



NO VISA FOR YOU
Busy Signal cries racism
after Canada denies him
permission to visit

THE SWEETHEART OF SOCA

RAE IS THROWING SOME WAIST AS SHE HOPES TO MAKE INROADS INTO THE T&T CARNIVAL MUSIC SCENE

**Fri
Feb
07**



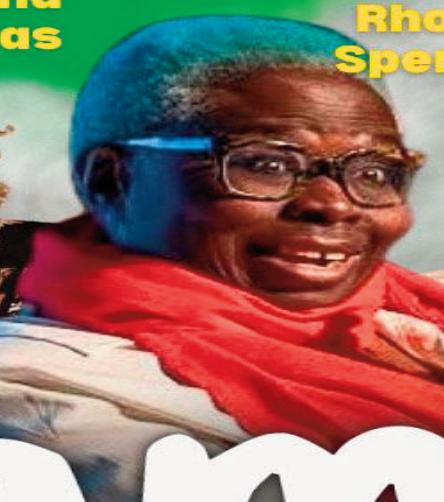
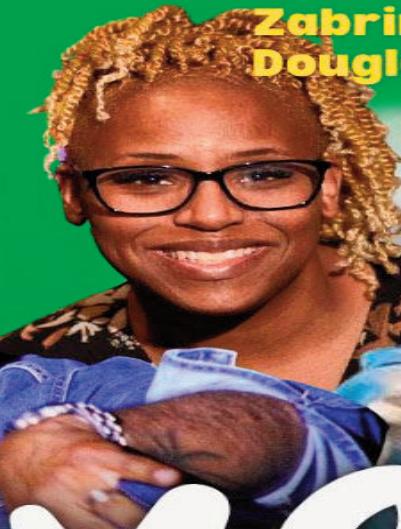
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World Record

Trini pannist plays the longest ever pan solo to take spot in Guinness Book

Trinidadian musician Joshua Regrello achieved a new milestone on in January afternoon by setting the Guinness World Record for the longest steelpan-playing marathon, after an impressive 31 hours of continuous performance on the national instrument.

The 27-year-old reached the 30-hour mark around 12:30 p.m., but decided to continue for an additional hour, much to the excitement of thousands of viewers who tuned in on YouTube and Facebook to cheer him on.

“This is not just a victory for myself, it’s a victory for everybody who was a part of this – from planning to being here,” Regrello said in a brief statement to friends, family, officials, and ministers who gathered in the studio of WACK 90.1FM in San Fernando, where he made history.

Regrello expressed his gratitude to the various teams who supported him during the record attempt, including members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Fire Service, and timekeepers from the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. These teams were tasked with witnessing the event in four-hour shifts to ensure Guinness World Record verification.

“I want to pay special notice to these witnesses... These are really objective people who had to endure hours of pan,” Regrello said. “The one thing we need to make this validated by Guinness is independent witnesses. We have to submit evidence, but we could not do that without them.”

Regrello, who previously made headlines as the first person to perform steelpan on the Great Wall of China, began his record attempt at 6:30 a.m. on Friday. He kicked off his marathon by performing Josh Groban’s “You Raise Me Up.”

Throughout the 31-hour period, several artists joined Regrello, including singers and instrumentalists, providing entertainment and support. While he was allowed a five-minute break every hour, Regrello only took a half-hour break in total, often playing with one hand while grabbing a quick bite or drink.

As the marathon came to a close, Regrello



Junior Regrello during his record-setting pan marathon

asked the studio audience to stand as he played the national anthem of Trinidad and Tobago,

marking the triumphant end of his historic performance.

SELF-LOVE:

Not just a buzzword

It is February, and everywhere you look, there are hearts, chocolates, and reminders about love. But before you get caught up in Valentine's Day plans or the endless romance ads, let us talk about a different kind of love, the one you give to yourself.

Self-love is not just a buzzword. It is the foundation for everything else in your life. When you treat yourself with care and respect, everything feels lighter. You show up stronger, more confident, and better equipped to handle whatever comes your way. It is not about being selfish; it is about being smart.

Let me ask you something. When was the last time you put yourself first? Not in a "buy a fancy coffee or buy a new pair of shoes" way, but in a real, meaningful way. When did you last stop to check in with yourself, to see how you are doing, and to ask what you need?

If you are like most people, the answer is probably, "Not as often as I should." That is okay because now is the perfect time to start.

Self-love is not about overhauling your life in one dramatic move. It is about making small, thoughtful choices every day that honor who you are and what you need. Let us talk about how you can start doing that right now.

The first step is simple: pay at-

tention to the way you speak to yourself. If a friend came to you after a tough day, you would not say, "You are such a failure." You would say, "It is okay. You tried your best. Tomorrow is a new day." So why would you say anything less to yourself? Start catching those negative thoughts and flipping them into something kinder.

Another small but powerful shift is to celebrate your wins, no matter how small they seem. Did you get out of bed even though you felt like staying under the covers? That is a win. Did you choose a healthier meal, take a walk, or finish a project you have been avoiding? Another win. These moments might not seem like much, but they are the building blocks of real progress.

Let us talk about boundaries. Saying no can feel uncomfortable, but it is one of the most loving things you can do for yourself. When you say no to what drains you, you create space for what nourishes you. It might mean skipping an event that you know will leave you feeling exhausted or politely declining a favor you are not in a position to give. It is not about shutting people out; it is about letting yourself in.

One of the most common struggles with self-love is the fear of being seen as selfish. Let me be

clear: taking care of yourself is not selfish. It is necessary. Imagine a car running on fumes. How far can it go before it stalls? That is you when you neglect your own needs. You cannot show up fully for others if you are barely running on empty.

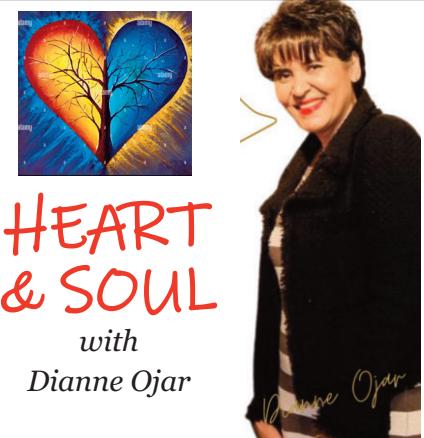
A simple way to start building self-love into your life is to create rituals that feel good to you. Maybe it is a morning moment where you sip your coffee in silence and set an intention for the day. Maybe it is journaling before bed to reflect on what went well and what you are grateful for. These small practices anchor you and remind you that you matter.

