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Cocoanut Girl



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Machel wows India

Soca star plays to massive audience of millions at 2022 Maha Shivratri concert

Worlds collided on March 1 as the West Indies met India. Caribbean soca king, Machel Montano, took his music to India and the 2022 Maha Shivratri by the Isha Yoga Center, founded by the famed Sadhguru and it was received with tremendous enthusiasm.

Montano, making his debut in India, had millions of Indians including Sadhguru himself up on their feet and dancing as he treated the audience to several of his songs including “Dance With You,” as well as “Touch The Ground,” a new song he debuted with Marge Blackman for the Save The Soil concert.

Montano was introduced as a musician from Trinidad and Tobago who is celebrating over 40 years in the music business with collaboration with top artistes like Arianna Grande, Pitbull and Shaggy. It was also disclosed that he spent 7 months as a participant at the Isha Center.

He opened the set with “Come Awake,” backed by a choir of young singers. Barefooted on the stage, Montano wearing an orange kurta, his head wrapped in a multi-colored scarf, was full of energy at the concert promoted by Sadhguru.

Maha Shivratri is an exuberant night-long festival at the Isha Yoga Center, with explosive meditations and spectacular musical performances by renowned artists. It is considered auspicious for spiritual growth. The festival, also known as ‘the great night of Shiva’, celebrates the overcoming of darkness and ignorance. It also celebrates the grand marriage of the lord of destruction, Shiva – with the goddess of fertility, love, and beauty and Parvati, who is also known as Shakti (power).



Machel Montano on stage in India. Click on photo to see the video

Video of the event captured fathers holding up their babies while jumping and swaying, and women in their traditional saris among thousands on their feet waving their hands. Sadhguru, too, rose from his chair and as he walked closer towards Montano’s performance, he was captured on camera as a sole figure in front of the massive crowd moving his feet around in a classic dance to the soca music.

“I want to thank Sadhguru, Isha and India for welcoming me from the Caribbean,” Montano said. “Maha Shiv Ratri make some noise. The music I’m doing is soca music and it’s the soul of calypso. It was created by a man named Ras Shorty I, who fused African and Indian rhythms.

Montano himself appeared to be fully

thrilled by the opportunity to perform to his biggest audience ever, while receiving a reception many could only dream of.

But he also kept the message of the evening alive.

“Right now in this world, it’s up to us to save soil. Are we ready for this challenge? Right now Sadhguru is on his way across the globe. Are we ready to ride with him?” he asked.

It was the segway into his final song, ‘On My Way’, a 2015 tune from his Monk Evolution album.

His call for the crowd to dance was an effort hardly needed as the flowing melody and chants of “on my way, on my way to you” were again quickly lapped up by the captive audience with many more joining those who had been dancing from when he first

began.

By the time he was done, the cameras showed the vast majority of the thousands present waving their hands and dancing, and as he left the stage, it was to chants of “Encore, Encore!”

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Real life role as Civil Rights activist wins Samuel L Jackson the NAACP's Chairman's Award

Samuel L Jackson received the Chairman's Award during the 53rd NAACP Image Awards held on February 26.

The NAACP announced that it will bestow the 73-year-old actor with the award, which recognizes individuals who demonstrate "exemplary public service and use their distinct platforms to create agents of change."

"Many might not know that prior to his acting career, Jackson was a staunch activist during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, even serving as an usher at Martin Luther King Jr's funeral," Leon W. Russell, chairman of the NAACP National Board of Directors, said in a statement. "His continued public service and advocacy for social change make him an excellent recipient for the Chairman's Award."

Previous recipients have included Tyler Perry, then-Sen. Barack Obama, Danny Glover, US Representative Maxine Waters and the late US Representative John Lewis.

Jackson, who has appeared in more than 100 films, is known for his portrayal of Jules in Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" and as Gator Purify in Spike Lee's "Jungle Fever." He has starred in several other films such as "Do the Right Thing," "Unbreakable," "Snakes on a Plane" and multiple Marvel films including "The Avengers" and "Captain America: The Winter Solider."

The Oscar-nominated actor expects to star in the Apple TV limited series "The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey." He will receive an honorary Academy Award at the upcoming Governors Awards this year.

Scot X Esdaile received the activist of the year award. He is the president of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP



Samuel L. Jackson: received the chairman's award

branches.

The winners of the awards were re-

vealed during a BET broadcast on February 26 at 8 pm Eastern.

RIP, Ricky Bobby: Musical director for Kes the Band, Ricardo Rameshwar, has passed on

The music fraternity and Kes the Band are in mourning today following the death of the band's musical director and keyboardist Ricardo Rameshwar.

Rameshwar passed away in early February,

His sister, Janae Rameshwar, confirmed his passing.

She said the musician suffered an asthma attack and was administered CPR at home when he lost consciousness. He was rushed to the Westshore medical facility in Port of Spain.

She said they were awaiting an autopsy on his body to confirm the cause of death.

Rameshwar, known fondly as Ricky Bobby, joined Kes the Band in 2012.

Prior to that, he spent 14 years working with Destra Garcia as the keyboardist for Atlantik and then as the musical director for her own band.

Rameshwar, who started his career in gospel, playing for Trini-born singer Helen Baylor and working with the likes of Sterling Gittens and Peter Regis, also played at the Queen's Tabernacle church in New York.

He got into soca when asked to replace the keyboardist for Charlie's Roots.

Rameshwar earned his producing chops through Link Up Studios owned by Anthony Chow Lin On aka Chinese Laundry and was part of the production duo Madmen Productions.

He then branched out into production on his own under the name 2RR Productions.

Under 2RR, which he is operating with his wife Roshelle, Rameshwar is looking to put out an EP of his own music which



Kes the Band: one of the top soca acts in the world

he described as a lot of crossover, pop-influenced music with Trinbagonian culture wrapped up in it.

"I started off in church, playing gospel in a full gospel church. I was the head musician in the Church of Abundant Life Ministries in San Juan which was walking distance from home. I had classical training in piano and reached Grade 6 but I was mainly self-taught from playing in the church. I learned to play by ear. I learned chords by listening to Fred Hammond, Shirley Caesar, Kirk Franklin," he said once to reporters.

As his reputation grew, so did the opportunities. Rameshwar got a call to play in Malaysia with a Trinidadian singer called Carlene Wells.

He got a call to play in a soca band but he hated soca. However, the need to

earn money overrode that sentiment.

The gig was to replace Michael Low Chew Tung aka Ming as the keyboardist for David Rudder.

