpretation to this poignant melody.



PREVIOUS: BUILDING
HER CAREER



NEXT: MOVING
BEYOND BRITAIN



LISTEN TO THE SONG NOW.

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PREVIOUS:
CALYPSO BLUES



NEXT: LATER LIFE

MOVING BEYOND BRITAIN

Impressed by her talent, French singer Yves Montand invited Baptiste to Paris, where she delighted audiences at the renowned cabaret venue La Nouvelle Eve.

Her success extended beyond France as she embarked on performances in Belgium and Germany, garnering immense acclaim.

In Germany, her popularity soared to such heights that she made the decision to settle there permanently.

Baptiste recorded numerous albums in German and showcased her acting skills in several German television films, including the notable production *Symphonie in Gold* in 1956.



WATCH THE OPENING NUMBER FEATURING MONA BAPTISTE IN
SYMPHONIE IN GOLD.

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LATER LIFE

In 1951, while recording *Calypso Blues*, she married Michael Carle, whom she had met in London. They had a son named Marcel.

Sadly, tragedy struck at the peak of her fame when Michael passed away in a car accident in 1958, leaving Marcel aged five. Consequently, she devoted most of the 1960s to raising their son, putting her career on hold.

Although she had plans to make a comeback, in 1972 she relocated to Ireland with her second husband, William Morrison. Her career gradually declined thereafter. Baptiste and Morrison shared many years of marriage until her passing on 25 June, 1993.

She was laid to rest in Dublin's Deansgrange Cemetery, remembered as Mona Baptiste Morrison.



PREVIOUS:
MOVING BEYOND
BRITAIN



NEXT: LEGACY

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PREVIOUS: LATER
LIFE

LEGACY

Mona Baptiste's musical legacy remains a testament to her captivating performances and heartfelt vocals.

Throughout her career, she played a vital role in introducing Caribbean music to the United Kingdom and beyond, leaving an indelible mark on the music scene.

While her impact may be more recognised in Germany than in her home country, her enduring recordings stand as a testament to her exceptional talent.

They continue to be discovered and cherished by both new and longtime fans, ensuring that her story lives on and inspiring future generations of musicians.



WATCH MONA BAPTISTE PERFORM THE SONG *STORMY WEATHER*.

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