



BLXXD & FYAH
Kezmandi wins his first
ever ever Grammy for
Best Reggae Album



**Welcome to
Paradise**
Jamaican singer
Naomi Cowan
secures 2026
JUNO Nomination



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SUPER BUNNY

First Spanish-language album to win top award at 2026 Grammys

Bad Bunny won album of the year at the 2026 Grammy Awards for his critically-acclaimed “Debí Tirar Más Fotos,” closing out a surprising and history-making night. It is the first time a Spanish-language album has taken home the top prize.

“Puerto Rico, believe me when I tell you that we are much bigger than 100 by 35,” he said in his acceptance speech in Spanish, referring to a Puerto Rican colloquialism about the island’s small size. “And there is nothing we can’t achieve. Thank God, thank you to the Academy, thank you to all the people who have believed in me throughout my career.

“To all the people who worked on this album, thank you mami for giving birth to me in Puerto Rico, I love you,” he continued.

Then he switched to English: “I want to dedicate this award to all the people who had to leave their homeland to follow their dreams.”

Harry Styles presented the award — the English singer previously took home the top prize in 2023 for “Harry’s House.” He beat Bad Bunny that year, who was nominated for “Un Verano Sin Ti” -- the first Spanish-language album to be up in the category.

Billie Eilish won song of the year for “Wildflower” and used the moment to add her voice to the chorus of musicians criticizing immigration authorities Sunday.

“No one is illegal on stolen land,” she said while accepting the award for the song from her 2024 album “Hit Me Hard and Soft.” “(Expletive) ICE is all I want to say.”

Immigration was a central theme of the night. The first time Bad Bunny was on stage —



Bad Bunny during his acceptance speech for Album of the Year at the Grammys

after winning the award for música urbana album — he used his speech to share an anti-ICE message, highlighting the humanity of all people.

“Before I say thanks to God, I’m going to say ICE out,” he said, starting out his speech in English to huge applause. “We’re not savage, we’re not animals, we’re not aliens. We are humans and we are Americans.”

Before that, Olivia Dean was named best new artist.

“I never really imagined that I would be up here,” she said, receiving her first Grammy while wiping away tears. “I’m up here as a granddaughter of an immigrant. I wouldn’t be here ... I am a product of bravery, and I think that those people deserve to be celebrated.”

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COMING HOME TO Yourself

Last time we spoke, we talked about setting clear intentions. Not the kind you rush through or write down because you feel like you should, but the kind you actually feel in your body. The kind that makes you pause and say, yes, this matters to me. That conversation was about direction. About choosing how you want to show up. About deciding what you are no longer willing to carry forward.

Now I want to slow things down with you.

Because once an intention is set, the next step is not doing more. It is listening more. It is coming home to yourself.

So let me ask you something, and I want you to answer it honestly, even if the answer surprises you. How connected do you feel to yourself right now?

Not to your roles. Not to what you do for others. Not to the version of you that gets things done and keeps everything moving. I mean you. The real you. The one underneath the noise.

Most people do not lose themselves overnight. It happens quietly. Little by little. Through responsibility. Through expectations. Through putting everyone else first. Through pushing feelings aside because there is no time to deal with them right now.

And before you know it, you are doing all the right things, but something feels off.

That feeling is not wrong. It is not weakness. It is not something to fix. It is a signal. It is your inner self asking for your attention.

This is where this part of the journey begins.

Coming home to yourself is not about changing who you are. It is about remembering who you are. It is about rebuilding trust with yourself. Trust in your feelings. Trust in your instincts. Trust in the quiet

voice inside that has been trying to guide you all along.

Let us sit here together for a moment. You do not need to do anything. Just notice your breathing. Notice where your body feels tight and where it feels relaxed. Notice what comes up when you stop trying to manage everything.

This is where reconnection starts.

Many people think self-connection means self-care. And yes, self-care can be part of it. But this goes deeper. This is about how you speak to yourself. How you listen to yourself. How often you override what you know is true because it feels inconvenient or uncomfortable.

Think about the last time you ignored your own needs. Maybe you said yes when your body wanted rest. Maybe you stayed quiet when you wanted to speak up. Maybe you pushed through something even though every part of you was asking for a pause.

That does not make you wrong. It makes you human.

But here is the shift. Awareness gives you choice.

And choice gives you power.

When you come home to yourself, you stop abandoning yourself in small ways. You begin to notice what feels right and what does not. You begin to honor your limits without guilt. You begin to trust that you do not need to explain or justify every decision that protects your well-being.

This is not about becoming selfish. It is about becoming honest.

