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The Origin, Development and Significant Artists of the Trinibad Movement

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The study of the Trinibad movement created in the beautiful islands of Trinidad and Tobago was truly an interesting and enjoyable research topic. I have learnt a tremendous amount of information on this newly emerging genre of music and I look forward to sharing my research findings with you throughout this study. I would like to thank my mother Nicole Arbelaez and my two sisters Danielle and Nicollette La Chapelle for their unwavering support throughout my educational journey, their love and support have truly inspired me deeply. I would also like to say a heartfelt thank you to my thesis supervisor, Mrs. Kelly Ramlal, for believing in this research and for investing her time and energy toward making this research a success. I wish to express a huge thank you to every artist, producer, manager, friend and family member who helped me acquire information needed to make this research precise.

## ABSTRACT

This study provides the historical development, background information and perception of musicians and producers who have contributed toward a newly emerging subgenre of Dancehall music from Trinidad and Tobago called, “*Trinibad*”. The *Trinibad* movement is a musical movement that first began in 2017/18 with several Trinidadian Dancehall artists using the term *Trinibad* in their music. Trinidad and Tobago is the birthplace of Soca and Calypso music, both of which speak out against political disputes, societal norms and culture. *Trinibad* music is no different from this, however, this subgenre has developed its own musical characteristics and a different approach to self-expression that is not appropriate for a younger audience due to explicit language.

Many countries from around the world have been heavily influenced by ‘Dancehall’ and it has rapidly grown in popularity. Japan, The United States of America, Europe, Brazil and Russia are all countries of which there are major dancehall music consumers. There is a major dancehall competition held in Moscow for dancers and there is also one held in Jamaica which is the birthplace of Dancehall. This study has thus concluded that *Trinibad* is a musical expression of Trinidad and Tobago’s modern-day culture. Despite it being frowned upon by old generations who dislike the messages and explicit language, the *Trinibad* movement continues to grow rapidly both targeting a Caribbean and International market and it is also appreciated by some Jamaicans.

Keywords: Dancehall, Trinibad, Soca, Calypso and Trinidad and Tobago.

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## INTRODUCTION

Trinidad and Tobago are two Caribbean Islands with a rich cultural history due to colonization. Trinidad is the larger of the two islands with an area of about 4,800 square km, whereas Tobago has an area of 300 square km. The original inhabitants of Trinidad migrated from the Orinoco River in South America and they spoke an Arawakan language. It is likely that by the time the Spanish established a presence in the 16th century, there was also a population of Cariban speakers, mainly on the north coast. Today a group of ancestors from natives reside in Arima Trinidad and they are known as the 'First People of Santa Rosa' and they are of partial descent from the original inhabitants and seek to keep their heritage alive. ("Trinidad and Tobago | People, Culture, Language, Map, Population, & Flag")

The ethnic makeup of Trinidad and Tobago is dominated by two groups, roughly equal in size: Afro-Trinidadians, who descended from slaves brought to work on the cotton and sugar plantations in the late 18th century, and Indo-Trinidadians, or East Indians. Trinidad and Tobago achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1962 and thus obtained a position as a Commonwealth country. Trinidad and Tobago became a republic nation in 1976 and named its capital city 'Port of Spain' which is located on the north western coast of Trinidad. As a result of colonization and the indentured workers who migrated to Trinidad and Tobago, the island's unique history and ethnic diversity has shaped the different musical styles that have been appreciated and developed on the islands. ("Trinidad and Tobago | People, Culture, Language, Map, Population, & Flag") Over time, calypso evolved from a combination of French, English, Spanish, and African influences. The French brought the tradition of Carnival to the islands, and when Trinidad and Tobago abolished slavery in 1834, former slaves became stars of the

Carnival, putting on calypso performances in dedicated calypso tents. (“Calypso Music Guide”) Rapso is another genre of music created in Trinidad and Tobago to symbolize a warrior chant and songs of revolution. Rapso practitioners view their craft as a lyrically foregrounded, activist-oriented variant of calypso, describing it as the poetry of calypso and the consciousness of Soca, some have resisted its inclusion under the umbrella of the calypso art form. (VAN LEEUWAARDE MOONSAMMY) Soca music originally spelt ‘Sokah’ was created by Garfield Blackman aka Lord Shorty or Ras Shorty I, and it was meant to create unity amongst the two significant ethnic groups African and Indian Trinidadians.