"I didn't know how to play soca. I met Albert Bush who was the musical director and I told him I never played soca. When they heard me play, they said if you could play that, it is nothing to learn this, this is ABC to what you playing there. Charlie Roots was my grounding, the best musicians came from there. When I went there I was the baby in the band, I was 21/22. I joined Charlie's Roots the year after High Mas and off of that hype I got a good seven years with them. My first tour was Amsterdam," he said at the time, describing his experience as trial and error as the older heads tried to break him down.

Four arrested in overdose death of actor Michael K Williams

Four men believed to be members of a drug distribution crew have been charged in the overdose death of actor Michael K Williams five months ago, authorities said.

All four were arrested and were in custody based on criminal complaints in Manhattan federal court, including one defendant who was arrested in Puerto Rico, according to a news release from US Attorney Damian Williams and New York City Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell.

Three defendants were scheduled to make initial appearances in Manhattan federal court to face narcotics conspiracy charges alleging the distribution of fentanyl-laced heroin that resulted in the death of Williams, who gained fame playing Omar Little on "The Wire".

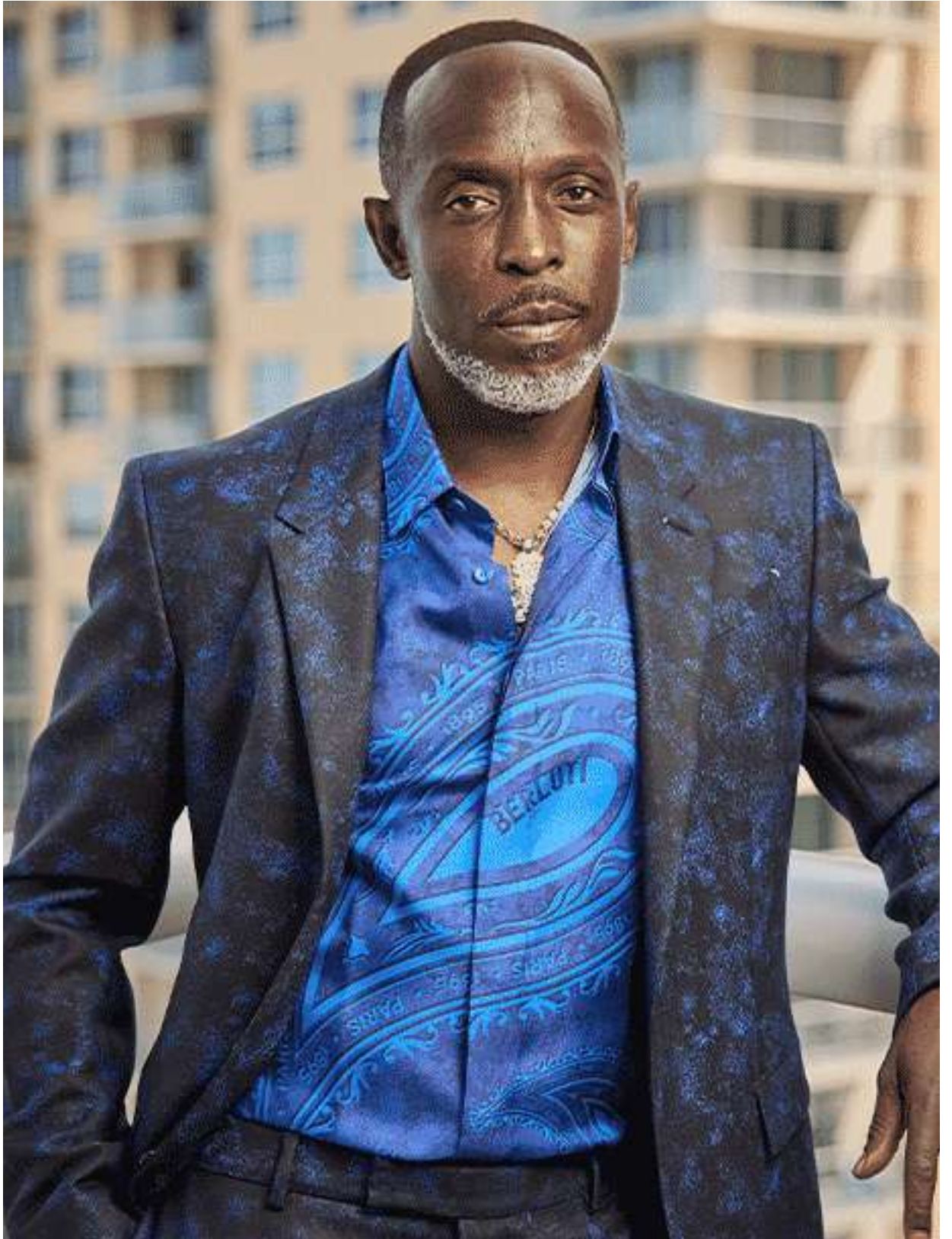
New York City's medical examiner earlier ruled that Williams, 54, died of acute drug intoxication on September 6, 2021. He was found dead by family members in his penthouse apartment. At that time, the medical examiner's office ruled Williams' death an accident.

The US attorney said the crimes and charges resulted from a "public health crisis".

"And it has to stop. Deadly opioids like fentanyl and heroin don't care about who you are or what you've accomplished. They just feed addiction and lead to tragedy," the prosecutor said.

Sewell said police detectives in Brooklyn "lived this case, never relenting in their investigation until they could bring a measure of justice to Michael K Williams and his family".

According to court papers, Williams' death resulted from drugs sold by a drug trafficking organisation that has operated since at least August 2020 in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighbourhood.



Michael K Williams: found dead in his Manhattan apartment

Authorities said members of the organisation sold the actor heroin laced with fentanyl on September 5.

The court papers contained photographs, including one in which defendant Irvin Cartagena can be seen executing the hand-to-hand transaction, authorities said. They added that the screenshots were taken from surveillance video.

It was not immediately clear who would represent Cartagena, 39, of Brooklyn, in court.

Authorities said that the men continued to sell fentanyl-laced heroin in broad daylight amid apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Manhattan even after knowing that Williams had died from one of their products.

Preserving the legacy of Kitchener, the Grandmaster

February 11 marked 22 years since the passing of the late great pride of Arima, Grand Master of Calypso, and prolific composer of tunes described as befitting for pan, Aldwyn “Lord Kitchener” Roberts.

On April 18 will be his 100th birthday and to ensure his legacy’s respected, remains relevant and alive, a team of local and international professionals, entrepreneurs and cultural community activists predominantly from Arima, is planning a one-year commemoration from the birthdate to April 17 of next year, 2023.

