Wesli Biography

Born in 1980 to a family of seven children in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Wesli (Wesley Louissaint) built his first guitar at the age of eight by stringing an old oil can with nylon fishing line. From these humble beginnings, he has gone on to become one of Haiti’s most inspiring and celebrated musical ambassadors. Wesli has earned acclaim across the globe for his appealing music, energizing live performances and charming personality. In 2019, his accomplishments were officially honored when he won the Juno Award (the Canadian equivalent of the GRAMMY) for World Music Album of the Year.

The sounds of Wesli’s childhood––from Evangelical gospel to reggae, Afrobeat, funk and, of course, the diverse roots music of Haiti––continually influence his compositions, which blend traditional Haitian rhythms and lyrics with a wide range styles. Based in Montreal since the early 2000s, Wesli explores a variety of genres while keeping his musical identity firmly anchored in his roots and Haitian cultural heritage.

Wesli’s musical adventure began at a young age when he sang alongside his mother in the gospel choir of the local church. His father, Henri Louissaint, was a well-known banjo and percussion player of twoubadou, a popular Haitian folk music style. Inspired by his parents, Wesli began playing the guitar as his primary instrument along with banjo and a wide range of traditional percussion. Growing up in a poor household, Wesli was often told that he had to be seven times better than anyone else to make it out of poverty. After experiencing the joyful, passionate music played around him as a child, both by his parents and his broader community, he dreamed of becoming a professional musician. He likes to say, “music chose me to share its spirit.”

His own spirit was challenged at a young age, when his family fled to a Cuban refugee camp during the violence that erupted after the 1991 Haitian coup d'état. Just 11 years old at the time, this difficult experience taught him “resilience, reconciliation and forgiveness” in the face of conflict. “No matter what,” Wesli says, “you can rebuild yourself and give yourself a positive direction, and make yourself into a new person that is useful to the society that you are living in.” This desire to serve his society has driven Wesli throughout his life, encouraging him to create change and bring Haitian culture to new audiences through the power of his music.

As a teenager, Wesli produced, directed and recorded the soul album Horizon with the band SoKute, which became widely successful in Haiti and established his international reputation. At the age of 21, the musical prodigy won a scholarship contest sponsored by the Canadian

government which allowed him to study arrangement and percussion in Montreal. Since then, Wesli has made Montreal his home, a process of integrating his home culture with an unfamiliar world which he describes as difficult but transformational: “I always like to say that I have two hearts. I have one heart in Haiti and I have one in heart Montreal, and that makes me who I am now.”

Since moving to Canada, the versatile singer, multi-instrumentalist and producer has accompanied the greatest Caribbean artists and several big names in African music during their stays in Montreal. He opened for Tiken Jah Fakoly and Magic System at the Olympia in Montreal, as well as for Alpha Blondy at the Metropolis to sold-out crowds. Since 2008, Wesli and his group have regularly performed on more than 50 major festival stages in Canada, in addition to touring the entire world, always offering captivating performances.

The many prestigious awards he has earned since 2016 are the results of his immense talent: The Hagood Hardy SOCAN Award (2016); the Dynasty World Music Award (2017); the JUNO award for World Music Album of the Year (2019), as well as the Felix for the World Music Best Recording Award at ADISQ in the same year. For Wesli, winning the JUNO award proved to him that the musical and cultural value he brings to the world had been accepted and welcomed, a message he hopes other young Haitian musicians will see as a sign that they too can inspire change with their craft. In 2020, he also won the Coup de Coeur Académie Charles-Cros Prize (France, 2020), the Best World Music song from the American Independent Music Awards, as well as the title of Best World Music Artist at the Canadian Folk Music Awards.

Ever since the release of his first album Kouraj, in 2009, Wesli’s creativity has been unstoppable, leading to the acclaimed album Liberté dans le noir in 2011, the star-studded ImmiGrand and the more traditional Ayiti Étoile Nouvelle in 2015 and an expanded version of ImmiGrand in 2017. Only a year later, the prolific artist released Rapadou Kréyol, an exploration of African rhythms and the instruments Wesli believes Haitian musical culture has neglected as it is increasingly drawn towards commercial music and watered down by globalization.