Another way to practice self-love is to forgive yourself for past mistakes. We are all human. We all mess up. But beating yourself up does not help you move forward. What does help is giving yourself grace and learning from those experiences. Each day is a fresh start. Treat it as such.

Now, I am not saying self-love is always easy. There will be days when it feels hard to show up for yourself. On those days, lean on someone who can encourage you a friend, family member, or mentor. Share your goals and ask them to check in with you. Accountability is a great motivator, and knowing someone is rooting for you can make all the difference.

It is also important to manage your expectations. Big changes take time. If you set out expecting perfection, you will only end up disappointed. Instead, allow yourself to be a beginner. Take it one step at a time. Progress is still progress, even when it feels slow.

When things get tough, remind yourself why you started. Maybe you wanted more energy, peace, or confidence. Whatever



your reason, keep it close. Reflect on the small steps you have already taken and the changes you have started to notice. Those small wins are proof that you are moving in the right direction.

Above all, be kind to yourself. We are often our own worst critics. If you miss a workout, skip a task, or have a bad day, it does not mean you are failing. Life happens, and setbacks are normal. They are not the end of the road; they are just a part of the journey. What matters is that you keep going.

Self-love is not something you achieve and check off a list. It is a practice, one that you build into your life day by day. Some days it will feel easy, and other days it will feel like a struggle. That is okay. The key is to keep showing up for yourself, even when it feels hard.

So here is my challenge to you: make February the month you commit to one act of self-love each day. It does not have to be big or fancy. It can be as simple as taking a deep breath when you are stressed, saying no to something that does not serve you, or giving yourself a compliment. Whatever it is, do it with intention.

And do not forget to celebrate your progress. Every small step counts, and over time, those steps add up to something big.

You are worth the effort. Start treating yourself like you believe it. Let this be the month you fall in love with the person who has been there for you through it all, yourself.

Connect with Dianne Ojar at www.MasterYourShiftsHypnosis.com to explore your journey and enjoy a complimentary 20-minute chat. Let us take the first step together!

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THE SWEETHEART OF SOCA

Rae maintains her focus on making an impact at T&T Carnival

For Rae, the rising star of Soca music, passion and perseverance are fueled by more than just a love for music.

Known as the “Sweetheart of Soca,” Rae credits her family and personal growth as driving forces behind her career. With several new releases already out in anticipation of Carnival 2025 in Trinidad and Tobago, Rae is focused on maintaining her momentum, grateful for every milestone she’s reached so far.

Rae’s journey into Soca music began long before her breakthrough moment. Growing up, she balanced her time between Trinidad and Tobago, New York, and now Maryland, experiencing moments of uncertainty and fear.

“I’ve always loved to sing. I learnt to read music during my earlier years when I played the violin and after that, I attended the Frank Sinatra School of The Arts in the US,” Rae recalls. Although she initially pursued classical music, she realized it wasn’t her true calling. “It didn’t feel like it was enough for me,” she admits. Despite recording with young singers at Murder Inc. studios in New York and trying out for American Idol, Rae faced a series of setbacks that led her to step away from music professionally.

However, a phone call from a relative changed the trajectory of Rae’s career. Her cousin connected her with Darryl Gervais, a renowned songwriter and producer known for working with Soca legend Kees. Though Rae had never recorded Soca music before, she was determined to make the most of this opportunity.

She convinced Gervais to write two songs for her in time for the 2020 Carnival season. Thanks to Gervais’ connections, Rae was soon added to the “Toatin Riddim” alongside big names like Nadia Batson, Lyrikal, and Shal Marshall. “That was where it all started for me,” she says. “That’s when I got my break.”

Five years later, Rae has navigated the challenges of the pandemic and is now standing strong as a female artist in the Soca industry. “During the pandemic when many of us were confused about the direction we should go in, I did not give up,” she explains. “I did a lot of virtual performances and maintained my presence.” This perseverance helped propel her to new heights, especially as she began to emerge as a significant voice in Soca.

Her latest release, “Throw Waist,” comes after the success of tracks like “Wining Degree” and “Come Over,” a collaboration with Azaryah. With “Throw Waist,” Rae moves beyond the “sweet” songs she’s known for, embracing a more versatile sound. “Everybody calls me the Sweetheart of Soca, but I feel like that puts me in a category where people think I can only do ‘sweet’ songs,” Rae states. “I don’t want to get boxed in; I’m versatile, and I am capable of multiple variations when it comes to Soca music.”

As Rae heads to Trinidad and Tobago for Carnival 2025, she’s ready to take the music scene by storm. In 2024, she made an impressive showing as the second runner-up in the Antigua Soca Monarch, a success she calls “a win” in her own right. “I was an artiste nobody had known—with a song nobody had heard much of. That meant a lot to me,” she recalls.

Rae is also focused on delivering stronger vocals and greater connection with her audience through online engagement and visuals. “It’s not enough to just release the music anymore. People want to connect, and visuals help with that,” she says. “Bringing the content and the personality with the music, is the way forward.”

“Throw Waist,” written by Darryl Gervais and produced by Papoo, carries an empowering message for women. “This song is about the ladies, and the energy is all about dominating, empowering, and strengthening



Rae: new single is called Throw Waist

women all season long,” Rae explains.

As she prepares to parade with Paparazzi on Carnival Monday and Tuesday, Rae is laser-focused on her rise in the industry, setting high standards for herself and remaining determined to succeed. “It’s all about maintaining tunnel vision and pushing forward,” she says. For Rae, the journey has only just begun.



L-R: Rihanna, Sean Paul and Nikki Minaj

TOP OF THE CHARTS

Caribbean Artistes make the cut on Billboard's Top 100 of the 21st century

Jamaican dancehall icon Sean Paul, Barbadian superstar Rihanna, and Trinidadian rapper Nicki Minaj have earned spots on Billboard's prestigious Top Artists of the 21st Century list, unveiled earlier this week.

Sean Paul ranks at No. 88, making him the only Jamaican artist to achieve this milestone, while Rihanna and Nicki Minaj rank at No. 3 and No. 36, respectively.