The Arima Rebranding Team (ART) is spearheaded by former education curriculum coordinator, international education consultant and community activist, Henry Saunders, with its core representation being Donald Baldeosingh, Thomas Isaac, Dennis Hicks, James Toussaint. In part, the team comprises international professors in education, IT experts, anthropologist and international lawyers.

ART is a bonafide registered not-for-profit NGO, and functions with its signpost: service and humility.

Themed All Things Kitchener—the brainchild of Kendall Reyes—the launch anticipated to be on Kitchener’s birthdate includes in part, an inter-faith service in Arima at 9.00 am, a street parade, and a free, gala, virtual, culturally-mixed tribute featuring top local and international artists.

The 45th and current Mayor of Arima, Cagney Casimire, expressed elation: “Arima is a powerful and extremely special cultural, historical, educational and tourism-worthy borough. It’s the only Royal Chartered Borough in the western hemisphere, and leads the nation by being the borough with the most single-pan bands.

“I fully endorse the team’s initiative, and I’m proud that the event is going to be executed, with two of the key aspects



being the re-naming of a major street in Kitchener’s name, and a Kitchener Park,” stated Casimire.

To ensure a successful solid celebration, Saunders said he tapped on the shoulders of a robust and diverse range of organisations, and owing to the intense need for funds, he’s anticipating co-operation from the business community to be a part of this one-of-a-kind auspicious occasion.

“We are looking forward to their partnership to ensure our concerts and varied competitions are executed successfully.

“Some events are self-sustaining, and are being planned in collaboration with national cultural organisations.”

A 100-page All Things Kitchener collector’s item magazine depicting the life and music of the Grand Master is an element of the commemoration. Some activities identified for the year “that require major collaborative and financial support are, a Kitchener cultural caravan; talks, media

events on Kitchener, exhibitions and symposiums; visual and performing arts (VAPA) competitions, training and development projects; a monumental space for Arima icons; a Kitchener artefacts museum; embellishment of Kitchener’s grave towards becoming a historical site; and a Kitchener Culinary Creations.

“Kitchener is a calypso icon non-surpass from the inception of his entrance in the arena, noted for his impeccable wardrobe, his signature hats, his dance on one foot while kicking out the other during performances, and his tunes being played the most times during Panorama competitions. Rain-o-Rama, located at his family’s home on the Diego Martin Main Road, remains an illustrious tourist attraction.

Saunders said he is making a special appeal to government ministries, and the corporate and business sectors to assist in the best interest of T&T, culture and the performing arts, and most of all, to preserve Kitch’s legacy.

Male model battles pressures

As if the “typical” pressures of representing one's country at a beauty pageant and forever becoming a public figure were not enough, imagine being a male from a country that has strong views on masculinity and entering a pageant for men.

Model and actor Suveer Ramsook took up the challenge as the first male to represent T&T at a male pageant—Mr Supranational in 2018. Last year on December 5, he earned the first runner-up spot at the Mister Grand International pageant owned by the Mister International Organisation, Philippines.

Despite creating history by bringing home the first title for a male in a male pageant, he still contends with the pressures of redefining the strict set of behaviours and roles expected of men in this society.

“A great challenge that I am definitely facing at the moment is the lack of respect for what I have accomplished,” he said.

Whatever the adversity, however, you hold your head up and represent your brand, he insisted.

Long before his success at the international competition, Ramsook was fully aware of the tough task ahead. He decided to enter Mr Supranational after a friend who held the franchise suggested that he would be one to make good use of the opportunity, especially since he comes from a country where masculinity equals strength and dominance and anything feminine is seen as weak.

“She believed I was the only one who would have been able to really take full advantage of an international pageant because males here tend to limit themselves because of what people think. Because of the stereotypes and stigmas surrounding males in pageantry, the opportunity was there for me, not many would have wanted to go.

“I didn't really think about what anybody would say, all I saw was the opportunity to travel and represent my country.”

Having been already inducted into the fashion and modelling industry locally, regionally and internationally, and already having a substantial fan base made it eas-



Suveer Ramsook: Male models are seen as weak

ier, but people were not accustomed to seeing a male present himself for a male pageant.

“The male modelling industry in Trinidad and Tobago is small because men just simply believe they shouldn't do those things stereotypically as it's kind of feminine or as some people would say: it's gay.

“Because of those stigmas and stereotypes, men have limited themselves and many people have misconceptions about what a male pageant or modelling competition entails. People don't take it seriously. But it's actually much more and how much it could actually benefit you and

your country on an international stage is something they don't know about.”

He admitted that at the time, he did not “put” his “full heart” into Mr Supranational. This changed by 2021 when he decided to enter Mister Grand International.

His campaign, “To Be a Man”, sensitised men about toxic or unhealthy masculinity. He sought to address issues like men treating women badly, men not being able to freely express themselves or their emotions, men giving in to peer pressure, and men believing that they should not partake of activities that are deemed feminine.



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Moko Jumbie costumes on stage at the Queens Park Savannah in Port of Spain

Return of the Moko Jumbies

Long-standing resident of west Trinidad, Dragon-Glen de Souza—founded his Moko Jumbie School of Art and Culture, Keylemanjahro, in 1986 where it still operates, in Cocorite, and is noted as being the initiator of the meaningful era and purposeful use of moko jumbies in Trinidad.

In 1997, de Souza met one, Hollis Clifton of San Fernando upon the advice of the Ministry of Culture following Clifton's request to have Keylemanjahro visit South and educate about moko jumbies, and via a one-day workshop, Bisnath and Clifton formed their own moko jumbie group, Kaisokah upon the vision of Clifton, said Bisnath.

Also known as stilt walkers or dancers, moko jumbies said to have derived from a combined representation of Central African healers or Moko, and West Indian term for a mythological spirit or ghost, jumbie, with the belief that moko jumbies origi-

nated from West African tradition brought to the Caribbean.

The moko jumbie is said to be a god that watches over the village owing to his towering height that affords him to easily foresee evil and danger. They are require strong athleticism, healthy skeletal frame and good balance, Bisnath apprised.

In 2016 for the first time a moko jumbie won King of Carnival, this being a Peter Minshall's costume: The Dying Swan Ras Nijinsky in Drag as Palova.

Internationally-acclaimed, world-record breaker, and master craftsman, Bisnath, stated of making stilts, "I was developed into an extremely creative person from early teen where woodwork is concerned, so mastering the technology made it a breeze.

"When I was eight years, my dad passed; it was tough, but I persevered. I started to work at 17 years, but officially at

18, and never stopped at the same company until I was 60. I am the 12th of 14 siblings, a father of three sons—Arvell, Joshua and Ojah, and granddad of one—Muzick.

