

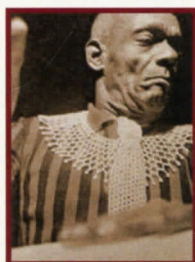
**Mats Lundahl**

**with Louis Carl Saint Jean**

**Issa El Saieh:  
Maestro and Legend**



**A PORTRAIT OF MY PAL,  
HIS TIMES AND HIS MUSIC**



Issa El Saieh was my best friend in Haiti. Everybody does not have a vintage 1919 legend as a friend. But I did. A legend in music. A legend in the history of Haitian art.

Issa played with some of the best and he discovered some of the best. He was the buddy of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and even more of Budd Johnson, Billy Taylor and Bebo Valdés. Through them he brought jazz and mambo to his country. Through his own efforts he incorporated voodoo rhythms into Haitian popular music. He ran his own record label, La Belle Creole, which put out some of the best Haitian music ever, notably his own orchestra featuring the percussion giants Ti Marcel and Ti Roro and such exquisite vocalists as Guy Durosier, Joe Trouillot and Herby Widmaier.

After retiring from the music business, Issa El Saieh became the most well-known art gallery owner in Haiti, by any standard the best—a man who never compromised his taste and who was instrumental in launching and supporting the careers of some of the best painters in Haiti.

Issa was Hamit the Syrian in Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, the man who “knew as many intimate things as a prostitute’s dog,” but there was also something saint-like about him. Issa El Saieh was one of those people you could not help liking, the sweetest guy you ever met. Everybody loved him. He died in 2005. I miss my pal. Haiti is not the same without him. May God bless his soul.

MATS LUNDAHL

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