The rankings, based on chart performance from January 1, 2000, to December 28, 2024, reflect artists' success on the Billboard 200 and Hot 100 charts. Songs and albums released before mid-1999 were excluded unless they charted within this timeframe.

Sean Paul's catalog boasts 19 Billboard Hot 100 hits, the most for any Jamaican act. His breakout single, "Gimme The Light" (2002), peaked at No. 7 and introduced his

versatile style to global audiences. Other notable hits include "Get Busy" (2003), which reached No. 1 and remained on the charts for 32 weeks, and "Temperature" (2006), which spent 17 weeks in the top 10. Collaborations like "Baby Boy" with Beyoncé, "Cheap Thrills" with Sia, and "Rockabye" with Clean Bandit have cemented his place as a dancehall legend.

Furthermore, Sean Paul's and Beyoncé's "Baby Boy" is ranked at No. 96 on the Top Hot 100 Songs of the 21st Century.

Rihanna ranks as the highest-placed female Caribbean artist, earning No. 3 on the list. With 14 No. 1 singles on the Hot 100, she has delivered hits like "Umbrella" featuring JAY-Z, "We Found Love" featuring Calvin Harris, and "Work" featuring Drake. Her chart dominance spans nearly two decades, making her a global cultural phenomenon.

Nicki Minaj, ranked No. 36, holds the record for the most Hot 100 entries among female artists, with 149 total. She was the first woman to surpass 100 entries on the chart and remains the only female rapper to achieve this milestone.

Latin music sensation Bad Bunny is ranked at No. 55, earning the title of the highest-ranking male Caribbean artist. Meanwhile, Taylor Swift and Drake top the list at No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, with Swift recognized as the biggest female artist of the 21st century by Billboard.

This recognition highlights the significant contributions of Caribbean artists to global music, showcasing their enduring impact and unparalleled talent.

Vybz seeks US visa to attend Grammy Awards

Dancehall icon Vybz Kartel is seeking a United States visa to attend the 67th Annual Grammy Awards next month, where his EP Party With Me is nominated for Best Reggae Album.

In an interview with Billboard, Kartel expressed excitement about the nomination while reflecting on his career. "If I wasn't incarcerated, I would have been nominated already. But I understand, why would they want to nominate a dude in prison? I know if I wasn't arrested, based on the trajectory that my career was on, I would have definitely won. But I'm very, very grateful."

The Party With Me EP, released on May 31, 2024, was created under unique circumstances. "It was done in prison. I was under a vibe and got some beats from [producer] Din Din. It was getting closer to crunch time because the case was now in England. I was writing to keep my mind occupied, ended up with these songs and said, 'Let me just put them on a little EP.' Bam, Grammy,"

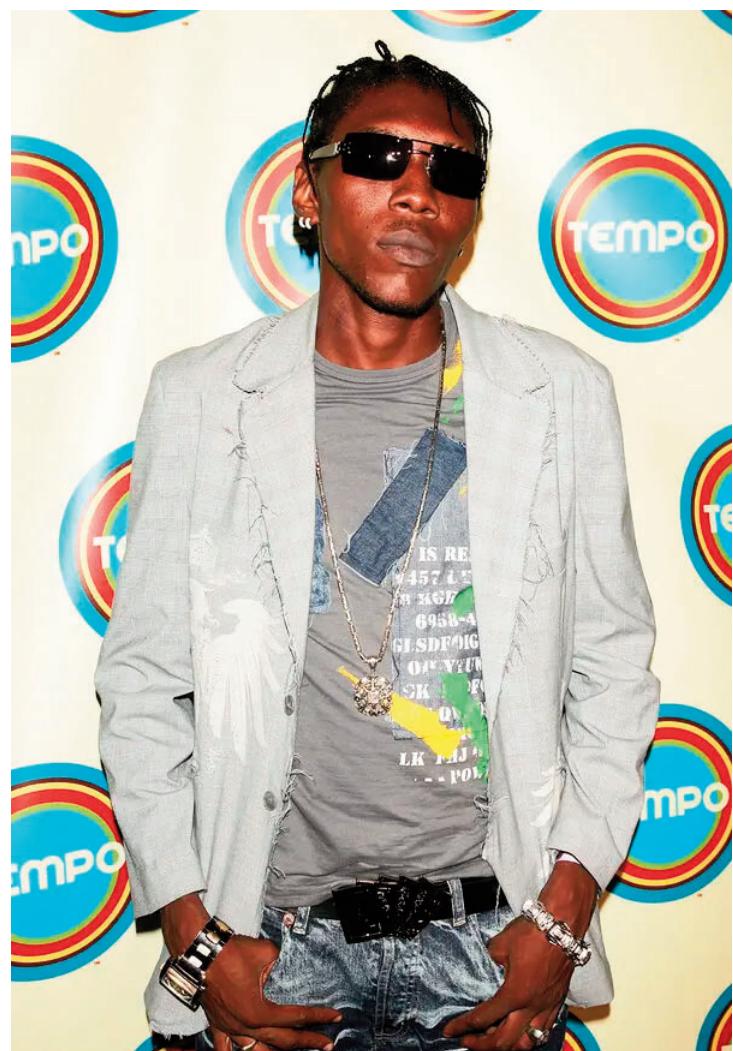
Kartel said.

The project reached number two on the iTunes Top 100 Reggae Albums chart and earned Kartel his first Grammy nomination, alongside contenders like Bob Marley, Collie Buddz, The Wailers, and Shenseea.

Kartel's visa application marks his first attempt to enter the U.S. since his visa was revoked in 2005 over what he referred to as "allegations." U.S. officials provided no explanation for the denial, but Kartel hopes for a breakthrough. "It would be a good look for all of us who are nominated to be at the Grammys," he said.

Other dancehall artists, including Buju Banton and Beenie Man, recently regained their U.S. visas, fueling optimism about Kartel's chances.

Although his U.S. plans remain uncertain, Vybz Kartel is confirmed to headline the Wireless Festival in England this year and will perform at SummerJam in Germany.



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No Visa for You!

Busy Signal cries racism after Canada denies him entry

Dancehall artist Busy Signal is urging Jamaican authorities to address what he describes as “injustice and prejudice” following the denial of his Canadian visitor visa. The decision, he alleges, carries undertones of racism and discrimination.

