

CLAYTOVEN MUSIC ENTERPRISES

Claytoven Richardson Biography

Serendipity gave Claytoven Richardson both his name and a jump-start to a career as a top session singer. But his good fortune had started years earlier, in the form of music education.

Although he grew up in a tough, East Oakland, California neighborhood, Richardson's shaping forces were positive. Instead of hanging out on the streets in high school, Richardson toured Europe with one of the premier choirs of that time, Phil Reeder's Castlemont High chorus, "The Castleers." "While in that group, it was my first time leaving the country and learning that the world was bigger than my little neighborhood," says Richardson. Instead of getting into trouble in high school, he studied clarinet and saxophone at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and entered UC Berkeley's Young Musicians Program (YMP) for gifted, "at-risk" youngsters. YMP instructor Bill Bell became "like my second father", says Richardson. "He'd teach me arranging, how to score compositions. I learned music just from basically being part of his family."

Thanks to those instructors and many others, Richardson went to the University of Michigan on a full scholarship as an oboe principle. It was during one of his school vacations that he acquired a name that neatly described the direction his life was taking. Childhood friend (and business partner) Larry Batiste accidentally fused Richardson's given name, Clayton, with that of another artist, and out came "Claytoven." The impressive name stuck, and its owner determined to work hard to live up to it.

Claytoven's singing career was also unintentional. After college, he played sax with and co-produced the group Bill Summers and Summers Heat. Summers overheard Claytoven singing reference vocals to get the sense of a song, and then asked Claytoven to

perform lead. He has been in demand as a session singer ever since, singing background vocals on countless gold and platinum recordings featuring Kenny G., Michael Bolton, Elton John, Peabo Bryson, New Kids on the Block, Ricki Martin, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Jennifer Lopez, Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole, and many others. His work on the number 1 song for Celine Dion, "My Heart Will Go On" (also the title track for the Titanic soundtrack) won him Grammy recognition in 1999.

In 1994, Claytoven started Claytoven Music Entertainment to facilitate managing all of his music business endeavors, some of which include music production, CD artwork designs, and Web site designs.

Claytoven also co-manages a production studio in Oakland where he devotes himself to writing catchy, contemporary compositions, which have been recorded by Lisa Fischer, Shanice Wilson, Al Jarreau, Patti Austin, and Young Jeezy among others.

But as busy as he is, Claytoven always makes time for educating others. "I was blessed as a kid," Claytoven says. "Because of the many teachers who came into my life while still in high school, I got to talk with Duke Ellington and ask questions about his music. I got to perform with Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln. I feel it is my responsibility to pass on my knowledge to young musicians just as it was passed on to me." And with that as his mission, Claytoven has stepped into the role of author by taking his years of experience and sharing them in a new book entitled, "The Professional Studio Vocalist". The goal of the book is to bridge the gap between the academic and professional music worlds by providing aspiring singers with the knowledge necessary to pursue a career as a professional recording vocalist. Currently, Claytoven also teaches this subject and other professional music courses at San Francisco State University, in their Music Recording Industry Department. He also teaches for three other youth oriented programs, Youth Movement Records in Oakland, California, Entertainment Arts Program in Houston, Texas, and the Speech Level Singing Institute's Vocal Summer Camp in Los Angeles, California. "With music education in public schools dwindling, it becomes that much more important for professional musicians to educate the young music community."