

R.I.P. Robbie Shakespeare

Influential bass player and producer Robbie Shakespeare died December 8th at the age of 68. He was one-half of the production duo Sly & Robbie with drummer Sly Dunbar. Shakespeare and Dunbar both natives of Jamaica, worked together in the Channel One Studio house band The Revolutionaries. They recognized great musical chemistry between them and opened Taxi Records in 1974. Shakespeare learned how to play the bass from Aston Barrett who played the instrument for Lee "Scratch" Perry's band The Upsetters. He was also mentored by drummer Lloyd Knibbs of The Skatalites, and he studied soul drummers like Al Jackson Jr. of Booker T & The MGs. Their musical partnership found them working with Peter Tosh, The Rolling Stones, Grace Jones, Simply Red, Tricky, Sting, Doug E. Fresh and many others. As Sly and Robbie they released six albums including the iconic *Rhythm Killers* from 1987. The music press called them 'masters of groove' for their trance-inducing arrangements. The heart of reggae music is the drum and bass and Sly and Robbie took that mastery and shared it across genres. They innovated with new electronic sounds in the late '80s which made *Rhythm Killers* sound like music designed for hip-hop dancers. Chaka Demus and Plier's "Bam Bam" and "Murder She Wrote" in the '90s would not have been possible without Sly and Robbie's production. These songs set a blueprint for future rappers collaborating with vocalists. They had 11 Grammy nominations and won for Best Reggae Album in 1999 for the album *Friends*. In 2008, they recorded *Inspiration Information* with Detroit artist Amp Fiddler. The duo released their last album *Red Hills Road* in 2020.

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