Bisnath said the pandemic slowed them down a bit like many worldwide, but he remained positive and steadfast, and while he didn't received a call from the NCC for the scaled down Taste of Carnival in 2022, "we've begun doing video shoots for businesses that make a living from Carnival—some corporate and fast-food Carnival promotions. We're being booked for shows with one being the College Boy Jessie's big show at Naparima Bowl; Carnival Monday and Tuesday, Chutney Soca Finals."

Bisnath stated that above all, not only is he grateful for Clifton's vision, but also for him having introduced a Kaisokah branch in Botswana. "Overall, the Jumbies are happy tasting Carnival 2022."



Covid-free Paradise

Jamaica lifts quarantine restrictions for visitors

Jamaica is taking several steps to return to more normal travel operations.

Visitors to the country will no longer need the Travel Authorization, and travel-related quarantine measures will no longer be required from March 1, 2022.

Children 12 years and older will still need to provide a negative COVID-19 test (antigen or PCR) conducted within 72 hours prior to the date of travel at check-in.

“Eliminating travel-related quarantines and the need for travelers to fill out and receive approval of the Travel Authorization form are key steps in relaxing our travel protocols as the global spread of COVID-19 declines,” said the Hon. Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism, Jamaica. “We are confident that these refreshed entry requirements will increase the appeal of Jamaica as a destination of choice and help us continue on our path to recovery for the tourism sector and wider economy as a whole.”

Jamaica was one of the first destinations to reopen after COVID-19 shut down the travel industry and was one of the first countries to be recognized by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) with its global safety and hygiene stamp.

Since its reopening, Jamaica has enjoyed a steady increase in tourism arrivals and continues to welcome an increasing number of visitors, approach-



This model shows off some of Jamaica's attractions

ing pre-COVID tourism levels.

“We are continually reviewing our Jamaica CARES program and travel protocols to align with best practices from internationally recognized organizations and ensure that Jamaica retains its position as one of the world's leading tour-

ism destinations,” noted Donovan White, Director of Tourism, Jamaica Tourist Board. “These changes are timed to go into effect as destinations across the globe are enacting similar revisions to their travel requirements.”

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Brian Lara 'heartbroken' after pal Shane Warne dies at 52

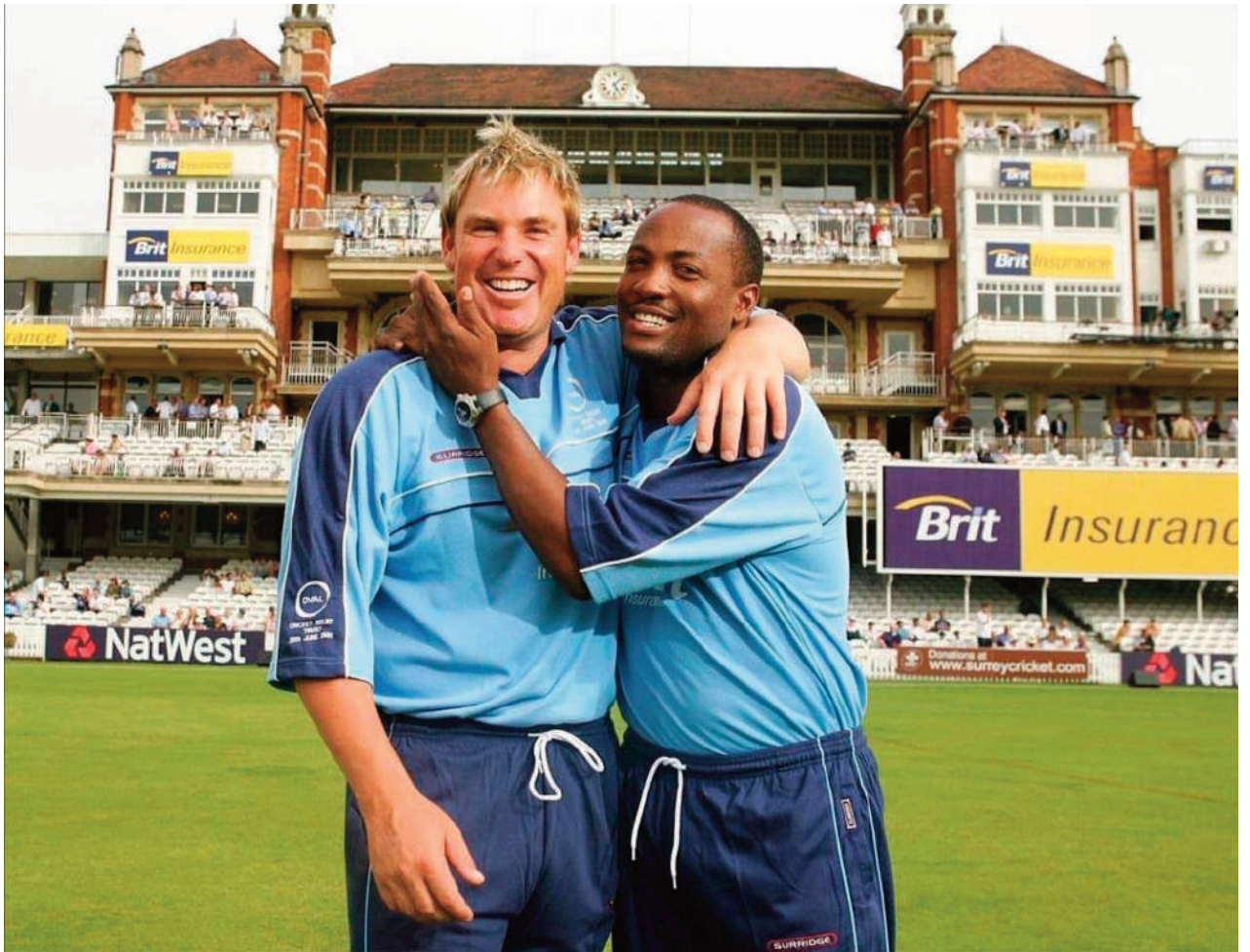
West Indies legend Brian Lara has been left "speechless" after the death of his former on-field rival and friend Shane Warne. The iconic Auspeestralian leg-spinner died on Friday (March 4) at his villa in Thailand from a suspected heart attack. He was 52.

Lara, known for his prowess against spin bowling, had a number of classic matches against Warne at the Test match level.

He tweeted on Friday, "And speechless at the moment. I literally don't know how to sum up this situation. My friend is gone!! We have lost one of the Greatest Sportsmen of all time!! My condolences goes out to his family. RIP Warnie!! You will be missed."

A number of past and present cricketers have paid tribute to the Australian, arguably the greatest spin bowler of all time.

