

The paragons

John Holt, Garth "Tyrone" Evans, Howard Barrett



" The timely release of this album *The Paragons* more than demonstrates that the classy smooth harmonies which the Paragons once possessed are still just that. By contemporizing the songs with the near flawless "ridim" of Sly Dunbar on drums and Robbie Shakespeare on bass, *The Paragons* may very well represent a new phase in the current scheme of music: the restoration of rock steady. Check it out."

Robert Santelli
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The year: 1966. The place: Kingston, Jamaica. The current sound blaring out of the local sound systems: rock steady.

It was a rich, clean inviting sound full of clean harmonies and bright melodies. Somehow it managed to sprout neatly between the charged up tempo of the passing ska era and the cool, constant throb that would eventually be known as reggae. It flourished from approximately 1965 to 1968, a rather prosperous period for Jamaican music. Riding the crest of the rock steady craze was none other than the singing trio called the Paragons.

The Paragons evolved out of the group, the Binders, an early Kingston collection made up of Tyrone Evans, Bob Andy, Junior Menz, and Leroy Stamp. Previous to adopting the name Paragons the group did mostly Drifters' songs in a sweet, somewhat imitative style which, nevertheless, caught on. In 1964, John Holt joined the group in place of Leroy Stamp. Junior Menz quit the group late that year and went on to become the lead singer of another popular group, the Techniques. Vocalist Howard Barrett, formerly a member of the Kingston College choir, which was widely recognized as the best in the West Indies at the time, was chosen to replace Menz.

Soon the Paragons began performing live with increased regularity. They would sing in front of the instrumental band, the Vikings, playing at such venues as the Carib, Regal and State Theatres, all located in Kingston, as well as with Byron Lee at numerous hotels on the North Coast.

Because of the enthusiastic response generated from the live performances, the Paragons teamed up with legendary producer Coxone Dodd and recorded three acclaimed sound-influenced singles: *Love at Last*, *Lover's Dream*, and *Good Luck and Good-Bye* in 1964. In late 1965 Bob Andy quit after another dispute over the direction the group was taking.

The Paragons were now left as a trio. Holt, Barrett and Evans, however, actively searched for a fourth singer to balance their sound. When none was forthcoming they temporarily

stopped recording, much to the chagrin of their growing legions of fans. Then one day sitting in a friend's house across the street from Coxone's Studio One Studio, Holt came up with a song idea. Immediately the group set about arranging the harmonies and working out the melody line and lyrics to a rock steady beat. They called the new tune *Happy Go Lucky Girl*. It sounded fresh and convincing and they suddenly realized that they were more efficient as a trio than a quartet. "The voices were crisper and tighter; the direction much more focused. Thus the quest for locating another vocalist was permanently halted, and they eagerly returned to the recording studio, this time with producer Duke Reid.

The Paragons recorded *Happy Go Lucky Girl* in early 1966 and it instantly became one of the first rock steady hits in Jamaica. Then came *on the Beach*, the classic that triggered the "hop" fad all over the Island. With such lyrics as "One more box of hops/Says the man to bartender/ One more box of hops/Says the man I won't surrender, "beer or "hops" began to outsell the most popular brands of Jamaican rum. *Wear You To The Ball*, another classic, followed along with *In My Neighbourhood*, *Riding High*, and *So Much Pain*. In all, the Paragons released some sixteen singles in its rock steady era, all of which reached number one on the Jamaican charts at one time or another. There was hardly a music fan in Jamaica who did not own at least one Paragons' record.

The Paragons ultimately became one of the most popular groups in Jamaica. It was unfortunate, however, that blatant corruption in the music business there and a lack of interest in Jamaican music outside of Jamaica (at least back then) forced the financially strapped Paragons to disband. John Holt went off on his own and enjoyed a successful solo career, while Barrett and Evans both migrated to the United States and settled with their families in New York City. Evans continued to record whenever he found the time and money. Barrett quit singing altogether, except when John Holt came north and performed in Queens and Brooklyn for the West Indian community there and invited him and Evans to join onstage for a few old Paragons' tunes.

It has been nearly fifteen years since the Paragons released one of its lesser known songs, *The Tide Is High*. Lister Hewan-Lowe, in his efforts to bring back the rock steady beat, decided the Paragons would be the best choice. The rock group Blondie, stumbling on the tune one day, decided to record it in its original rock steady style. Hewan-Lowe then re-formed the Paragons and cut this LP. Holt, Evans and Barrett were tracked down by Hewan-Lowe some months back with the express purpose of recording a 1981 interpretation of the trio's old rock steady gems. After all, if there was to be a rock steady revival fostered by the tremendous success of Deborah Harry's version of *The Tide Is High*, it certainly would not be complete without some musical statement from the Paragons.

Songs on the album

Side One

1. HAPPY GO LUCKY GIRL
2. I'LL BE BACK
3. MAN NEXT DOOR
4. SMILING FACE
5. MY BEST GIRL

Side two

1. THE TIDE IS HIGH
2. RIDING HIGH
3. WEAR YOU TO THE BALL
4. YOU MEAN THE WORLD TO ME
5. ON THE BEACH

The Musicians

- Sly Dunbar.....Drums
- Robbie Shakespeare.....Bass
- Mao Chung.....Guitar, Organ
- Sticky Thompson.....Percussion
- Robbie Lyn.....Piano
- Clive Hunt.....Trumpet
- David Madden.....Trumpet
- Nambo.....Trombone
- Everaldo Evans.....Sax
- Dean Frazer.....Sax



Tyrone



Howard



John