I want to share something personal with you. There were times in my own life when I stayed disconnected from myself because it felt safer. Because being present with my own truth meant I would have to make changes. Hard changes. Changes that required courage.

But every time I ignored that

inner voice, I paid for it in other ways. In my energy. In my health. In my sense of fulfillment.

Coming home to myself changed everything. Not overnight. Not perfectly. But steadily.

And that is what I want for you.

So let us talk about trust. Because self-connection and self-trust go hand in hand.

Trusting yourself does not mean you always have the answer. It means you are willing to listen. It means you stop dismissing your feelings as inconvenient or dramatic. It means you recognize that your body and your inner awareness hold wisdom.

When something feels heavy, it matters. When something feels aligned, it matters. When something drains you repeatedly, it matters.

You do not need permission to honor that.

I want you to imagine something with me. Imagine placing your hand on your chest and saying quietly to yourself, I am listening now.

What would change if you lived that way?

What decisions would look different? What boundaries would feel easier to set? What would you stop tolerating?

This is the work that happens after intentions are set. This is the grounding phase. The part where you build a relationship with yourself that feels steady and safe.

And here is something important. Coming home to yourself does not mean withdrawing from the world. It means showing up more fully in it. When you are connected to yourself, you are clearer. Calmer. More confident. Less reactive. More intentional.

You stop second guessing yourself as much. You stop looking outside of yourself for constant



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validation. You begin to move from a place of inner alignment instead of pressure.

That is powerful.

So let us make this practical. Over the next few days, I want you to notice moments when you feel disconnected. Notice when you rush. Notice when you override your own needs. And instead of judging yourself, simply pause and ask, what do I need right now?

Sometimes the answer will be rest. Sometimes it will be honesty. Sometimes it will be space. Sometimes it will be courage.

There is no wrong answer.

This is not about doing this perfectly. It is about doing it consistently.

If you want an intention to mirror, here is one you can use. Say it quietly to yourself or write it down if that feels right.

"I choose to listen to myself with honesty and compassion. I trust my inner guidance, and I honor what feels true for me."

Let that settle. Let it become familiar.

This is how trust is rebuilt. Not through force. Not through pressure. Through presence.

You do not need to become someone new. You are already enough. You are already wise. You are already capable.

This part of the journey is about remembering that.

And as we continue forward, everything builds from here. Clear intentions. Deep self-connection. Trust in your inner voice. From that place, action becomes cleaner. Decisions become easier. Life feels less heavy.

If you ever feel lost, come back here. Come back to yourself. That is always the starting point.

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SKEWERED!

Grammys host Trevor Noah makes fun of Nicki Minaj's praise of Donald Trump

Nicki Minaj has been responding to Grammys host Trevor Noah for skewering her support for President Donald Trump and her absence from the music awards show on Sunday night.

"As they do their ritual tonight, God almighty will reveal himself to them. The ritual will backfire on them. God will not be mocked. Blessed is the MIGHTY NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. Every tongue that rises up against me in judgement shall be condemned & put to shame," the "Super Freaky Girl" rapper said on her X account on Monday morning.

This follows a slew of posts from Minaj on her Twitter feed after Noah made his opening monologue jokes, including a homophobic insult at the host.

Minaj's praise for the president has drawn criticism following her appearance at Turning Point USA's AmericaFest in December.

During his opening monologue from the Crypto.com Arena stage Sunday night, as Noah introduced music legends in the audience, the Grammys host suddenly interjected with a mocking tone "Nicki Minaj is not here, not here. She is still at the White House with Donald Trump discussing very important issues."

Noah then imagined a conversation between Minaj and the president as he did a Trump impression: "Actually, Nicki, I have the biggest ass. I have it. Everybody is saying it, Nicki. I know they say it to you, but it's me. Look at it baby: WAP, WAP, WAP."

During her appearance at Turning Point USA's AmericaFest, Minaj told Erika Kirk, the organization's CEO and Charlie Kirk's widow, that she has "the utmost respect and admiration for our president. I don't know if he even knows this, but he's given so many people hope."

Noah's sixth and final hosting gig for the Grammys had him taking aim at president Trump as part of a 68th annual awards show that had the country's political tensions as a recurring theme as winners accepted trophies on stage or talked to the media afterwards.



Nicki Minaj says she has the utmost respect for Donald Trump

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ICE COLDS CHRONIC LAW

In custody at notorious 'Alligator Alcatraz' ICE facility in Florida

Jamaican artist Chronic Law has been in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for over two weeks and remains held at a Florida facility, known by its controversial nickname, "Alligator Alcatraz."