Former West Indies opening batsman Daren Ganga tweeted, "Cannot believe it, Cricket Legend Shane Warne departs!!! Truly shocked and saddened, only 52 years of age. The ultimate spin wizard and entertainer #RIPMate."



West Indies legend Brian Lara, right, and his friend Shane Warne

Ex-West Indies captain Chris Gayle posted, "RIP LEGEND." Test wickets and 293 ODI wickets. He was an integral part of the dominant Australian team from the mid-1990s into the 2000s. Warne finished his Test career with 708

Middle East a target for JA culture

The Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) is harnessing collaboration in hopes of taking the Jamaican culture and creative industry to the Middle East market.

Representatives of JSEZA are in Dubai as part of the Jamaican delegation participating in the six-month World Expo 2020 Dubai, securing business, trade and investment opportunities for the country.

JSEZA's Manager, Business Facilitation and Acceleration Services, Kevon Farquharson, shares with JIS News that from students who participate in school tours of the Jamaica Pavilion to high-level officials and everyone in between, the Jamaican

culture resonates with visitors.

"Especially for the school tours, the history section and the cultural aspect of things are very important, and the kids appreciate it. Sometimes you will see a visitor come in and you are looking for them to move to another section and they just won't move...we engage them, ask them a few questions and they [will say], 'You guys are a small nation; you guys went through so much; you guys have this huge impact...you have the Bob Marley, the Usain Bolt, the Chris Gayle'" discloses Mr. Farquharson.

"Persons can tell you straight up about our culture, and even some of the

influencers that come to the Pavilion, they want us to showcase specific parts of our culture because they know so much about it," he continues.

A noteworthy moment for the delegation was the visit of a high-level official who entered the Pavilion playing songs from Peter Tosh on his mobile device and throughout his tour.

The 2021 release of *No Time to Die*, the latest in the James Bond series, which was filmed in Jamaica, has put a spotlight on the local creative industry. This, Mr. Farquharson said, has led to "our creatives being recognised when they [investors] look at our entertainment sector".

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Keeping ‘Mash’ alive

PRIOR to the pandemic, Mark Roy Junor would be one of the revellers traversing the ‘Mash’ routes in Guyana, but with the damper that was placed on all activities related to Mashramani – in fact, the cancellation of Mash Day activities over the past two years, and this year also, Mark couldn’t help but be affected.

Imagine his relief when fellow costume designer Olympia Small-Sonaram came up with an idea to still do something in celebration of ‘Mash.’

“Olympia Small is the one who came up with the idea. ‘Mash’ is our thing; it’s part of the Guyanese culture,” he explained. “The idea is to form a group to do something for Mash, being that we have not heard anything about costuming or parades; nothing for designers to do. She reached out to others and everyone pitched in.”

The group, Guyana Mashramani Costume Designers, will continue to exist even after the pandemic, Mark offered. “The plan is to create costumes for ‘Mash.’ We need to do something to show that Mash still lives, so all the designers will bring materials; old costumes...We should be on the road show-

casing ‘Mash’ costumes.”

Small-Sonaram offered that the main goal was to get approval from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport to do ‘Mash Night.’ “This was not for the costume parade; just to display floats, whether virtual or in person. That didn’t happen. Minister was busy in Parliament, so we didn’t get to meet with him,” she said.

So she decided that she will put together a camp where designers could bring together materials they have, along with old costumes and revamped ones. “I decided I will put together a band to show persons that the designers are still here and to get the attention of the ministry to have them involve designers more,” Small-Sonaram offered.

“We find there are a lot of things going on but the designers are not being included. Because of COVID, the designers have suffered a great loss. It’s really hard on us because there is nothing happening that includes us,” she further mentioned.

The group will be using a location for the display on Brickdam, opposite popular designer Maxi Williams. “People can come

and see the costumes. It’s a showcase to let people know we’re still thinking about ‘Mash,’ and we’re keeping ‘Mash’ alive, regardless of what’s going on with the pandemic,” Small-Sonaram said.

Meanwhile, Mark, owner of Kramronuj Designs and Beat by Mark, described himself as very artistic and free-spirited. He prides himself in being not only a costume designer but a model, coach, dancer, and make-up artist. “When it comes to the arts, you name it, I do it.”

Mark acknowledged that the pandemic has not only affected his work, but the entire nation. “Without people doing anything for ‘Mash,’ there’s no money flowing, so it’s really tough for persons to survive unless you have another means of income. Makeup helps me now and I dabble in other fine arts which help cushion the impacts of the pandemic.”

With money not flowing, though, he said the most designers can do now is to collaborate with other creatives. “I would do so with models, designers, photographers. We just want hope that things will go back to normal.”