In an Instagram post on Friday, the artist shared a letter dated December 19, 2024, from the Canadian High Commission, addressed to his legal name, Reanno Devon Gordon.

The letter cited concerns under Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR), stating: “I am not satisfied that you will leave Canada at the end of your stay as required by paragraph 179 (b) of the IRPR. I am refusing your application because you have not established that you will leave Canada based on the following factors.”

The letter further suggested that the purpose of his visit “is not consistent with a temporary stay given the details provided in [his] application.”

Busy Signal expressed frustration, calling the denial an affront to his reputation as a globally recognized artist with a clean legal record.

“As a globally recognized Jamaican artist with an impeccable business track record, no current police record of any sort from any country, with active visas from the UK, USA, and Europe, I am calling on my country’s authorities for support in addressing the injustice, prejudice, and racist response I received when the Canadian High Commission/Embassy denied my visa application,” he said.

Online responses to Busy Signal’s post were mixed, with some fans and professionals questioning the visa application process itself. One commenter noted, “It seems the visa was wrongly filed...you wouldn’t be able to perform on that visa anyway.”

A self-identified immigration lawyer added that the artist should have applied for a work visa instead of a visitor visa.

Busy Signal defended his application, explaining his strategy of securing a visitor visa for



Busy Signal: visa denial is injustice

initial meetings before planning concerts and applying for a work visa.

“So I’ve always applied for visiting first, appear in the country to meet with possible business partners before planning a tour or concert then apply for a work visa. This was only first step. So no, I did not give the impression I planned to work on a visiting. Over 20 years in the music business traveling. So I, nor my team would do something so stupid.,” he stated.

The denial comes despite Busy Signal’s clean current record, but his legal history remains a factor.

In 2012, he was arrested in the UK under an extradition warrant, jailed in Jamaica, and eventually extradited to the US, where he pleaded guilty to failure to appear in court on previous drug trafficking charges. He served two months in a US federal prison and has since rebuilt his career, obtaining a US visa in 2017.



Jamaica Carnival will be held on April 27 with a record amount of visitors expected

MAS IN THE YA'ARD

Jamaica has big plans for Carnival 2025

With less than 100 days to go before Carnival Sunday on April 27, 2025, excitement is building across Jamaica.

The island's vibrant carnival celebrations will see three bands—Xodus, GenXS, and Yardmas—taking to the streets with distinct themes, events, and performances. Each band has unveiled its themes, promising a spectacle of color, music, and revelry.

Xodus will bring “Utopia: The Garden of Paradise” to life, transporting revelers to an Edenic fantasy. GenXS embraces grandeur with its theme, “Kingdom of the Sun,” showcasing radiant costumes. Meanwhile, Yardmas, the most recently launched band, celebrates Jamaica with the patriotic theme “Land We Love,” paying homage to the island’s culture and natural beauty.

The week leading up to Carnival Sunday will feature an array of high-energy events. Xodus will host Tailgate (April 24), Fete Gala (April 25), and Remedy: Mini Road March (April 26). GenXS revelers will enjoy “Immortals J’ouvert” on Saturday, April 26. Yardmas Jump Up Week festivities include Yardmas J’ouvert on April 26 and Yardmas Beach on April 28.

Carnival in Jamaica continues to be a powerful driver for tourism and the local economy. The 2024 staging welcomed an esti-

mated 100,000 visitors to the island from April 3–9, generating significant revenue.

The Jamaican government is optimistic about 2025, with projections of earning around \$5 billion JMD and attracting over 9,000 costumed revelers to the festivities. Delano Seiveright, senior strategist in the Ministry of Tourism, highlighted these figures in 2024, underscoring Carnival’s growing influence as a tourism staple.

Beyond direct spending, the growing popularity of the event has triggered increased demand across various support industries. These include air and ground transportation, accommodation, gastronomy, crafts, merchant sales, job creation, entertainer services, vendor sales, and event production essentials such as sound, DJ services, decor, bars, rentals, food, and staffing.

As Carnival in Jamaica 2025 approaches, stakeholders and participants alike are gearing up for a memorable experience. From dazzling costumes to pulsating soca music and high-energy events, this year’s staging promises to deliver an unparalleled celebration of Caribbean culture.



Cars of the Year

AJAC set to unveil its choices at 2025 Toronto Auto Show

The Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC) revealed the 12 Best Vehicles in Canada for 2025 today during a media preview ceremony at the Montreal International Auto Show (MIAS). Competing as finalists for this year's Canadian Car of the Year Awards (CCOTY), the winners are to be presented during the opening ceremony that will kick-off the Media Preview Day of the 2025 Canadian International AutoShow on February 13th in Toronto.

The Canadian Car of the Year Awards feature four distinct categories: Canadian Car of the Year, Canadian Utility Vehicle of the Year, Canadian Electric Car of the Year, and Canadian Electric Utility Vehicle of the Year.

"We are excited to once again host the Canadian Car of the Year Awards in partnership with AJAC," says Jason Campbell, General Manager of the AutoShow. "It's an honour to continue our longstanding relationship with AJAC and make this award ceremony an annual highlight of the Canadian International AutoShow. Congratulations to all the finalists, we look forward to seeing the final results announced on Media Day in Toronto next month."

Selected by Canadian Car of the Year jurors, the 12 Best Vehicles in Canada for 2025 competing for the Canadian Car of the Year Awards are as follows:

The three finalists for 2025 Canadian Car of the Year are:

Acura Integra Type S

Honda Civic

Toyota Camry

The three finalists for 2025 Canadian Utility Vehicle of the Year are:

Hyundai Santa Fe

Mazda CX-70

Toyota LandCruiser

The three finalists for 2025 Canadian Electric Car of the Year are:

BMW i4

Fiat 500e

Lucid Air

The three finalists for 2025 Canadian Electric Utility Vehicle of the Year are:

Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

Kia EV9

Mazda CX-70 Plug-In

The list of 12 Best Vehicles in Canada for 2025 features a blend of newcomers and long-standing favourites among Canadian car buyers.



The Acura Integra Type S is in the running for Car of the Year

"Forty-eight of Canada's top automotive journalists have driven and voted on these vehicles and found them to be the best in the country in their categories. I'm also proud of our jurors, who each year work hard to determine which vehicles are the Best in Canada, giving you reliable and relevant information when it comes to your own next new-vehicle purchase," said Evan Williams, AJAC president.