Since his initial detention on January 12, information from Chronic Law's camp has been scarce. His manager, Alexandre "Bashy 1Law" Jones, told DancehallMag on Friday that the Hillside artist has legal representation handling the matter, but he declined to comment further.

Public records show that Chronic Law, born Ackeme Jermene Campbell, was arrested in Turner County, Georgia, in November 2025 on a raft of traffic-related charges.

These included improper/erratic lane changes, reckless driving, speeding in excess of the maximum limit, and the more serious charge of attempting to elude a police officer. One source previously downplayed the severity of those charges, stating, "The case is not [as] se-

rious as bloggers are making it out to be," and emphasizing that "there are no gun charges."

Then, in the days leading up to his detention, the 32-year-old appeared to be moving freely in Florida. Two of his most recent Instagram posts were geotagged in Miami, placing him in the area shortly before he was taken into ICE custody.

He was officially listed at the Florida Soft Side South facility on January 15.

Located in Ochopee, within the swamp-lands of the Everglades, the "Soft Side" designation refers to the facility's structure: it is comprised largely of temporary, soft-sided tents rather than traditional concrete cell blocks.

Opened in mid-2025 as part of a state crackdown on undocumented immigrants, the facility has drawn criticism from human rights groups like Amnesty International. Detainees have complained of maggot-infested food, heat, and the psychological terror of being sur-

rounded by swamps inhabited by alligators and snakes—a feature Florida officials have touted as a natural deterrent against escape.

On Wednesday, former detainees testified in federal court that they were effectively cut off from the outside world and punished for seeking legal counsel. According to a report by ABC News, witnesses told a judge that they were denied basic supplies like pens and paper, forcing them to write their attorneys' phone numbers on the walls with soap.

Chronic Law was YouTube Jamaica's most-streamed artist of 2025. While his catalog is often characterized by dark, gritty narratives of street life, the artist has previously pushed back against claims that he promotes violence. In a 2023 interview, he described his lyrics as anthems of "self-protection" rather than aggression, explaining, "Yuh neva hear mi seh mi jus' a chop somebody. Mi affi get a cut first."

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Welcome to Paradise

Jamaican singer Naomi Cowan Secures 2026 JUNO nomination

Jamaican singer Naomi Cowan has secured her first-ever JUNO Award nomination, landing a spot in the “Reggae Recording of the Year” category for her debut album, Welcome To Paradise.

The nomination, announced at the end of January, pits the Paradise Plum singer against some of the Canadian reggae scene’s heaviest hitters for the 2026 awards.

Uniquely, Cowan is nominated for a complete body of work in a recording category otherwise dominated by standalone tracks this year. The other nominees are:

Exco Levi: The defending champion (who also won in 2012–2015 and 2017) is nominated for Ready For You (with Kheilstone).

Kirk Diamond: A three-time winner (2018, 2023, 2024), nominated for his track Deh Yah.

Samora & Ammoye: The duo is in the running for More Reggae (Funk It Up).

Dagga Riddim Cypher: A collective track featuring Jojo You Made That, Yung 2nuff, Erin B, Topman Meeko, One Don & Enzooo.

Cowan took to Instagram to share her excitement. “**♥CA♥ 1st album, 1st JUNO nomination in Canada,**” she began. “God really surprised me yesterday with this one. Paradise irl. 20 slides are not enough but if you’ve ever been to one of my shows, release parties, dubplate sessions or simply played my music in Canada. THANK YOU.”

Released in October 2025 via Cowan’s 7th C Records and Easy Star Records, Welcome To Paradise is described as a fusion of reggae, dancehall, and soul, exploring themes of self-worth, healing, and emotional evolution.



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Leonce Taylor has two hit songs this carnival season

READY UP

Leonce Taylor's soca gamble

For the average soca artiste trying to break through a crowded Carnival marketplace, every decision carries weight. For the 2026 Carnival season, Leonce Taylor took a calculated risk, trusting her instinct over being cautious and, for the first time, releasing two songs for the season.

Written by Jason "Shaft" Bishop and produced by Daddy O Productionz, Rugz Dirty Inc and Rhythym Productionz, His Loss is a groovy soca encouraging women to keep their heads up after a breakup.

Taylor was nominated for Best New Artist (Soca) at the Caribbean Music Awards in 2023 and again in 2024, recognition that quietly placed her among the genre's rising voices. It was at the 2024 awards show that she met Shaft, who insisted he would make her a hit song.

He called a few weeks after the awards and the result was His Loss, a song Taylor described as almost effortless to create.