**Rationale:** Over the years Trinidad and Tobago’s music has developed since colonial days and it continues to develop and gain recognition internationally. There has been little to no scholarly work about the *Trinibad movement* which gave me the initiative to research this topic.

Documenting historic events at the inception of its development is critically important and thus it was necessary to document this subgenre of music at its most relevant time in history. From my research future generations of students and researchers will have access to correct documentation on how dancehall music developed in Trinidad and Tobago and most importantly how it's subgenre *Trinibad* developed.

**Thesis Statement:** Trinidad and Tobago’s music developed for centuries through the fusion of cultures that inhabited the island through colonialism; in 2019, a producer by the name of Punz created a musical movement of Trinidadian dancehall music known as *Trinibad*. The history, public perception, and artist’s intentions contribute to an understanding of this genre.

**Parameters:** This study aimed to identify the musical history and attributes of the *Trinibad movement*. There is an emphasis on dancehall and the slight change or approach used by Trinidadians in a new approach to dancehall expression. The geographical area in this research

focused primarily on the island of Trinidad with references to Tobago and Jamaica. The study analysed Jamaican dancehall and compared it to *Trinibad*, as well as, the public's perception of the genre. The people personally interviewed in this research were artists, producers and cultural educators.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study is to:

1. Analyse how *Trinibad* music has developed from Jamaican dancehall.
2. Describe the intentions of the artists who perform *Trinibad* music.
3. Document the historical development of the genre *Trinibad*.
4. Analyse the public's perception of *Trinibad*.

**Chapter Outline:** Chapter 1: Historical development of Trinidad and Tobago's music with reference to *Trinibad*.

This chapter presents a historical overview of the musical genres that developed in Trinidad and Tobago prior to *Trinibad* and the development of Dancehall in Jamaica and its influence on Trinidad and Tobago is outlined.

Chapter 2: The Rise of *Trinibad* music.

This chapter entails the intentions of the producers and artistes involved in the newly emerging genre that has gained tremendous recognition. The success of the genre and its global reach.

Chapter 3: The Public's Perception of *Trinibad* music.

This chapter analyses the public's perception of the genre, based on data collected through an online survey and interviews conducted with cultural educators.

**Methodology:** This study has used both a quantitative and qualitative approach method to collect data. This was collected from interviews, online magazines, surveys and newspaper articles. Nine interviews were conducted virtually; interviewees included were music producers, artistes', managers and cultural educators. This study analysed the interviews conducted from November 2020 - March 2021 to document the intention, feedback and purpose of Trinidad music. Quantitative data was conducted through an online survey using Google forms for the duration of February 22<sup>th</sup> – March 30<sup>th</sup> 2021. There were 453 responses to this survey. The survey results can be shown through pie charts, tables and bar graphs collected and conclusive statements were made on the perception of the genre. Throughout this research active members of the *Trinidad* movement were interviewed and analysed to help gather data needed to understand the origin, musical development and perception of the movement. By interviewing and asking questions it is discovered how a subgenre initially frowned upon by society continues to gain success and acceptance, despite its controversy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of *Dancehall* music and its history, its influences and the modern-day development of it throughout the Caribbean is the main focus of this research. A new wave of Trinidadian dancehall music called *Trinibad* will be analysed during this research paper. The creation of Dancehall music and the reason for its development will also be discussed. *Trinibad* is a subgenre of dancehall music created in Trinidad and Tobago. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used throughout this study. U.W.I Linc, Google Scholar, Google and YouTube are the main online research platforms used for this study. There are only a few YouTube interviews and one or two articles published on *Trinibad* thus far and I have not seen any scholarly work, which is why I deemed this research necessary. It was important to document a part of Trinidad and Tobago's history at its most relevant time. This research would benefit anyone who wants to know more about the *Trinibad* movement, musical movements in the Caribbean, music influenced by Dancehall and subgenres of Dancehall music. *Trinibad* continues to significantly develop Trinidad and Tobago's music industry for international exportation, career opportunities and recognition in a musical genre apart from Soca and Calypso.