The list of 12 Best Vehicles in Canada is based on detailed ballots completed by AJAC's expert journalists. Over 600 ballots were submitted by 48 jurors located across Canada, from Vancouver to Halifax. CCOTY is Canada's ONLY vehicle awards program in which the jurors drive every vehicle they vote on. Vehicles are tested on the same roads and in the same conditions faced by Canadian drivers from coast to coast every day.

The winners in all four categories for Canadian Car of the Year will be announced on Thursday, February 13, 2024, at the Canadian International AutoShow (CIAS) in Toronto. Results from AJAC journalist member ballots are audited by international accounting firm KPMG and remain under wraps until the moment the envelopes are opened.

The 2025 Canadian International AutoShow, presented by Toronto Star, returns to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre from Feb-

ruary 14th to the 23rd. This year's theme "Total Immersion" highlights the AutoShow's unique position during a time of change in the automotive industry. Consumer choice has never been as vast and diverse as today. The AutoShow is the place for brands to showcase their newest products and technologies.



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A Carnival Playlist

Lyrikal releases 20 songs for the 2025 T&T Mas season

Devon "Lyrikal" Martin has released 20 songs this Trinidad Carnival, creating a diverse playlist for the 2025 season.

The tracks offer a variety of music –from pulsating power soca anthems for the road to groovy, mid-tempo tunes for fetes and with "patriotism that touches the heart," a media release said.

Known for his energetic performances, Lyrikal's latest contributions reflect his commitment to the art form and culture, the release said.

"Carnival is not just an event; it's a feeling, a celebration of life, love, and freedom. I wanted to create something for everyone –no matter where you are or how you feel," Lyrikal said in the release.

"Of all the songs I have released thus far, there is a song for everyone; my goal was to make sure that no one is left out of the Carnival experience."

The collection of songs, which Lyrikal calls his "Carnival Playlist," is something he has always wanted to do and felt 2025 was the perfect time to bring this dream to life, the release said.

There are two collaborations among the 20 songs.

Songs such as Dotish, Strange Things, Bacchanal Time, and Carnival Meeting are gaining traction on streaming platforms and in Carnival circuits across the Caribbean and the diaspora, the release said.

Lyrikal's Carnival 2025 playlist is also a journey through the vibrancy and essence of soca music, the release said, adding that he reinforces his title as the New York's King of Soca while further solidifying his global appeal.

The songs can be streamed from his official Spotify playlist.



Lyrikal: released an entire Carnival playlist

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TINY DESK

Machel leads band in intimate concert for 10 million

Soca music has made it to NPR's Tiny Desk concert series.

Machel Montano and a group of talented musicians made history as they brought the Washington, DC, studio alive with the vibrant sounds of the TT-born genre.

The 20-minute concert was uploaded to YouTube on January 13 (images from the concert leaked online in late November 2024).

The Tiny Desk Concert series, which began in 2008, allows singers and musicians to give intimate live concerts. Many of its videos garner millions of views.

NPR Music's YouTube channel has over ten million subscribers and nearly 3,000 videos uploaded. Major artistes have graced this studio, such as Usher, Adele, Sting, Shaggy, Alicia Keys, T-Pain, Justin Timberlake, Damian "Jr Gong" Marley, Erykah Badu, Coldplay, Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift.

Montano opened his show, in front of a live audience, with his 2007 hit One More Time.

Before moving on, he told the audience, "My name is Machel Montano, from Trinidad and Tobago."

He added that in the Caribbean, "It's always dancing time."

He went on to sing Dance With You, then told the audience to get ready for "wining time," moving on to Fast Wine.

Taking off his jacket, he joked, "Time to turn up that heat."

He explained they would be transitioning from groovy to power soca, then sang Like Ah Boss, Famalay and Soca Kingdom.

Audience members jumped, danced and sang along. Some waved bandanas with the national flags of different Caribbean countries.

Montano was accompanied by musicians Kyle Peters (guitar), Bayete Williams (keyboard), Duane "Abletron Gawd" Williams (effects), Dwain "Dwaingerous" Antrobus (keyboard), Damien Neblett (bass guitar), Melvin Alick (drums), Etienne Charles (trumpet, flugelhorn), Rhys Thompson and Modupe Onilu aka Boom-boomroomtt (percussion), and Lamar Antwon Robinson and Michael Chandlar as backup vocalists.



Machel Montano along with his band at NPR's headquarters in Washington, DC

In an Instagram post, Montano said it was not just his moment but "our (TT's) moment.

"Today we made history. For the first time ever, soca music has graced the iconic NPR Tiny Desk stage, and I am filled with gratitude, and an overwhelming sense of pride, to represent our culture on this global platform.

"(This is) a moment for every soca lover, every Caribbean soul, and every person who carries the rhythm of the islands in their heart. Let's celebrate this milestone together. Watch it. Share it. Be proud of how far our music has come. Thank you for being part of this journey."

NPR Music posted on Instagram: "Stretch and loosen up! Machel Montano is the first to bring soca, the high-energy dance music of the Caribbean, to the desk."

Montano replied, "What an honour and a privilege! Thank you for the opportunity and for sharing the joy of soca to the world. We had a blast at your spot!"

Fellow artistes congratulated him including Mical Teja, Wendell Manwarren, Teddyson John, among others. TUOC (Trinbago Unified Calypsonians) also did so.

Montano's mother Elizabeth "Lady" Montano told Newsday her pores raised and the performance brought her to tears.

She said she felt a deep sense of pride, knowing how hard her son had worked over the years.

She was happy to see so many positive comments under the YouTube video.

"I was explaining to Machel that there were some people (in the comments) who said they didn't know the artiste or the genre, and then people from the Caribbean started to explain who he is, what he means to the region, how long he has been doing (music)..."

"I am always proud of him. He loves and represents music, the culture, the people of TT and the Caribbean."

She was also happy the band was made up of Caribbean people.

"There were Bajans, Trinis, people who went far back with him...He always puts this effort into what he does, because he knows the meaning and the purpose."

Although she was in the US at the time, she was unable to attend the live recording.

Miss Diva

Canadian artiste hoping to make inroads at T&T Carnival in 2025

Canadian-born artiste Alicia "Miss Diva" Anderson is eager to make inroads in the soca and Carnival circuit for 2025.