"It didn't take me a long time to record or anything. It was just golden. It was something that was just mechanical. It just happened."

Released in October, His Loss has received steady airplay, a sig-

nificant achievement for an artiste based outside TT. Taylor lives in New York, and like many foreign-based performers, she has had to contend with the perception that distance can dilute relevance.

Still, Taylor wanted a power soca song, but releasing another in the same season felt risky.

She said that established artistes can afford to put out four or five songs, but for lesser-known performers, she believes the music can easily get lost in the mix. She did not want to have to "fight up" to push her song and get it played.

Finally, she decided to take the gamble and contacted musician and producer Alexander Gooding of Lunatix Productions for the music. Then she asked soca artiste Umi Marcano to write the song.

The result was Ready Up, which pushed her vocally and challenged her own perceptions of her range.

"Now there were a lot of high notes. Alex wanted to see how far I could push my vocal ability, my vocal range, and he was impressed. He said, 'Yeah. This could work.'

"He says my vocal tone favours Destra (Garcia) a lot. And it could be that everybody thinks that we sound alike, but even though we have a similar tone, her vocal range is way wider than mine."



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CRICKET LOVELY CRICKET

Nine-year-old balances cricket, school and big dreams

Cricket is a sport loved by many in Trinidad and Tobago, but for nine-year-old Amara Jasmin Gopichandsingh, it is far more than a pastime – it is a way of life that strengthens her focus, discipline and self-awareness both on and off the field.

A student at Tabaquite Presbyterian School in Trinidad, Gopichandsingh, is maintaining excellence in her schoolwork – demonstrating that passion and academics can coexist harmoniously.

Asked to describe herself beyond the cricket field, Gopichandsingh admitted to being quiet, energetic, and funny depending on her surroundings. That adaptability is reflected in how she juggles school, training and family life.

Cricket has always been part of her world. Growing up as the youngest of five children in a family deeply involved in the sport, Gopichandsingh was introduced to the game from an early age. “When I was really small growing up, and I went cricket with my dad, the guys on the team would always bowl the ball to me and sometimes my siblings also. There, I realised the love and passion I had for the game,” she shared.

Watching her family play only strengthened that connection. Seeing everyone in my family playing, and being the youngest, I always looked up to my other siblings and was always eager to get started,” she said. Her two older brothers, Amrit and Aroon, both played with the South East Trinidad Zone Cricket and represented Powergen at the Under-19 Cricket Team. Her parents, too, competed successfully in both windball and hardball leagues, winning numerous finals across the country.

“When I saw all the things my dad achieved throughout his career, I knew this was for me,”

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Amara Gopiechand with her coach, former West Indies player Samuel Badree
she said.

But how did she feel stepping into a sport often viewed as a boys’ game? “I felt nervous and shy when I first started training because I was placed in a group with only boys...I would always be the last one to be chosen,” she said. But persistence paid off. “Until I started to play even better than them, and now, I’m up the line when it’s time to choose.”

One moment, in particular, stands out in her young cricketing career. “My team had eight runs to make in three balls, and I was the last wicket. I hit two fours to win the game.”

Since 2023, Gopichandsingh has been training at the Samuel Badree Cricket Academy at the University of TT Campus in Tarouba on Sat-

urdays, while practising three days a week with her father. “Training there is exciting and sometimes challenging. I learn new skills and my coaches always motivate and encourage me,” she said. She particularly enjoys improving her skills alongside her peers and is currently focused on bowling, hoping one day to become an all-rounder like her role model Hayley Matthews. Still, she admits, “I prefer batting because it is my strength.”

Former West Indies cricketer Samuel Badree, whose academy Gopichandsingh attends, spoke highly of her attitude and development. “I would describe Amara’s attitude as one of eagerness. She is very enthusiastic, and she comes to every session with a lot of alacrity,” he said.

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PAN TUNE FATHER

FireTender pays tribute in 2026 song to Lord Kitchener

Last year, calypsonian FireTender made a splash with her woman-positive anthem, Leave She Alone. For Carnival, she is singing the praises of the late Lord Kitchener, the iconic calypso "Grand Master", with her new composition, Pan Tune Father.

FireTender, aka singer-songwriter Gillian Moore, is now in her third year in the kaiso arena. It's also her third year as part of the cast at the Kalypso Revue, the tent founded by Kitchener himself.

She is a graduate of UTT's master of carnival arts programme, where, for her masters research, she studied the woman-themed works of Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts, 1922-2000), analysing some 175 calypsoes from his decades-long career. "Kitchener is such a source of inspiration," says Moore. "His repertoire, over 70 years of writing calypso, is monumental. I wanted to pay tribute to the gifts he's given us."