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The alimony song

Mary J. Blige says she went on tour to pay support to ex

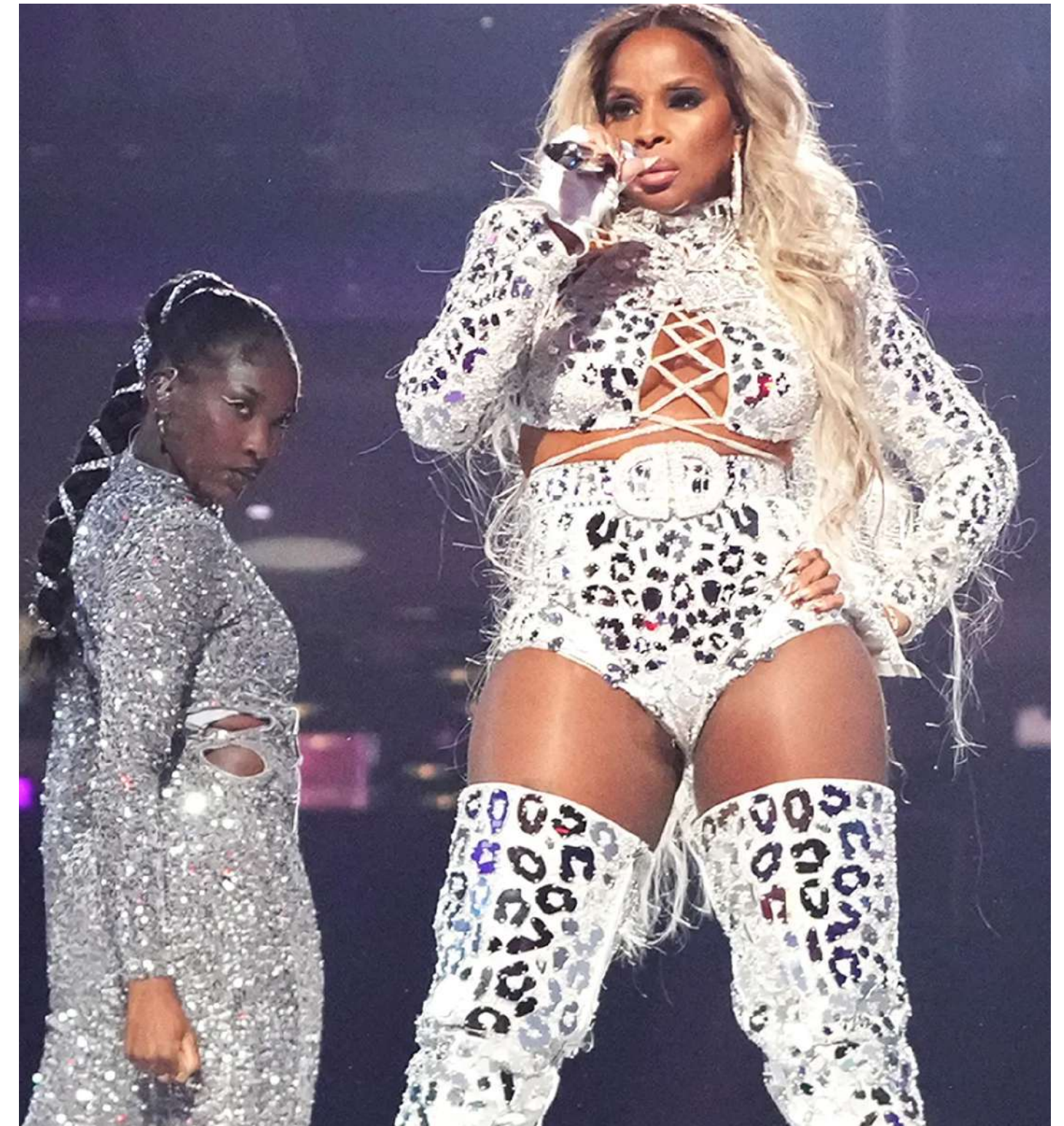
In a recent interview, Mary J. Blige opened up about the origins of her new song, “Rent Money,” which she explains was about how she had to go on tour to help support her very public divorce from Kendu Isaacs.

The release of Blige’s new album *Good Morning Gorgeous* and her Super Bowl LVI performance alongside Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, 50 Cent, and Eminem has marked an exciting new chapter for The Queen of Hip-Hop Soul. On her new album, the third single “Rent Money” featuring Dave East, is inspired by a very specific time in her life, she told Angie Martinez on an iHeart Radio special this week.

In the song, Blige sings lyrics, “Look now my rent money due / I spent everything f— with you, oh / They say you win some, you win some you lose / All I got is rent money due / f— with you.”

In her sit-down with Martinez, she explained, “‘Rent Money’ is [about] when I first got divorced. I had to give up all this alimony, and I didn’t have no more money to give because he had spent it all. So, I had to go, you know, I had to go on tour, and make all the money back to pay the alimony.”

She continued, “I didn’t have no money to pay my rent and all this other stuff. But it’s also a metaphor like, I didn’t have my soul. I was just drained of everything. So it



Singer Mary J. Blige on stage during a recent performance

was time for somebody to pay; sometimes you just feel like somebody gotta pay.”

Blige was paying her ex Martin “Kendu” Isaacs \$30,000 per month in temporary spousal support between 2016 when she first filed to when they settled in 2018, theGrio reported. The former couple settled out of court in March of 2018,

avoiding a potential week-long trial.

In a recent cover story for *Elle*, Blige opened up about how she started building her self-confidence while she was still married and that it inspired the title track of her new album.

She explained, “During *Mudbound* and when I was

married, I was feeling so low. I had to pay myself the highest compliments, even if I didn’t believe it, just so I could build myself up...I would do it in the morning, because that’s the time when your hair is not done and you don’t have on makeup. You’re just kind of dealing with yourself for real.”

The Temptations celebrate their longevity with '60'

There are popular groups, there are progressive groups, and there are legendary groups. But then, you have the standard. The group that all after it is measured by. The Temptations are not the first male soul quintet, but they set the standard for all after them.

This year marks their sixth decade as a vocal institution. Literally. With numerous line-up changes, two things have remained constant; the presence of founder Otis Williams, and their reputation as peerless vocal harmonizers.

How do you celebrate some many years of hits like "My Girl," "Psychodelic Shack," "Just My Imagination," "Ain't Too Proud to Beg," "Cloud Nine," and so many others? For the Temptations, they released a new album, *Temptations 60*, named for 60 years since they signed to Motown Records.

Released by Universal Music Group (UMG) in January, the album was slated to be a victory lap of sorts, fusing the Temptations' signature sounds with some fresh influences. Although on the surface that's what it sounds like, it turns out to be an album with more moments of brilliance and pleasure.

Right from the start, opening "Let It Reign" tips the listener off that The Tempts are up to date with the times, thematically and sonically. Mostly featuring rapping from K. Sparks, the song is a political call to action in response to the social upheaval happening in the country. The melodic chants of "We need peace, we need change, we need soul," are anthemic and inspiring.

They later return to the social themes with "Time For the People." It starts with sampled vocals from Black Lives Matter protests, as shouts of "No Justice, No Peace" set the tone for this funky call to action:

"Don't let this people try to fool ya (they don't know what the problem is)

They done changed the games into a habit (giving more people the biz)"

It's refreshing that a group that's been



Legendary group The Temptations is marking its 60th anniversary

around so long isn't resting on its laurels and continues to use their platform to address social issues.

With several producers throughout the album, including co-founder Otis Williams, Smokey Robinson, three-time Grammy winner Narada Michael Walden, and Thomas "TC" Campbell, *Temptations 60* goes back and forth between old-school Motown throwback, synthesized funk, and updated soul.

What worked so well about their 1998 number one single, "Stay," produced by Walden, is that it was the right balance between honoring the past and embracing the present, thanks to a sample of "My Girl." It's for this reason that the highlight of the album is "How Do You Spell Love."

It's a song that composition-wise could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with songs like "Treat Her Like a Lady" and "A Fine Mess." It's easy to sing along with, has an enjoy-

able sprinkling of synthesizers and horns and the singing gets your feet moving in a two-step.

Their collaboration with Robinson harkens back to when he gave The Temptations their first smash hits, like "My Girl," "The Way You Do The Things You Do," and "Since I Lost My Baby." As the album's lead single, "Is it Gonna Be Yes or No" is a classy bedroom ballad. Lyrics like "Hesitating/Why you gonna keep me waiting/we should be participating" are sly, veiled calls of yearning and pleading.