Wesli’s latest, and highly ambitious, two-album project is a continuation and deepening of the goals of Rapadou Kréyol, named Tradisyon in reference to the Haitian and African diasporic traditions it uplifts, honors and reinvigorates. Years in the making, the project officially launched in 2021 with the release by the Cumbancha record label of the upbeat reggae song and video "Le Soleil Descend.” It was followed in June 2022 with “Bontan Ilayéyé,” a groundbreaking fusion of Haitian voodoo chants and electronic music featuring African DJ and producer AfrotroniX.

The first volume of this epic work, Tradisyon, which focuses on Haitian roots, acoustic and traditional styles, will be released on CD worldwide on October 21, 2022. Overflowing with 19 songs, the album explores traditional chants from the voodoo religion, explosive carnival rara rhythms and lilting, folksy twoubadou songs. Tradisyon will be followed a few months later by Tradisyon, Pt. 2, a stunning exploration of new directions in Haitian music, blending traditional genres with electronic music, Afrobeat, soul, funk, hip-hop and more to create a rich, festive and uniquely engaging sound.

In 2023, Wesli's album Tradisyon Vol. 1 received a JUNO nomination for Global Music Album of the Year as well as a CMFA nomination for Global Roots Album of the Year.

SUMMARY

* Wesli (Wesley Louissaint) was born in 1980 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to a poor family of seven children.
* He built his first guitar at the age of eight from an old oil can and nylon fishing line.
* Wesli is now one of Haiti’s most inspiring and celebrated musical ambassadors, blending traditional Haitian rhythms and lyrics with a wide range of styles.
* He won the Juno Award (the Canadian equivalent of the Grammy) for World Music Album of the Year in 2019.
* His music is influenced by his childhood sounds from Evangelical gospel to reggae, Afrobeat, funk, and diverse roots music of Haiti.
* Wesli’s musical adventure began when he sang alongside his mother in the gospel choir of the local church.
* As a teenager, Wesli produced, directed and recorded the album Horizon with the band SoKute.
* At 21, he won a scholarship contest sponsored by the Canadian government, allowing him to study arrangement and percussion in Montreal.
* Since then, Wesli has made Montreal his home and has regularly performed on more than 50 major festival stages in Canada, in addition to touring the world.
* He has won many prestigious awards since 2016, including the Hagood Hardy SOCAN Award (2016), the Dynasty World Music Award (2017), the Juno award for World Music Album of the Year (2019), the ADISQ Felix prize for World Music Album of 2019 (Québec) and the prestigious Coup de Coeur Académie Charles-Cros Prize (France, 2020) for his diaspora activity, among others.
* In 2020 Wesli was named as an Ambassador for Haitian Culture by the Department of Culture and Communications of Haiti. https://famgroup.ca/2020/12/wesli-nomme-ambassadeur-de-la-culture-haitienne/
* Wesli's latest ambitious two-album project, named Tradisyon, officially launched in 2021, and it continues to uplift, honor, and reinvigorate the Haitian and African diasporic traditions.
* In 2023, Wesli's Tradisyon Vol. 1 received a JUNO nomination for Global Music Album of the Year as well as a CMFA nomination for Global Roots Album of the Year.

DISCOGRAPHY

1. Kouraj (2009) *WUP Productions/ Select Distribution*
2. Liberté dans le noir (2011) *WUP Productions / Universal Distribution*
3. ImmiGranD (2015) ​​*WUP Productions/ Select Distribution*
4. Ayiti Étoile Nouvelle (2015) *WUP Productions / Select Distribution*
5. ImmiGranD Deluxe (2017) *WUP Productions / Azteque Pias Distribution*
6. Rapadou Kreyol (2018) JUNO AWARD (*Winner*)  *WUP Productions/ Believe Distribution*
7. Tradisyon Vol. 1 (2022) JUNO AWARD (*Nomination*) *WUP Productions / Cumbancha Pias Believe Distribution*
8. Tradisyon Vol. 2 (*Coming out Spring 2023*) *WUP Productions / Cumbancha Pias Believe Distribution*
9. *André Desilets, Saxophone*
10. *Watson Joseph, Bass Guitar*
11. *Wesley Louissaint, Lead Vocals + Guitar + Banjo + Percussions*
12. *David Mobio, Keyboard + Percussions*
13. *Cindy Belotte, Backing Vocal*
14. *Martine Labbé, Trumpet*
15. *Michel Medrano, Drums*