"I wrote this calypso to remind people of the amazing pan tunes Kitch created. Those tunes had magical, original melodies, irresistible tempo, and that vibrant spirit he used to bring to his performance. "I also want younger people to know about him and listen to his music."

Pan Tune Father, composed by Fire Tender, was created by a talented team of musicians, including initial arrangement by gifted keyboardist and composer, Philip Hill, who passed away in November 2025. Fire Tender says the song is dedicated to his memory.

Producer Makesi Jawara Joseph, a talented musician in his own right, took up the reins, creating a fitting Kitchener-esque feel that captures nostalgia while also

featuring Fire Tender's performance. "Makesi has brilliant musical instincts," says Fire Tender, "and he also has the training, knowledge and experience to back them up."

Joseph, a graduate of UTT and a multi-instrumentalist who has toured internationally with top local talents, performs on drums, percussion and pan, in addition to his production credit.

Bassist Joanna Hussain, member of Moore's band Bush Tea, holds down a sweet, danceable groove. She also played on last year's FireTender



FireTender — studied themed works of Lord Kitchener

offering, alongside her brother, versatile guitarist John Hussain. He also returns, playing some stylish licks and driving the melody. The latter Hussain and Moore graduated in the same cohort from UTT's carnival arts programme.

Saxophonist Tony Paul, who teaches at UTT and collaborated with both Clive Zanda and Ray Holman (Kitchener's Iron Man), adds a melodic flourish and some soulful harmonics to the catchy kaiso. "It's my first time collaborating

with Tony," Moore says. "He's such an ace, he brought the recording to a whole other level!"

"Reaction has been great so far," Fire Tender says. "People seem to be really feeling that Kitchener energy."

She feels the tune is the right step in her calypso journey: "It's Fire Tender's mission to keep the calypso fire alight, always emulating the very best exemplars of the art," she says.

"Who could be finer than Kitch?"

VYBZ GETS SUED FOR \$7M

Trinidad promoter claims breach of contract for cancelled show

Trinidad-based event promoter Jacho Entertainment Limited has filed a civil lawsuit against Jamaican dancehall star Vybz Kartel over the abrupt cancellation of the One Caribbean Music Festival, which was scheduled for May 31, 2025.

The matter was filed on Tuesday in the High Court of Justice and alleges breach of contract, unjust enrichment, and defamation, among other claims. Jacho Entertainment is seeking damages in excess of TT\$7.3 million (approximately US \$1.07 million), along with the recovery of US\$1.1 million already paid to the artist under a performance agreement.

According to court filings, Jacho Entertainment entered into a written contract with Palmer on November 22, 2024, under which he agreed to headline the festival for a fee of US\$1.35 million, payable in four instalments. The event was originally scheduled for February 28, 2025, but was later postponed to May 31, reportedly with the knowledge and involvement of the artist's management team.

The promoter claims that by May 29, approximately 81 per cent of the agreed fee had been paid, leaving a balance of US\$250,000. Court documents state that the outstanding amount was to be settled upon the artist's arrival in Trinidad and Tobago, and that while temporary foreign exchange constraints affected timing, the funds were available on the day of the event.

The lawsuit alleges that Palmer failed to board his scheduled flight to Trinidad on May 30, and that his representatives subsequently demanded full payment before arrival — a condition Jacho Entertainment says was not required under the contract. On the day of the festival, the artist announced the cancellation publicly via media interviews and social media, without issuing the formal written notice stipulated in the agreement.

Jacho Entertainment said the last-minute cancellation caused significant disruption, as patrons had already entered the venue or travelled from across Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. The company said it was forced to halt the event, issue emergency an-



Vybz Kartel — didn't perform at advertised concert in Trinidad

nouncements and implement crowd-control measures to ensure public safety.

The promoter claims it assumed responsibility for refunds, logistics and public communication in the aftermath, absorbing substantial costs related to venue hire, staffing, security and technical production. Thousands of ticket holders were reportedly affected, and Jacho Entertainment says it suffered rep-

utational damage as public narratives emerged assigning blame for the failed event.

In its filing, the company further alleges that statements made by Palmer on social media following the cancellation falsely portrayed the promoter as having failed to meet payment obligations, exposing the company to public ridicule and damaging relationships with sponsors and industry partners.

SŌK-D'M

T&T Producer creates a new genre of soca music mixed with EDM

Entrepreneur, producer and cultural innovator Kamella Carmino has created and coined a new genre – Sōk-D'M (pronounced Soak Dem), a high-energy fusion of soca and EDM that bridges Caribbean culture and global festival sound.

