

LOCAL NEWS

Irving is set to have his *Day-O* on Broadway

■ By CARA BRENNEN
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HE HAS written such world-famous hits as *Day-O*, *Jamaica Farewell* and *Island In The Sun* and now composer Irving Burgie is set to take Broadway by storm.

The *Tribune* spoke with Mr Burgie in Nassau yesterday when he was in town to present Bahamian schools with copies of his new children's songbooks and accompanying CDs entitled *Share Caribbean Music*.

The donation is part of Mr Burgie's love affair with the Bahamas which began in the late 1960s when he first visited the islands at the invitation of Dr Doris Johnson.

The two were introduced by Mr Burgie's wife, a classmate at Virginia Union College. They continued their friendship during the years Doris Johnson was working on her doctorate of education at New York University.

Events

Dr Johnson also helped Mr Burgie catalogue his home library, giving him a copy of her book *The Quiet Revolution in the Bahamas*, chronicling events surrounding the PLP's first successful election.

In the 1960s, while vacationing at the Ocean Club, he spent one month helping the Lucayan Chorale prepare an elaborate casino show featuring Sony Johnson, one of the most popular singers in Nassau at the time.

Mr Burgie feels it is immensely important that music be a part of children's education and believes it is necessary to give something back to the Caribbean islands, which had served as



■ FROM left: Frank Minaya, Irving Burgie and Consul General Ed Bethel, who met at the Bahamian Consulate in New York to discuss Mr. Burgie's donation of children's songbooks and CD's to The Bahamas.

his inspiration for so many songs.

Mr Burgie's career has spanned over 60 years since he studied voice at the Juilliard School of Music, the University of Arizona and the University of Southern California, where he learnt the rudiments and theory of music. This followed a three-year stint in the army during World War Two.

"In fact, I went to school under the GI Bill of Rights," he said.

He began playing the guitar at 16 and took up the alto-sax at 20. While in college he learnt to play the piano.

His first songs were published in Harry Belafonte's hit album *Calypso*.

The two collaborated on 34 songs, including *Island in the Sun*, which Mr Burgie wrote specifically for the movie of the same name which starred Harry Belafonte, Joan Fontaine, Joan Collins and Dorothy Dandridge.

His song *Day-O* soared through the charts when it was featured in the hit movie *Beetle Juice*.

Mr Burgie explained the song-writing process. "Well, at best you have a project to write about, something for a

show, and you are writing to express characters, or you are thinking of a song in a vacuum and you develop an idea. Sometimes, if you have an assignment, it makes the process and your brain go faster."

Depending on the song, he writes the melody first and other times he writes the lyrics. "I tend to be more conscious of what it (the song) is going to say," he said.

Satisfying

For Mr Burgie the most satisfying moment is when he hears one of his songs on the radio. "That means it was sold," he said, laughing. "And in my case I am fortunate to hear it on the radio as much today as I did years ago."

He said he really has no favourite among his songs as they all have a special place in his heart. "*Jamaica Farewell*, *Land of the Sea and Sun* and *Angelina* are some that stand out in my mind."

And he feels blessed to have had so many songs become million dollar sellers.

Mr Burgie is best-known for writing songs with a

Caribbean theme, which can perhaps be attributed to the fact that his mother was from Barbados. In 1966, he wrote the National Anthem for that country.

However, he said his preferred choice of music is classical.

"When I turn on the radio, it's to the classical station," he added.

Mr Burgie said he has nothing against the music of today - the rap and reggae. "If the young set goes for that, well okay, we had a lot of crazy music in our day like *Cement Mixer*, *Putty Putty*, and *Flat Foot Floatie with the Floy Floy*. We had fun, so whatever they are into is okay as long as they are not killing anybody."

These days Mr Burgie is preparing for a new Broadway show called *Day-O*, for which he wrote the music and songbook. The show is set in the Caribbean. A second reading is set for June and Mr Burgie hopes the show can open later this year. It will feature primarily a compilation of his previous material and some new pieces as well.

In his spare time, he is working on his autobiography, which will also be called *Day-O*.