

ALTHEA WRAY LTCL BSc MAq EMBA cert PPTC PGCE

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Tel: 0795 861 3532



Althea Wray was born in the United Kingdom to Jamaican parents Bert and Edna Cooper and was raised and educated in the UK, Jamaica and the USA. She started piano lessons at the tender of three years and six months in Swindon, Wiltshire. She continued her musical training in Jamaica studying first with Mrs Pat Lyew and then the late Miss Ena Helps. She received the highest marks in the island for the grade eight pianoforte examinations for the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music in 1972 and gained a **Licentiate in Pianoforte Performance** from Trinity College London in 1977.

Between 1974 and 1977, she ran a small piano teaching studio where she taught piano up to grade 3 in Kingston, Jamaica whilst reading for a BSc in Natural Sciences (1975 -1979) at the University of the West Indies (UWI). She also completed a Masters in Aquaculture at Auburn University, Alabama (1980-81) and an executive MBA in marketing between 1992-94 at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Althea completed her Post Graduate Certificate in Education qualification in Primary Education at Canterbury Christchurch University, Kent in 2013.

Althea received a one year scholarship to the **European Piano Teachers Association** Piano performance teaching certificate course at the Purcell School in Hertfordshire, which she successfully completed in June 2010. She studied piano with Gwyn Pritchard, Professor of composition at Trinity Guildhall, and piano pedagogy, in Forest Hills, South London between August 2009 and May 2010. Althea also received one year's guitar tuition from Gary Sandford, former guitarist for the singer Joe Jackson.

As a youngster and then an adult, she was involved in the music ministry at her church, Bethel Baptist in Kingston, playing both the piano and organ. She also worked as a keyboardist in several theatrical productions in the 1980's such as 'Garvey' by Perry Henzell and the Jamaican National Pantomimes 'Trash' and 'River Mumma and the Golden table'. Althea worked for Peter Ashbourne singing in many commercial advertisements and did vocal session work for Jamaican singers such as Karen Smith and A J Brown and offered her keyboard and vocal services for private functions.

After having divided her time between her musical career, her studies and work in the fields of Banking, Environment and Real Estate Althea relocated to the north coast of Jamaica in 1997 and became active in the hotel entertainment circuit as a cocktail pianist/vocalist. In addition to her solo work she performed as vocalist/pianist in a jazz trio setting at five star hotels including Sandals Dunn's River, Couples, Ciboney and Round Hill Hotels between 1996 and 2000.

Althea decided to seek out new opportunities to further her music career and took the bold step to return to the UK in early 2000 with her family. Her first achievement was to complete a one-year certificate course in Jazz and Pop Studies at Goldsmith College, New Cross, London in 2001. She was vocal tutor for **Black Women in the Arts in Hackney** between 2001 and 2004. She set up **Water II Wine Ministries Ltd in 2004** in partnership with her husband, Kingsley and brother Ian Cooper and established **Support the Sound** in 2004 as the tuition arm of the company, (in Lewisham, before relocating to Nunhead, also in South London). Support the Sound has developed a reputation for excellence with an average pass rate of 95-100% for Grades 1 to 8.

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Althea also provides support for students sitting GCSE and A Level Music, and BTEC Music and Music Technology. The practice currently has over 30 students enrolled. Althea conceives and coordinates concerts three times a year to showcase her young and not so young students.

Althea's musical performances span over 35 years. She played for the late Honourable Louise Bennett Coverley (Miss Lou) on her famous children's television programme **Ring Ding** aired in the 1970's by the then Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation in Jamaica. She won bronze and silver medals for both individual and duet performances between 1972 and 1974 in the annual **Jamaica Music Festival** and competed in the Kiwanis international piano competition held in Toronto, Canada in 1973 where she placed third.

While attending UWI and Auburn University she performed in numerous concerts, coming second in the Auburn University Talent competition in 1980. She received the Middlesex regional award for Best Instrumentalist Jamaican Female Musician for her work up to 2000; this was awarded in 2002 by the Jamaica Federation of Musicians.

In July 2007, Althea hosted **In the key of C**, a musical celebration of her life where she led an invited audience on a journey through the musical and spiritual highlights of her 50 years of life. Held at Rye Lane Chapel London she played on her favourite piano, a full Steinway Grand. Her contemporary Gospel band **Jasper** plays by invitation at various venues throughout the UK.

As a composer she has written over 100 contemporary gospel songs, children's songs and instrumental pieces and published her first songbook entitled **Songs for Life** in 2008. She has released a number of albums since moving to the UK, under the stage name *Thea Wray*, the latest being an instrumental piano worship album entitled **COME**. She has released a vocal instructional compact disc entitled '**Support the Sound**' and is working on a vocal instructional manual as well as a children's (up to Key Stage 1) songbook. Althea is also preparing to record her second Christmas album entitled '**The Star**', the first being '**My Favourite Things**' in 1997, which received airplay in Jamaica and the UK.

Between 2004 and 2013 Althea provided choir direction for three primary school choirs in the boroughs of Southwark and Lewisham. She is an outstanding Early Years teacher and music coordinator at Adamsrill Primary School where she set up the school choir in 2015. She is the music director at Rye Lane Chapel in Peckham, South London and is also currently working with the Emmanuel Gospel Choir on a musical performance scheduled for October 2016.

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