One may consider *Trinibad* to be a subgenre of Dancehall, however, *Trinibad* remains unique for the accents, slangs and twangs that are indigenous to Trinbagonian culture. The focus of my research is to investigate artists, producers, cultural activists and members of the public in order to document the origin, development, significant artists and the perception of *Trinibad* from both the artist and the public's point of view. The literature reviewed contains the origins, identity and influence of Dancehall. Dancehall music originated in the dismal ghetto area of

Kingston, Jamaica. It was created by ghetto youths as a way to claim their identity and their power within a society that did not grant them many opportunities. As the Dancehall identity grew and spread throughout Jamaican culture, it soon spread throughout the world and gained international recognition. For creators, artists and adherents, dancehall functions as a field of cultural production, where Kingston's underprivileged create and project a distinctly Black-Jamaican 'ghetto' identity that is reclaimed and re-articulated as positive, celebratory and powerful. It is re-centred from the margins of wider society and liberated from the repressive values of hegemonic culture.

Dancehall Jamaican artists speak about the hardships they encounter throughout life and their determination to succeed musically to make a better life for themselves and their families. The government and political parties in Jamaica made attempts to stifle the uprising of black consciousness, however, the music continued to resonate with the public and international recognition flourished. Occasionally labelled as 'slack, vulgar, misogynistic, aggressive and infantile' dancehall is condemned by those who purposefully situate themselves apart from the 'low culture'. The gaps in this existing knowledge are due to the challenges of getting accurate details from the direct sources. For future research findings more artists and producers should be researched as new upcoming *Trinidad* artists continue to emerge. This dissertation focused on the development of dancehall music in Trinidad and Tobago, the artists perspectives on how their music is viewed by the public and their musical intentions, the producers creative process and the public's perception of *Trinidad* music. (Cooper)

## CHAPTER ONE

### Historical Overview of *Dancehall* and *Trinibad*

Dancehall is a genre of popular Jamaican music that originated in the late 1970s. Initially, dancehall was a sparser version of reggae compared to the roots style, which had dominated much of the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, digital instrumentation became more prevalent, changing the sound considerably, with digital dancehall (or "ragga") becoming increasingly characterized by faster rhythms. Key elements of dancehall music include its extensive use of Jamaican Patois rather than Jamaican standard English and a focus on the track instrumentals (or "riddims"). Dancehall gained mainstream success in Jamaica in the 1980s, and by the 1990s, it became increasingly popular in the Jamaican diaspora communities. In the 2000s, dancehall experienced worldwide mainstream success, and by 2010, it began to heavily influence the work of established Western artists and producers, which has helped to further bring the genre into the Western music mainstream market. ("Dancehall")

During the late '90s into the early 00s, there were several dancehall movements in Trinidad and Tobago. Two significant dancehall groups were, 'Bashment and Kiskadee Karavan'. The Kiskadee Karavan began in 1992 and its founder is Robert Amar. It grew in popularity amongst the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. In Circa 1995 the movement evolved with members, such as Yard Fowl Crew, General Grant, Kindred, Edu Rankin, and Supa Chile. The public would memorize the lyrics to popular songs, such as, "Dan It Up", "Shot Call", and "Dis Trini Could Flow". After a while, the momentum behind the Karavan dissolved, however, a few members would still attempt to keep it alive with frequent activity. Within recent years