While it's a nice nostalgic nod at the legendary voices that made The Temptations the icons they are today, it's also a poignant reminder of mortality that offers real depth. *Temptations 60* is a reminder that the Tempts are still around and can still sing and add additions to their catalog of classic songs. Let's give them their flowers.



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Race: Bubba Wallace bringing Black fans to NASCAR

Bubba Wallace's Netflix series is officially here. After months of anticipation, *Race: Bubba Wallace*, has dropped on the streaming service, and theGrio caught up with the historic NASCAR driver and the director of the project, Erik Parker, to break down the limited series, Wallace's legacy and more.

Race: Bubba Wallace follows Wallace's experience as a Black NASCAR driver, specifically focusing on his newly formed team and the current season, theGrio previously reported. When speaking to theGrio's Courtney Wills, Wallace opened up about being a Black NASCAR driver and what it means to bring the Black community to a sport that they may not have always felt welcomed in.

"There was the race this past weekend in L.A., the clash at the Coliseum," Wallace recalled. "You know, the amount of support that was there which was really cool. I mean, you had Reggie Bush, his family was there, Jemele Hill was there, Jermaine Dupri was there. Ice Cube was there. And then even just the fan base, the people in the stands watching the race...was super dope to see. And so just the atmosphere was something that you definitely didn't want to miss."

He added, "If I sit there and take enough time to think about it, that's like, yeah, I had a little bit to do with that. But at the same time, I feel like, you know, they've seen what NASCAR is just doing as a sport, and it's not all about me and that they want to come support our sport as a whole. So, yeah, I think it's special."

Parker, when discussing his main goal in directing the series, explained, "I absolutely wanted to tell this story in real time of history in the making, and I think we captured that, but it's also a snapshot, you know, in the 2020 season, when Bubba spoke out about what was happening in NASCAR and on racial justice, social justice issues. We wanted to capture that moment."

Race: Bubba Wallace is available to stream now on Netflix.



Bubba Wallace: Bringing Black fans to NASCAR



Tassa drumming no longer a 'poor old man's culture'

THOUGH originally stemming from Persian traditions, Tassa drums are a part of the rich legacy of Indian culture over the centuries. In Guyana, Tassa drumming is a beloved feature of many Hindu weddings and, over the years, have also been known to appear amidst an ensemble of other sounds at cultural events.

Rajesh Dubraj, who represents one of the leading Tassa drum groups in Guyana, recalled how he became involved in playing the Tassa drum.

"It was soon after the death of Bhaiji Ram, who was the religious leader of the Eccles Devi Mandir, and he was also the proprietor of the Tairam Little India Store, who recognised and supplied us with a set of Tassa drums and gave us terms to pay for it when we as a group would have played out," Dubraj said.

He made mention of the fact that some 20 years ago, Tassa drumming was looked at as a "poor old man's culture" and Tassa drummers were mostly old men from across the country, who usually had to put up with poor accommodation and treatment when hired to perform for weddings.

He also noted that most of these men, particularly older folk, were very reluctant to teach the art form to the youngsters for many reasons.

Dubraj shared with the *Peppercorn Magazine* that after about five years as a group, he believes they have changed that narrative, raised the bar and brought the art form to a more meaningful entertainment



Rajesh Dubraj (in white) with some young tassa players

package.

"I first extended teaching time and days and venues. I also provided costumes from T-Shirts to midvan kurtas outfits," Dubraj said.

According to Dubraj, there was a no-caps and no-slippers policy.

"We would usually perform for churches' cultural events for free," he noted.

During the interview, Dubraj said that 23 years ago as a musician in the Mandir and as a budding Chutney artiste, he decided to add to his repertoire of instruments (Tassa Drumming) and learnt to play with friends and students from the temple.

"During the period when the group was just emerging, we

would only stay once per week at the Temple compound, but with discipline and dedication, the group quickly became popular and well known for its exquisite performances and high-speed entertainment act," Dubraj said.

The Tassa Drummer noted that after one year, people began to recognise the group for its ability and started booking and paying for them to perform at their events.

According to him, regrettably, the group wasn't able to perform at that time, because they were using the temple's instruments.

Dubraj has emerged from having a passion for Indian music and culture to being the

leading Chutney artiste in Guyana and is also the lone artiste of that particular genre signed to the Kross Kolor label.

A feature on the local artist from *womex.com* states that Dubraj has made his name "performing at many major events in almost every region in Guyana and has also touched a few regional territories, including Suriname, where he performed at CARIFESTA VIII and CARIFESTA IX in Trinidad & Tobago, representing Guyana in the arts of singing and Tassa drumming. One of his major performances was at the launching of the cellphone giant company DIGICEL in Guyana, where he shared the stage with Grammy award winner Akon and the T.O.K, a male group of Jamaica. With a few of his original songs already released under the Kross Kolor label, Rajesh has been excelling tremendously, having won the 2004 and 2009 Chutney Soca Competition in Guyana and gradually managing to gain the position of being the Chutney sensation of Guyana."

Apart from tassa drumming, his talents include being a vocalist, Harmonium, Dholak player.

Rajesh noted that: "Everyone has their way of doing things; their own style and adds their own 'flava' and feel to make things more comfortable and far easier for them to do."

When it comes to Guyanese entertainment, Rajesh Dubraj has his own way of expressing and showcasing his talent.

Bappi Lahiri: Disco King of Bollywood dies at 69

Singer-composer Bappi Lahiri passed away on Tuesday at the age of 69 in Mumbai. He was ailing for some time and died at CritiCare Hospital in Juhu, Mumbai, due to Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Personalities from all walks of life paid tribute to Lahiri, including PM Narendra Modi, actors Ajay Devgn and Akshay Kumar and composer AR Rahman.

An official statement was released by the late composer's family read, "It's a deeply sad moment for us. The cremation will take on the arrival of Bappa (his son) from Los Angeles tomorrow mid morning. We are seeking love and blessings for his soul. We will keep you updated. The statement was signed by his wife Chitrani Lahiri, Gobind Bansal, children Bappa Lahiri and Rema Lahiri.

CritiCare hospital director Dr Deepak Namjoshi told indianexpress.com, "In January, Bappi Lahiri was brought into the hospital for chest infection and Obstructive Sleep Apnea. He was admitted here for 29 days, including 18 days he was in the ICU. He then recovered well and his parameters were stable and he was undergoing pulmonary rehabilitation. On Monday, February 14, he was given a discharge. He stayed at home for about one and a half days, and then his health started deteriorating and his family called us up, so we rushed to his residence with an ambulance. He was here



Bappi Lahiri: popularised disco music to the Indian mainstream

around 11:30 pm on Tuesday, and very critical, we tried reviving him, but he ultimately passed away around 11:40 – 11:45 pm on Tuesday night."