A media release said, while DJs across Europe and beyond have long experimented with layering techno or EDM elements into soca sets, Carmino is clear about the distinction, she said, "This is not a remix. This is not a DJ blend. Sōk-D'M is an original genre, composed intentionally from the ground up."

The idea was sparked during a conversation with ABM of Platinum Trini Hot 97FM Internet Radio station, based in Los Angeles. ABM, who holds a promoter's licence for Las Vegas, shared a sobering reality: while EDM thrives in that market, there is virtually no space for soca.

Carmino said her response was instant, "So why don't we fuse soca and EDM," she asked, "and call it Sōk-D'M?"

By that very evening, inspiration had turned into action. Carmino teamed up with her son, Jesus Carmino-Garraway and together they began crafting what would become her first Sōk-D'M track, Cross De Stage, published by JuJu Multimedia. The song marked the birth of a genre – one rooted in Caribbean rhythm yet engineered for global dance floors, the release said.

Carmino, who writes all of her music, has since released two additional Sōk-D'M tracks: High on Love and Jump Up on Down, further defining the sound and its emotional reach.

At its core, Sōk-D'M blends the drums, chants, call-and-response energy and steelpan roots of soca with the synths, basslines, builds and drops of EDM. Sitting comfortably be-



Kamella Carmino

tween 125-132 BPM, the genre occupies a thrilling middle ground – where the heat of J'Ouvert meets the lights of Tomorrowland, the release added.

"To Soak Dem," Carmino explains, "is to be drenched in rhythm, culture and spirit."

Beyond the sound, Sōk-D'M represents a new global Caribbean wave: Carnival without borders, EDM with soul. It invites producers,

DJs, dancers and listeners from all backgrounds to connect through rhythm, movement and joy.

"Sōk-D'M is about being soaked in the moment – in joy, in music, in freedom," said Carmino.

From the streets of Port of Spain to international festival stages, the movement calls on the world to "feel it, live it, soak in it."



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Jamaican tourism officials and management of Flair Airlines at the unveiling of the new Toronto-Montego Bay service

JAZZ & ARTS FESTIVAL 2026

St Lucia gets ready to welcome the world to its famous music show

Music lovers can officially start their countdown. The Saint Lucia Tourism Authority has announced the highly anticipated lineup for the St Lucia Jazz & Arts Festival 2026, promising an electrifying blend of jazz, reggae, gospel, Caribbean fusion, and global sounds when the festival returns from April 30 to May 10, 2026.

Tickets for the festival go on sale online on Sunday, February 1, 2026, giving fans the chance to secure their spot.

The festival opens with high energy on Thursday, April 30, with an opening night centered heavily on reggae. Jamaican reggae stalwart Capleton headlines the evening, joined by fellow Jamaicans D'yani and Valiant, alongside Saint Lucian favorites Amber Digby, LM Stone, and Shervon Sealy, setting the tone for the remaining festival days.

Jazz purists will be treated to a standout experience on Tuesday, May 5, when Pure Jazz

takes center stage. The night features Grammy-winning bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding, Trinidadian jazz powerhouse Chantal Esdelle & Moyenne, and local standouts Camille Charlemagne and Leandra Modeste.

Spiritual upliftment follows on Wednesday, May 6, with Kingdom Night, showcasing gospel heavyweight Tye Tribbett and Nigerian star Ada Ehi, supported by an all-star lineup including Shirleyann Cyril-Mayers and Nigela St. Clair-Daniel.

Jazz returns on Thursday, May 7, with Pure Jazz Night Two, headlined by the legendary Branford Marsalis Quartet, alongside Jesse Billy and Echoes – Fusion of Arts, continuing the festival's rich tradition of world-class musicianship.

On Friday, May 8, the spotlight shifts to Caribbean Fusion, bringing together generations and genres. The night features The Original Wailers ft. Al Anderson, Skip Marley, Kes the

Band, Dexta Daps, and a distinctly Saint Lucian flavor with Melange.

Global rhythms take over on Saturday, May 9, during World Beats, headlined by African megastar Tems. She is joined by international R&B favorite Ella Mai, Princess' Lover, Lu City, X-Man, and more, in what promises to be one of the festival's most dynamic nights.

The festival culminates in grand style on Sunday, May 10, with The Ultimate Celebration, featuring international music icon Billy Ocean, soul powerhouse Beverley Knight, and Mervin Wilkinson and Friends, with additional acts still to be announced.