Dancehall music has grown to significant heights and it is appreciated globally. Its new subgenre *Trinibad* which originated in Trinidad and Tobago has certainly taken the social media platforms by a storm, as *Trinibad* artists are emerging daily. (Wharwood)

The term *Trinibad* was invented by Trinbagonian artists involved in the dancehall music industry. *Trinibad* music is essentially Trinidadian dancehall music. The *Trinibad* movement goes beyond the music, it's an avenue for disadvantaged youths to create a genre of music based on their life experiences or the experiences of the people around them. It is highly competitive amongst the artists, and this is evidenced by the harshness of the lyrical content to engage and increase their listenership. The music is uniquely Trinbagonian as it is based on the hardships faced by the youths within our society. It incorporates our accents, twang, and slangs making it difficult to replicate. There's a real opportunity here for these talents to be further honed, developed, and exported internationally.

No one person has been credited to have coined the term, '*Trinibad*', however, Richard Romano (Dee Jay Punz) is seen as someone who is highly instrumental in the development of the *Trinibad* movement. He has been a DJ for many years and would often play Trinidadian dancehall during his radio sessions on radio 94.1FM, Boom champions. Richard first heard of the word *Trinibad* from having heard it mentioned in songs and conversations in 2017/2018 and he made a mix of the songs and gave it the name '*Trinibad Mix*'. The public's response to his mixtape was beyond his expectations, and after his encouraging feedback he was devoted to developing the movement.

Before the term, *Trinibad* was officially used in 2019 to describe dancehall music produced in Trinidad and Tobago. The creation of modern dancehall music in Trinidad and Tobago began in 2010 with the Millionaire Family, a group of dancehall artists formed by John

Michael Alibocas aka Makamillion. It involved artists, such as Orlando Octave, Kerry John, Fadda Moses, Jah Bel, and Makamillion. The Millionaire family had several hit songs and they were the first successful dancehall group from Trinidad and Tobago. Their musical creations were heavily influenced by Jamaican musicians, for example, Come Over by Makamillion and Buffy which is a techno style of dancehall, was inspired by Vybz Kartel and Spice's song 'Ramping Shop'. The development of dancehall music in Trinidad and Tobago has also influenced the sexual lyrical content heard in Soca music today.

In September 2012, the youngest artists to professionally release a dancehall song on Trinidad radio were Zebee who was 15 years old, and his brother Kiah who was 10 years old at the time. The brothers left school early to release their song on radio 96.1. They were under the guidance of Makamillion as he saw great potential in the ZK boys. Makamillion has a genuine passion for promoting, guiding, and helping the brothers reach their full potential which is why he took them under the millionaire family at a young age.

He continues to be a mentor and manager to the brothers, and they have both gained recognition in the local industry. "*Trinibad* music is music that nobody else can do besides Trinidadians and we have to accept that and this is good for us. Our music is unique to us from the way we sing our words to the terms we use like *Zessing*. *Zessing* is our word while Jamaican's have *Pasa Pasa*. Anybody could sing dancehall, but, the thing about *Trinibad* is nobody else can do it unless you're Trinidadian. You can't put a Haitian, German or Jamaican to sing *Trinibad* music, because, they are not Trini. It is more than just music; it is a culture! This movement is not a normal movement". (Interview with Makamillion)

The development of *Trinibad* began with youths who live in the ghetto areas of Trinidad and social media platforms helped to significantly develop the popularity of the movement.