Best known for popularising disco music to the Indian mainstream, the singer was fondly known as Bappi da, and experienced huge success in the 1980s and 90s. He earned the title 'Disco King' thanks to his work on films such as *Disco Dancer*, *Namak Halaal*, *Dance Dance*, *Commando*.

PM Modi condoled his death, "Shri Bappi Lahiri Ji's music was all encompassing,

beautifully expressing diverse emotions. People across generations could relate to his works. His lively nature will be missed by everyone. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family and admirers. Om Shanti."

In 2021, the singer was admitted to the ICU of the Breach Candy hospital as a precautionary measure after testing positive for the coronavirus. It was reported later that year that the singer had lost his voice. Lahiri denied these reports in an Instagram post, writing, "Some media outlets

are spreading false news about me and my health, which breaks my heart to hear. By the grace of my fans and well-wishers, I am completely healthy."

After completing 50 years in the industry in 2019, the singer expressed his gratitude and told PTI, "I feel so proud to have had this journey and to have worked with all the extremely talented people in the industry. Simply put, my life is Dilip Kumar to Ranveer Singh. From Dharm Adhikari to Gunday I've done it all."

Wayne T mashing them up

Winston Thomas, commonly known as Wayne T, a Trinidad-born, US-based singer, has returned to the music industry after a two-decade hiatus.

His Carnival 2022 soca tune is Mash up-Mash up, a song that he and Franklyn Grant wrote and produced, about women partying and having a good time together.

Cindy, a woman from Sangre Grande, inspired Thomas to write his latest song, Thomas told Newsday. He recalled striking up a conversation with the cheerful stranger in the checkout line of a Brooklyn supermarket. He recognised her Trinidadian accent after hearing her speak. She then recognised his features and connected him to his soca hit Doye Doye from 1993.

With Mash up-Mash up, Thomas hopes to achieve the same level of success as Doye Doye.

Thomas, 61, is originally from Techier Village in Point Fortin. At age nine, he started singing while attending Vance River RC primary school.

He migrated in 1972 and continued pursuing and showing his talent in the music industry.

He sang Rude Party in 1992, which was well-received by partygoers both locally and internationally. In 1995, he sang Ding Ding, a popular song at the time. He told Newsday that his biggest soca hit ever is Doye Doye, a collaboration with his brother Roger Thomas aka Silky Slim.

“That was a top favourite. That song that made everyone shake their head,” Thomas said.

“For 20-plus years, I had stopped singing. But I was still involved in spreading the culture. I was designing Carnival costumes. I was part of mas band Dream Team. I helped the launch of Bahamas carnival. In 2019, I came back on the music scene. I have since had several songs including a soca parang (Santa Santa) last year.

In 2020, Thomas released two songs – Ah Want Ah Vene and Gyal Wah Yuh Want?

His family's musical background extends to his mother and uncle. Like



Wayne T stopped singing for 20-plus years but now he's back with Mash-up

Thomas and his brother, their late mother, Velva “Incredible V” Thomas-Daly, was also a singer. Wayne T reminisced that in 1994, the three of them performed for Lord Kitchener’s Calypso tent, The Revue.

Thomas-Daly’s brother, Alan “Black-

stone” Thomas, is a songwriter and has written many songs for artistes, among them calypsonian Edwin “Crazy” Ayoung, soca parang king Irwin “Scrunter” Johnson, and soca singers Anslem Douglas, and Denise “Saucy Wow” Belfon.

The Coconut Girl

Soca ambassador Nadia Batson celebrates island vibe

Whether she is words deep in a new composition or entertaining her fans with her infectious music, singer, songwriter and producer Nadia Batson always has one aim – to promote TT and its easy-going island vibe.

“I call myself an unofficial ambassador because I promote this country so much. I push TT all the time, everywhere I go,” Batson said.

On February 23, Batson launched her new album, *Coconut Girl*, with the single, *Jelly*, being the flagship song.

“It (*Coconut Girl*) is a nice play on me being from TT and the whole island vibe. I don’t think there is anybody who could love soca more than I do, playing around with it, having fun with. To me soca doesn’t always have to represent party, there are different songs for different moods. For example, *Jelly* doesn’t say anything about jumping or partying, it just has a really relaxing, nice vibe and I like it.”

Batson said the album currently has 16 songs, but she’s pushing for more.

“I’m still going back and forth with management to add two more,” she said with a laugh. “But I don’t know how successful I’ll be.”

Writing and singing comes easy to the St Joseph TML and St George’s College alumna – she has been doing it since she was eight and began singing professionally when she was 17.

As an entertainer and com-



Nadia Batson: considered a global soca ambassador

petitor she has taken her craft to many local and international stages, among them the popular Party Time talent show of the '80s and '90s, the Chutney Soca Monarch competition, and the International Soca Monarch competition.

She has performed alongside artistes such as the late Andre Tanker and Kees Diefenthaler, and in 2011 she formed her own all-female soca band, SASS Nation, performing with vocalists Terri Lyons (a breakout star as the 2020 Calypso Monarch) and

Megan Walrond.

Batson estimates she has written hundreds of songs over the years, “I dare say thousands,” both for herself and other artistes, and has put out about seven albums. She said the majority of the songs on *Coconut Girl* is her own work.

“One is co-written by Lyrikal (Devon Martin), and another by V’ghn (Jevaughn John) out of Grenada.” This year, she said, she is on the Tilt, Queendom, Sweetest, Timeless and Location riddims.

Batson believes soca ar-

tistes don’t do enough “bodies of work,” with many choosing to put out just singles, maybe because of the time and money it takes to put out an album. She said the fact that she writes her own songs and has a home studio makes it possible for her to do more.

“So it’s easy for me to write and record, and because of this I have a lot of unreleased music.”

Coconut Girl is the first album she has done in the last three to four years, and is something for which her fans have been asking and into which she has put her heart and soul.

“I am fortunate to have loyal fans when it comes to streaming and buying music because they know they will have a good body of work. I am very positive that they will love what I’ve put together – a mix of favourites and unreleased songs.”

The Arima resident recalls the aftermath of the hectic 2020 Carnival season, when the pandemic hit TT, how glad she was for the rest because she thought the restrictions that came with covid19 were going to be short-term.

But as those two months extended into four, then six, then eight and then a year, she said it became somewhat of a challenge and she tried to make use of her time by creating online content like posting TikTok videos that would make people laugh.



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