Having captured the hearts of many in her home country, she is now taking aim at Trinidad and Tobago, a media release said.

For Miss Diva, who is a product of three countries – Canada, TT and Jamaica – music has no boundaries.

"A person who loves music does not box himself in," she said in the release.

She said she owes her love for music to the exposure she had as a child with her mother being involved in cultural activities and the radio circuit in Jamaica and Canada.

While growing up, she spent time in both Jamaica and TT, where her step-father lived.

"My mother married into the Trinidadian culture. I remember sitting with Chucky in front of the gate in Woodbrook, and singing songs as a child."

Based in Montreal, Miss Diva is determined to boost her catalogue with more soca music and has released her second soca track in two years.

She says while most of her prominence in music has been attributed to the reggae genre, having worked with artistes like Luciano, Glen Washington and Macka Diamond over the years, she is very optimistic about her crossover into soca music, the release said.

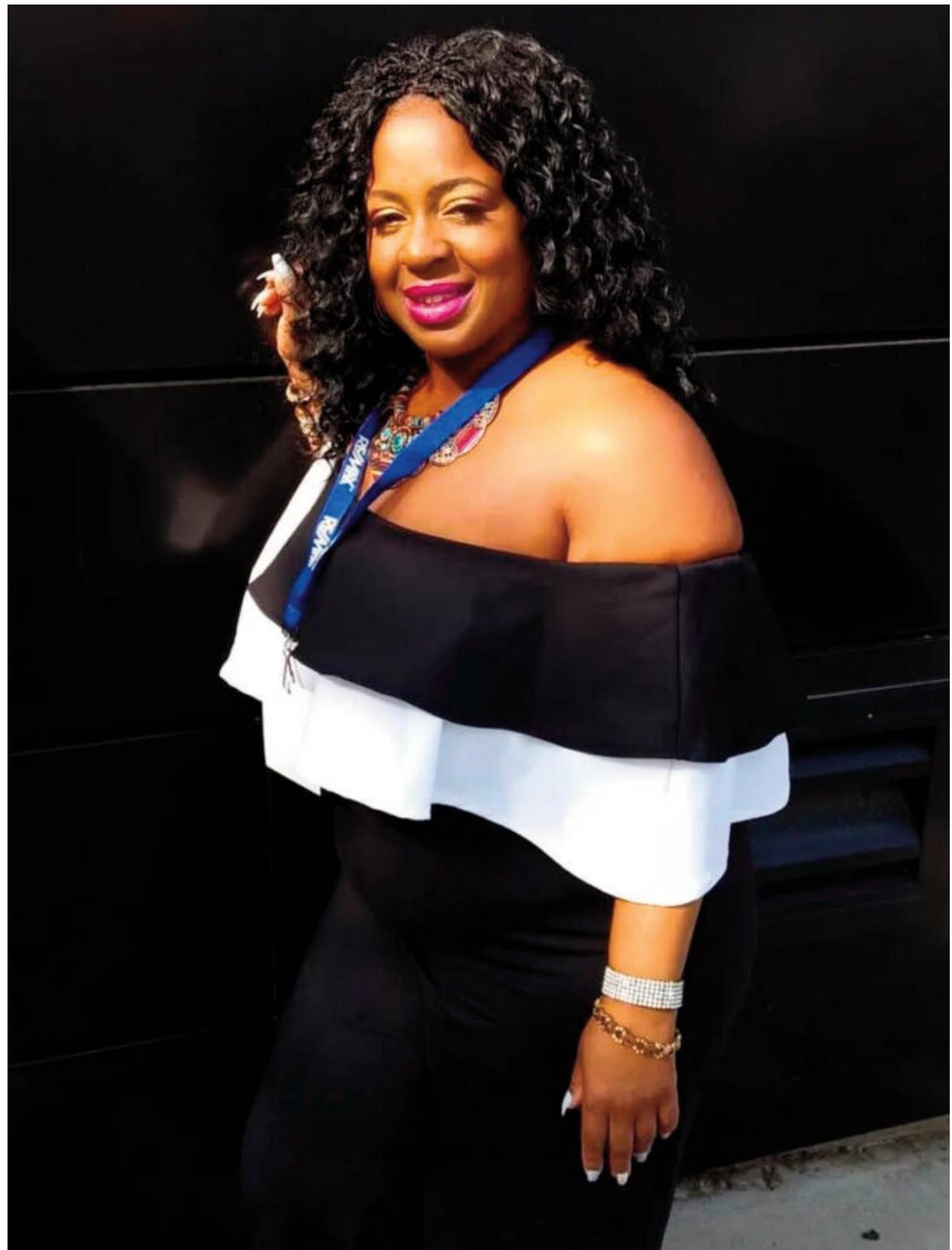
"Last season, I released a song called Energy Bumper and the feedback that I received was really good, but I released it a bit later than I should have, so now, I'm jumping in with the anticipation that the people will get to hear and enjoy it."

An 18-time queen of the band mas winner in Canada, Miss Diva admits she is competitive and is always hungry when it comes to music and her career. She is also open to entering Carnival competitions.

"I'm naturally a competitive person but the aim is not just to win, but to know that I made it to the big stage."

"I grew up seeing the work ethic of artistes like Buju Banton, Marcia Griffith, Tanya Stephens and many others. My mother worked among these artistes and what I saw then, is a major part of who I am now."

Her 2025 soca release *Meet Me on the Road* is a testament to her personal love for the road



Miss Diva: bringing Canadian, Jamaican and T&T influences in her music

as a masquerader, the release said.

"This song was produced by ICU studios. He's from Grenada and he's worked with Mr Killa and even Skinny Fabulous," she said, adding there will be a remix to the single in due time.

"My aim is to tap into this market and leave a lasting impression."

Miss Diva says her earlier years have prepared her for where she knows her destiny will

lead her, as she continues making music she knows others will enjoy.

"When I'm in the Caribbean, I feel like it's where I belong because I spent so much time in Trinidad and Jamaica, as a child. I'm eager to be a part of the scene as an artiste, particularly so with soca music."

She is inspired by the work and attitude of artistes like Patrice Roberts, Fay-Ann Lyons, Preedy and Nessa Preppy.