*Trinibad* artists did not rely on Trinidad radio stations to promote their music. Some of the slang terms used in *Trinibad* are; “Fully dunce” which is used to refer to troubled youths who call themselves “fully dunce” or “dunce thugs,” as a means of declaring their dark and ignorant state of mind to willing resort to violence in any situation. (*Rygin King’s “Fully Dunce” Slang Raises Concern Among Cops - The Tropixs*) The Term “Zesser” is defined by urbandictionary.com as a cool confident person who wears the hottest expensive brand name clothing & huge excessive jewellery, this Trinidadian slang originates from the English word 'zest' or 'zesty' which means to be appealing, appetizing, or sharp. (*Zesser Meaning - Google Search*) *Trinibad* is unique in its own way because it can be sung on a Pop, R&B and Hip Hop beat whereas most music cannot do this. *Trinibad* represents ghetto youths from Trinidad and Tobago who desired to pave a way for themselves to achieve success in the music industry. Soca and Calypso music are the two most prominent genres of music in the Trinidad and Tobago music industry and other genres are usually in the background, however, with the rise of *Trinibad* music it has made the industry take notice of a newly upcoming subgenre that is significantly helping to export the country’s music to an international market.

The movement continues to make an impact internationally and it was even publicly acknowledged by Grammy award winning Jamaican Dancehall artiste Sean Paul. Sean released in an interview with Overtime media that he would like to hear more ‘Trinigood’ music and although he is in full support of the *Trinibad* movement, he strongly urges artists to use their voice and platforms for good and consider the use of lyrical content and for them to tell the stories of their authentic selves. (“Sean Paul Wants to Hear Some ‘Trinigood’ Music Too”)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Significant Trinidad Artists, Producers and their stories, experiences and musical intentions:



*Figure 1. Prince Swanny*

#### Taryll Swan – (Prince Swanny)

Taryll Swan aka Prince Swanny was born on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997, in Port of Spain General Hospital, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Swanny grew up in Port of Spain and at the age of seven, he moved to Carenage, where he attended Carenage Boys' Government Primary School and later, Tranquillity Government Secondary School. Upon graduating from Secondary School, he returned to live in his hometown of Port of Spain. He continued to develop his strong love for singing and song writing with numerous producers. In early 2017, he gained significant recognition in the dancehall world when he released his song 'Go Fi dem' as it sparked a lot of controversy. Despite the song's controversy it helped create a deeper understanding of the life and culture of young Trinbagonians. After this he released 'Brother, Brother' which captured the hearts of his audience as it spoke about being surrounded by 'real friends' and having each other's back no matter what. (Swanny)

In such a short amount of time Prince Swanny has made a significant mark in the Dancehall industry and he has been at the forefront representing Dancehall music from the inception of his career. He started Ztekk Records with other dancehall musicians and they formed a strong musical body of artists that was combined together to represent a gang called

‘Rastacity’ on the main principle, “Keep it real never switch”. Prince Swanny’s song ‘Breadwinner’ was produced by Millbeats who was later interviewed in this study. The success of his music has surpassed that of any *Trinidad* artist and he has gained recognition from Jamaican music industry professionals, Tarrius Riley and producer Russian. He has 15 million and counting views on his song ‘Catch 22’. His fans, as well as, people who don’t usually listen to his music were pleased that he wrote a song titled ‘Tribute to Women’ which speaks out against violence against women in Trinidad and Tobago. Prince Swanny continues to thrive in the music industry with the *Trinidad* movement branding. (Swanny)



Figure 2. *Rebel Sixx*

Kyle George - (Rebel Sixx)

8/03/1994 – 05/07/2020

Kyle George was a successful Trinidad artist who became popular and reached the peak of his career success before he was killed at his home in Arima. According to his mother he lived his dream while he was here, he owned a Studio, Clothing line, and a Record label. Kyle had a passion for music and he would often leave his work at the Ministry of Works and Transport to record his music. Eventually, co-workers noticed his absence and after a while, he left his secure job at a government office to pursue a career path in music full time. Everyone thought he was crazy, but he believed in his dreams without any doubts. (OUTDEY TV) His biggest song Rifle War has acquired 11 million views and his biggest performance was at the Soca Monarch. He died two weeks before his plans to propose to his girlfriend.