The official lineup reveal has already sparked excitement across the region and beyond. With its diverse programming and global appeal, the St Lucia Jazz & Arts Festival 2026 is once again poised to reinforce the island's reputation as a premier destination.

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Remembering Cat

Tributes pour in following death of reggae icon Stephen 'Cat' Coore

Tributes have been pouring in from across Jamaica and the global music community following the death of legendary musician Stephen "Cat" Coore, who passed away on Sunday, January 18, at age 69. Coore was a founding member and musical director of the iconic reggae band Third World and is widely regarded as one of the architects of Jamaica's modern musical legacy.

Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport Olivia Grange described Coore as "a unique talent who could truly be described as 'The Reggae Ambassador,'" calling his passing "a tremendous loss." In a statement issued Monday, Grange extended condolences to his family, saying, "I know his wife Lisa, his children Shiah, Kanna, Stephen and Ashley, and his grandchildren must be devastated." She added, "The Government and people of Jamaica are grateful to them for allowing 'Cat' Coore the time to share with us his gift of musical excellence."

Grange also highlighted Coore's musical legacy, noting that with Third World he delivered classic hits including Reggae Ambassador, Now That We Found Love, 96 Degrees in the Shade and Try Jah Love. She reminded the public that before co-founding Third World, Coore "was an integral part of the successful reggae group, Inner Circle," and said his legacy would continue to inspire future generations. "We will miss 'Cat' Coore's presence," she said, "but there is no doubt that his legacy will live on."

Prime Minister Andrew Holness described Coore as "a towering figure in our cultural history and one of the architects of Jamaica's global musical legacy." He said Coore's work helped shape a sound that carried Jamaica's message "to every corner of the world," adding that his artistry blended "technical brilliance with deep cultural consciousness."

"Cat Coore was a cultural ambassador in the truest sense, representing Jamaica with dignity, excellence, and pride," Holness said, noting that his contribution to the creative arts "enriched our national identity and inspired generations of musicians at home and abroad." He added that



Cat Coore – a cultural ambassador

Coore's receipt of the Order of Distinction was fitting recognition for "a lifetime dedicated to music and nation-building through the arts."

Opposition Leader Mark J. Golding also paid tribute, calling Coore's death "a terrible shock." He described the musician as "a phenomenal musician, whose contribution to Jamaican popular music over five decades is enormous." Golding said Coore's "technical and compositional genius" helped Third World pioneer a bold fusion of musical styles rooted in reggae, while pushing the genre's boundaries.

"Cat's virtuoso performances on the guitar and cello, along with his subtle vocal harmonies and occasional lead voice, played a major role in

building the group's international acclaim and commercial success," Golding said, adding, "His guitar solos are among the best in the genre."

Golding also shared a personal reflection, saying he last saw Coore just days before his passing. "We warmly embraced, with promises that we would soon talk. The news this morning of his passing is therefore all the more shocking," he said.

Stephen "Cat" Coore, OD, was born April 6, 1956. He is survived by his wife Lisa, his children, grandchildren, and a global community of fans. As Holness noted, "May his music continue to live on, reminding us of who we are and the power of Jamaican creativity to unite the world."



HIS & HERs

Caribbean actress is one to watch in new Netflix top 10 series

With Netflix's *His & Hers* climbing into the platform's Top 10, attention is turning to one of the breakout faces from the limited series' flashback scenes — actress Kristen Maxwell, who plays Teen Anna, the younger version of Tessa Thompson's character.

Though her screen time appears in pivotal flashbacks set at St. Hilary's Academy, Maxwell's performance has resonated with viewers, adding emotional depth to the mystery thriller now trending worldwide. Off screen, the 20-year-old actress is also drawing interest for something she wears with pride: her Caribbean heritage.

Maxwell recently shared that she is a first-

generation American with deep roots in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Born in Queens, New York, to a Jamaican mother and Trinidadian father, she credits her grandmothers with keeping her closely connected to Caribbean culture throughout her upbringing.

Although she later moved with her mother and sister to suburban Georgia, Maxwell ultimately returned to New York City, where her acting career began to take shape. What started as meetings for commercial representation quickly evolved into opportunities in film and television — a shift she says happened almost organically.

"Before I knew it I was auditioning for some

of the best projects out there," she said. "That's why I always say that in a way this career chose me."

Maxwell first gained attention for her role as Teen Sidney in *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* and has since continued building momentum. She professionally trained in the Meisner technique at the Maggie Flanigan Studio in New York City, grounding her performances in emotional realism — a skill evident in her portrayal of Teen Anna.

His & Hers, which premiered on Netflix on January 8, 2026, is based on Alice Feeney's 2020 novel of the same name.