DIDDY FIGHTS BACK

Mogul Says His 'Freak-Off' Videos With Cassie 'Consensual'

Hip Hop mogul Diddy is responding to the "freak-off" allegations by Cassie Ventura and is disputing that his ex-girlfriend of more than a decade was forced to participate in sex events.

Cassie made allegations against Diddy that she was trafficked, drugged, and forced to participate in the "freak-off," which often involved third parties, including male prostitutes. Diddy is currently facing mounting criminal charges and civil suits over allegations by several other victims, and he's presently incarcerated in a Federal jail in Brooklyn.

However, the rapper and former Bad Boy Entertainment CEO has filed a response in legal documents disputing that Cassie is the victim she claims to be. According to TMZ, the legal documents filed by Diddy claim that the "freak-off" videos reveal that the sexual activity was consensual and that that even works to prove his innocence.

The celebrity news site, in a report on Tuesday, said that the tapes show that Cassie enjoyed herself in them, contradicting her claim that she was subjected to coercion or duress in participating in the "freak-off."

Diddy's legal team claims they reviewed nine videos. Cassie allegedly provided the "freak-off" videos to the authorities in support of the criminal investigation launched following her lawsuit over a year ago. The attorneys referred to the tapes as showing "private sexual activity between fully consenting adults in a long-term relationship and that Cassie "not only consented but thoroughly enjoyed herself" during the "freak-off."

The report added that Cassie appeared "evidently happy, dominant and completely in control" in the tapes. Filings by prosecutors



Cassie (left) made serious allegations against the rap mogul Diddy

say that the tapes are elaborate and produced performances despite the claim about consensual sex by the defense.

In the meantime, the lawyers have also questioned why Cassie kept the tapes, insinuating that she enjoyed the performances so much she wanted to keep them for posterity rather than the evidence she and the prosecution intend it to be.

Diddy's lawyers also claim that she was aware of the tapes being made and that they weren't secret.

"There are no secret cameras, no orgies, no other celebrities involved, no underground tunnels, no minors, and not so much as a hint of coercion or violence," the filing said, according to TMZ.

As for sex trafficking allegations, the filing said the tapes prove there was no evidence of sex trafficking.

In the meantime, another victim is claim-

ing that Diddy drugged and sexually assaulted her when she was 16 years old in 2000.

The victim, whose lawsuit is filed as a Jane Doe, claims that she was offered a ride by Diddy and two other men after she left her babysitting job in Manhattan. After accepting the ride, she said she was given a drink by Diddy, which left her "groggy." She claimed that the rapper and producer raped her, and later, she was dropped off at her apartment building.

Her lawsuit joins others making similar allegations against Diddy, including the most explosive by producer Rodney 'Lil Rod' Jones, who claimed he was sexually assaulted by Diddy in 2023 while working on his R&B album, 'The Love Album: Off the Grid.'

Diddy's trial is set to begin sometime in May. He is charged with racketeering conspiracy, sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion, and transportation for prostitution.

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Jamaica is trying to attract the modern traveller by highlighting its cultural heritage and vibrant beauty

CONTRASTS

Jamaica unveils dynamic new campaign to attract modern visitors

The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) has launched a dynamic new campaign, "Contrasts," aimed at capturing the hearts of modern travelers seeking diverse, immersive experiences.

Created in collaboration with Accenture Song, the campaign highlights Jamaica's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and vibrant atmosphere, reinforcing its position as a must-visit Caribbean destination.

With the tagline "One Love," the campaign emphasizes Jamaica's multidimensional appeal, offering something for every kind of traveler—whether they seek luxury, adventure, romance,

or cultural immersion.

Hon. Edmund Bartlett, Jamaica's Minister of Tourism, expressed the essence of the campaign: "We have immense pride in our people, our hospitality, and the multitude of experiences we are able to provide. This campaign showcases just that and compels both new and returning visitors to explore the range of vibes we offer."

Building on the success of the earlier "Come Back" campaign, "Contrasts" celebrates the island's diversity and encourages travelers to experience Jamaica's vibrant culture firsthand. From its luxury accommodations and breathtak-

ing landscapes to its soulful music, cuisine, and people, the campaign captures the depth and charm of the island.

Donovan White, Director of Tourism, emphasized the transformative power of a Jamaican vacation: "Our wish is for visitors to feel in total sync with the best version of themselves. In Jamaica, they can enjoy a vacation tailored to their interests through our diverse cultural experiences, unparalleled beauty, and warm hospitality. It's a vibe that can only be found on our shores."

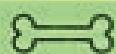
PHOENIX

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North-Chan of Tokyo

Kanye's daughter spits some bars in Japanese on new song

Kanye West's daughter North West is spitting some bars on FKA twigs' new song "Childlike Things," and she's doing it in Japanese.

The track, released on Friday (January 24), appears on FKA's new album EUSEXUA.

Per Genius, North's verse translates as: "Hello/ My name is North-chan/ From California to Tokyo/ Jesus, the King/ Praise the Lord/ Jesus is the one and only true God (You need to know.)"

Last year, North announced that she was planning her own debut album, with a title inspired by her dad's own breakthrough project.

At a Vultures 2 listening event in Phoenix last March, North stood side by side with her father at the center of the stage as she made the announcement.

"I've been working on an album and it is called Elementary School Dropout," the 10-year-old said to a roar from the crowd.

The name is, of course, a nod to Kanye's 2004 landmark debut The College Dropout.

The reveal came shortly after North made her music debut on her father and Ty Dolla \$ign's collaborative project Vultures 1, featuring prominently on "Talking."

The track peaked at No. 30 on the Billboard Hot 100, making her one of the youngest ever artists to appear on the chart.

On the song, North raps: "I love it here/ We're gonna take over another year/ It's your bestie, Miss, Miss Westie/ Don't try to test me/ It's gonna get messy/ Just, just bless me, bless me/ It's your bestie, Miss, Miss Westie."



North West with her father Kanye West

North wasn't the only West child at the listening event. Kanye West also brought out his two youngest children, Psalm and Chicago, while their older sister performed "Talking."

At the listening party, Ye and Ty Dolla \$ign played eight songs from the then-forthcoming Vultures 2, including collaborations with Future, Playboi Carti, Lil Durk, Project Pat, Don Toliver and o7o Shake. North eventually appeared on Vultures 2, rapping — in Japanese — on "Bomb."

Several days after that listening event, North discussed her debut project in an interview.

