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Get dreamy eyed with Tillotson

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COUNTRY-pop artiste Johnny Tillotson is back in town and this time around he will be paying tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Malaysian Liver Foundation's (MLF) upcoming charity dinner.

On his seventh visit to Malaysia, Tillotson said: "It's great to be back in Malaysia again. The last time was in 1997. I have had the chance to see this place grow as I was first here in the early 80s."

He has previously performed for many charity organisations including the Cheshire Home and the Rotary Handicapped Children's Fund. He also participated in the Save the Children Relay Project 1990.

The two-time Grammy nominee is well known for his chart-toppers such as Dreamy Eyes, Judy Judy Judy and Without You, among many others.

When asked what was his most significant and meaningful song, the sentimental singer replied that all the songs are significant as they are all very personal.

"If I had to name some, then Poetry In Motion will come first because it represents what ladies are all about regardless of nationality or age, followed by It Keeps Right On A-Hurtin' which I wrote because it is one of those songs that people who have suffered a loss can relate to. The song has been recorded by 112 people including my idol Elvis Presley."

It Keeps Right On A-Hurtin' brought Tillotson his first Grammy nomination and marked his distinction as one of the first "crossover" artistes - as a country-pop singer.

Tillotson, who sings mainly love songs, likes either funny or touching ones which can make listeners cry.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida in the United States, he started writing songs while at the University of Florida. Graduating with a degree in journalism and communications in 1959, he decided to be a singer at an early age.

"My parents were worried about my choice of career as there is no knowing about what's going to happen next. To me, that's what makes showbiz so exciting.

"However, they wanted me to take up a course and score good grades. I did just that to appease them.

"The course was something I enjoyed - meeting people, directing, being behind and in front of the screen. Even though I wanted to sing, I also knew I must have something to fall back on which I like equally."

He started out recording for Archie Bleyer, the owner of Cadence Records, and his songs were hits not only in Southeast Asia but in Scandinavian countries as well as North and South America.

"I look at myself as a very lucky guy because my dreams actually came true. I have no idea how, but they have. I have 14 top 40 hits."

He then moved to MGM and had 18 chart records to his credit. His first release under the new company, Talk Back Trembling Lips, was a huge success.

Currently the singer and his wife Nancy are doing a lot of writing. They have written at least 20 songs which they term modern country songs.

"These songs are very much different in the phrasing and tunes. We like to write," he says smiling. Married for 23 years, he said: "My wife travels with me. She helps me co-ordinate trips, works with my manager and makes sure that I take good care of myself.

"She's a terrific lady - great sense of humour, very intelligent, a

great songwriter and very shy as well."

A one-woman man, he believes that it is essential to pick a partner who shares common interests. "Guys don't change much. Surprise, surprise! So it's important to have common ground," he said laughingly, adding that men should stick with one woman as it makes life much simpler. The talented singer plans to write a book which is at the infancy stage right now. "I would like to write something but it has got to be written well. It can't just be all nice little sweet stories. The book will have a very cool title and the story won't be too long."

Tillotson will definitely include stories about Presley, The Beatles, The Stones and many more.

"I knew Elvis throughout his career. He used to love it when I sent him little notes when I was in the audience. He was very playful with his audience and he was such a gentleman," he says, full of praise for his idol.

Tillotson is looking forward to performing for the Prime Minister at the MLF charity dinner in Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel, Petaling Jaya on July 23.

"It is a great honour to be here and be part of this charity dinner where everyone shows their appreciation for the Prime Minister.

"He has done so much for the people... and motivates the people to do their best. That's how we should look at life - have a great time and do your best."

Having just released a new album, Johnny Tillotson All-Time Greatest Hits, he is also looking forward to singing for his fans at Holiday Villa Hotel, Subang Jaya tomorrow. The album contains almost 40 of his original hit songs .

"After the show, I'm going to come out and meet the people. Sometimes people have pictures of me over the years and I will like to see how I've changed. I always tell the audience if I missed anything on the show, to ask me to sing them because I know all my songs and usually sing them after signing autographs and CDs," he said.

He is passionate about singing and recreates moments in his mind whenever he is on stage and tries his best to do so for his audience as well.

"It is very important to try and sing just like you did on the record. Every performer goes through a period where after a while he thinks he can do it better than the record. Actually he can't.

"If the record was a hit, there has to be some reasons for it to be a hit. As the expression goes, 'If it isn't broke, don't fix it', I strive to sing songs on stage exactly as the recorded versions."

After his shows here, he goes back to his home in Los Angeles before flying to Miami, Florida to do a show.

The evergreen country-pop singer is obviously very much in demand.

To find out more about Tillotson, log on to the website built by his wife - www.johnnytillotson.com

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