Olivia Grange (right) with Etana (centre), and Managing Director of J. Wray and Nephew Limited, Daniel Caron

Reggae Ambassador

Reggae singer Etana has been named the first official Reggae Month Ambassador as Jamaica prepares to mark the 17th anniversary of the declaration of February as Reggae Month.

The announcement was made during the official launch of Reggae Month activities at J. Wray and Nephew Limited's head office in New Kingston, hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport.

Culture Minister Olivia Grange said Etana's appointment reflects the continued emphasis on reggae's cultural impact and its role in shaping future generations of Jamaican music.

More than 60 events have been registered with the Reggae Month Secretariat for this year's celebrations, which officially begin on Sunday, Feb. 1, with a church service at Fellowship Tabernacle on Fairfield Avenue in Kingston. The day will also include a tribute to the late Dennis Emmanuel Brown, the Crown Prince of Reggae, at Heroes Park.

Minister Grange also announced that the annual Bob Marley Tribute Concert will be held on Feb. 6 at Emancipation Park, with Stephen Marley making a special appearance. "He will be the featured Marley at the celebration but the

concert will [also] bring together overseas acts... . They will be standing alongside our local talent in a powerful reminder that reggae is global but its soul remains Jamaican," she said.

As Reggae Month continues, Dancehall Week will run from Feb. 22 to March 1, while the next generation of reggae artistes will be highlighted at the Young Reggae Ambassadors showcase in Negril, Westmoreland, on Feb. 24. Minister Grange said initiatives such as Children of the Icon and Young Reggae Ambassadors are critical to ensuring the future of the music.

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BLOOD & FYAH

Keznamdi gets the nod for Best Reggae Album at Grammy Awards

Jamaican artist Keznamdi has taken home the Grammy for Best Reggae Album at the 68th Annual Grammy Awards for his chart-topping project, "Blood & Fyah."

This marks the singer-songwriter's first-ever Grammy win, a milestone that has been widely celebrated by fans and fellow artists alike.

"Blood & Fyah" made an explosive impact on release, debuting at No. 1 on the U.S. iTunes Reggae Albums Chart and placing four tracks in the top six of the iTunes Reggae Songs Chart. The album's unique blend of roots reggae, dancehall, and Afrobeats has resonated strongly with younger audiences, solidifying Keznamdi's status as one of reggae's most dynamic new voices.

"Reggae music has always been a music weh defend truths and rights and African liberation and Black man redemption," Keznamdi said during his acceptance speech. "We have to give thanks," he added, while showing appreciation to his family and team.

The category also featured heavyweights and previous nominees: Vybz Kartel with "Heart & Soul", Jesse Royal with "No Place Like Home", Lila Iké with "Treasure Self Love", and Mortimer with "From Within."

For Vybz Kartel, this marked his second consecutive Grammy nomination, continuing his high-profile comeback since his release from prison. Heart & Soul blends classic dancehall with reflective moments, and his single "Amout" reached No. 1 on Jamaica's YouTube chart, amassing nearly 2 million global views in its first week.

Jesse Royal, also earning his second Grammy nod, delivered an album inspired by resilience and faith following a near-fatal car accident earlier this year. No Place Like Home has been praised for its production quality and lyrical depth, affirming Royal's role as one of reggae's most consistent torchbearers.

First-time nominee Lila Iké may not have won the award, but she made a major mark on the ceremony. She opened this year's Grammys with a powerful performance and walked the red carpet in style, capturing global attention and further cementing her status as one of reggae's rising stars. Her album Treasure Self Love highlights soulful vocals and collaborations with



Keznamdi — won Best Reggae Album award

H.E.R., Joey Bada\$\$, and Protoje.

Mortimer's From Within combines classic roots reggae with modern storytelling and production finesse, earning him recognition as another fresh voice in the genre.

Keznamdi's win represents a generational shift in reggae, reflecting the growing influence of younger artists who are blending traditional rhythms with global sounds. As fans and critics alike celebrate, it's clear that reggae's international reach and cultural impact continue to thrive, with artists like Keznamdi leading the

charge.

Meanwhile, Trinidad and Tobago-born producer Jolene Mendes was among the winners at the 66th Grammy Awards, accepting the trophy for Best Music Video for DoeChii's "Anxiety."

Mendes was recognized as one of the producers behind the award-winning visual, which has been widely praised for its emotional depth, striking imagery, and avant-garde approach. While DoeChii and the video's director, James Mackel, were not in attendance at the ceremony, Mendes accepted the Grammy.



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