The young rising star had a brief on-camera chat with social media figure and fellow child star Jazzy on the first night of Rolling Loud California. After thanking Kim Kardashian for setting up the interview, the reporter and actress asked her guest about the release of Elementary School Dropout, to which North replied: "It's gonna be great."

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Big Sean stars as Morpheus in the video, while Will Smith plays Neo

IN THE MATRIX

Will Smith leaves fans wondering if he's going to star in upcoming movie...but it's just a teaser for a song

Will Smith has teamed up with Big Sean to reveal the truth behind his recent Matrix teaser.

While some fans believed that Smith would be starring in a new Matrix movie, it has now been revealed that the Hollywood star and Detroit rapper will be joining forces for a new single called "Beautiful Scars."

A trailer announcing the song was unveiled by Smith on January 26 and it recreates one of the most iconic scenes from the 1999 movie where Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, has to choose between taking a blue pill or a red pill to determine his future.

In the short clip, Big Sean plays Morpheus (originally portrayed by Laurence Fishburne) while Smith is in the role of Neo.

At one point, Sean says to Smith: "Look, you've made some awesome career choices your whole life. There's only one you truly re-

gret. Well, maybe two, but we're not gonna focus on that one," alluding to his infamous slap on Chris Rock at the 2022 Oscars.

The former G.O.O.D. Music MC then says: "So, I'm gonna give you a choice. Blue pill, everything remains the same, and you get to move on with your life. Red pill, you get to go back and star in that movie that got away. The choice is yours."

Unlike in the film where Neo takes the red pill, Smith swallows both pills, prompting a hilariously stunned response from Sean.

The video ends before it reveals what happens next.

It is likely that the music video for the track — which was released on January 30 — will also be inspired by The Matrix, though it is not known if the creative team behind the film are responsible for the teaser clip.

The Matrix teasers began earlier this month when Will Smith uploaded a video to Instagram which said: "In 1997, the Wachowski's offered Will Smith the role of Neo in The Matrix. Smith turned it down. He chose Wild Wild West, believing it was a better fit for him at the time.

"But the question remains: What would The Matrix have been like with Will Smith as Neo? Wake up, Will... The Matrix has you..."

Despite his suggestive post, insiders told The Hollywood Reporter that the Fresh Prince will not appear in an upcoming Matrix movie from Warner Bros. and writer-director Drew Goddard, which was confirmed last year.

There was also speculation that the clip was promotion for a possible Super Bowl commercial.



It's a Ruff World

Snoop Dogg takes heat from fans after performing at Donald Trump's inaugural

Snoop Dogg isn't the only rapper who performed at a President Donald Trump Inaugural event this weekend, but he is the one getting the most heat.

On January 17, various celebrities, including singers and rappers, came together in Washington, D.C., to celebrate President Donald Trump's return to office. Among the performers at Trump's first-ever Crypto Ball were Snoop Dogg, Rick Ross, and Soulja Boy. Some fans on social media criticized the rappers for performing at the event in light of their past criticism of Trump.

Snoop Dogg is getting the most heat since he criticized Trump voters last year in a video shared on social media. "Let's make it clear, you vote for who you wanna vote for, it's fine

with me, but one of my homies, he was just like, 'I can't wait 'til Trump get back in here. He had a n**ga eatin'," Snoop said in the clip. "And I just don't want nobody to be delusional," he said at the time. "You can't be a delusional n***a. Did he have you eating or was it a nationwide, worldwide pandemic and you n***as stole the money?"

Fans on X reshared the video this weekend, slamming Snoop Dogg for the performance. "Now mind you, Snoop had a lot to say about Black artists performing at his first inauguration," one user on X wrote while sharing the video of Snoop going off on his friend for supporting Trump. Another fan wrote, "Tupac was right about Snoop, he plays both sides and does anything for a check."

Meanwhile, Dogg has finally responded to the criticism he's received for performing at an event in celebration of Donald Trump's return to the White House — and he isn't waving the white flag.

After facing heavy backlash online, including from his own fans and social media followers, Snoop addressed his decision to perform at the event in a video posted to Instagram on Sunday (January 26).

"Y'all can't hate enough me for me, I love too much. Get your life right, stop worrying about mine," he said. "I'm cool, I'm together. Still a Black man. Still a hundred percent Black. I ain't going nowhere, cuh! I'm right here. Get the Crypto on Crip, though."

IT WAS ME

Shaggy shouts out to fans after his monster hit “It wasn’t Me” hits over 1 billion views on Spotify

Shaggy and Rik Rok’s classic “It Wasn’t Me” has officially surpassed one billion streams on Spotify.

The song was released in 2000, decades before the era of streaming, which makes this achievement all the more impressive. “It Wasn’t Me” was released on Shaggy’s landmark album Hot Shot, which was released on November 7, 2000. The track, which arguably put the dancehall star on the global stage, was produced by Shaun “Sting” Pizzonia. Despite not earning any official certification in the United States, the song sold millions of copies worldwide.

Shaggy noted its achievement in a video shared on Instagram while thanking Spotify for the recognition and thanking his fans for still listening to the timeless song after 25 years.

“So I just want to say thanks to Spotify For recognizing over a billion streams of our single ‘It Wasn’t Me’ from the ‘Hot Shot’ album,” Shaggy said. “You know the crazy thing about this record is or this award. This is a billion streams after it already sold millions and millions and millions and millions and millions of hard copies.”

“So to have a record over you know 25 years selling millions and millions of hard copies and coming back and selling over a billion and streams again it’s just phenomenal,” the dancehall legend continues. “I just like to say thanks to the fans 100% of the fans the fans that made this record.”

Shaggy also took a slide dig at the record labels for not believing in the song until it became a mainstream success. “You know it wasn’t any record company that pushed this or anything it was just straight fans that love this record and they made that record live on and on and become a part of pop culture now,” he said. “So I just like to say thanks to Spotify, thanks to everybody that was involved and thanks to the fans. Much love.”

Shaggy’s Hot Shot album was certified 6X platinum in the United States by the RIAA in June 2001. “It Wasn’t Me” was the biggest song on the project and peaked at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. The song also climbed to the top of several other Billboard charts, including the US Hot Rap Songs, US Pop Airplay, and US Rhythmic Chart.



Shaggy: I'd just like to thank the fans

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