After his death, his mother begged the public not to do any violent acts in retaliation for his murder. Instead, she wants the individuals involved in his death to turn their lives to god and seek forgiveness as she is a very spiritual person who strives to live her life according to god's word. In a video posted to social media his mother states, "Young black men, you see what's happening in Trinidad today? And I'm sympathetic to your plight, because many of our areas have been area profiled. While in America we have race profiling, in Trinidad we have area profiling and economic status profiling. It's very colonial, but it's very present in our country, but black boys hear what, "Love Yourself! You need to love yourself". The young deceased 26yr old left two children fatherless, his family, and a nation who cheered his name in despair mourning his absence. Rebel's time physically on earth may have ended, but his music continues to live on in the hearts of his fans. (Dani L Style)



Figure 3. *KLion*

#### Kwinton Thomas – (K Lion)

The Trinidad and Tobago dancehall community mourned the loss of one of its biggest *Trinibad* artists. Kwinton 'K Lion' Thomas passed away on June 10th in Miami, Florida. Reports state that he died from a seizure that led to a heart attack. Thomas was only 26-years-old at the time of his passing. He first emerged on the local scene in 2018 and confidently presented himself as a part of the new generation of dancehall music known as 'Trinibad'. As he continued to promote the momentum behind the *Trinibad* movement his fame grew rapidly and significantly. His most popular hit song 'Malandros' has 9.4 million-plus views on YouTube. His musical creation is more than just lyrics and a beat as he seeks to

build a deeper connection with his audience and he writes based on his life experiences and the reality surrounding him.

He chose the name 'K Lion' from having high school friends who called him lion whilst he would perform and then he decided to use the 'K' from his first name before the word lion as a reminder to never forget himself in the midst of fame. K Lion was one of the few dancehall artists who graced the stage at the International Soca Monarch Finals in 2020. Throughout his career path, he successfully acquired 119,000 subscribers on YouTube and his videos range from 500,000 to 9.4 million views. He is regarded as someone highly respected in the Belmont community as his music had the power to bring members of the together. For decades people have been trying to achieve this, however, they were unsuccessful. The entire Trinidadian dancehall *Trinibad* fans were completely devastated by the news of his passing. It is safe to say he has certainly left his mark on the world with his music and like Rebel Sixx, his music continues to live on. (*Local Dancehall Star 'K Lion' Passes Away | Loop News*)



Figure 4. Boy Boy

#### Erron Williams – (Boy Boy)

Erron Williams aka Boy Boy was born on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Boy Boy was inspired to sing and perform music from his life experiences and with the death of his father he saw the need to provide for himself and his family. He would like his music to represent the parts of Trinidad that are frowned upon and discarded. He wants to put those places on the map to let the world know not everything is what they see or hear on the media. During his creative process, he relies on the

beat or riddim from producers to take him in an emotional direction for a song based on the vibe that comes to him at the moment. He considers his most successful songs to be, ‘Die Die’ and ‘Adrenalin’. He stated during his interview that the public’s perception and feedback on the music he performs has been very encouraging and positive and he has not received any negative feedback thus far. The public has expressed for him to continue shining and making music.

(Interview with Boy Boy)

Boy Boy has also written a song titled ‘Formula’ for the United Congress political party during the Trinidad and Tobago Elections in August 2020. In his song ‘Formula’ he encouraged citizens to show their support for the party’s political leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar by putting their x by the rising star for the UNC on Election day, August 10th. The executive producer of this production was his cousin/ executive manager Dale Ryan who is also the owner of Central Records.



Figure 5. Rheon Elbourne

Rheon Elbourne

Rheon Elbourne was born on February 20<sup>th</sup> and he grew up in Kelly Village, Trinidad. He came from humble beginnings and lived in a board house with a latrine at the side. Whilst interviewing Rheon, he was very humble, honest, mature, and passionate about his career path and success. He expressed during his interview that he did not set out to do *Trinibad* music, however, since he strives to keep his musical creations relevant with the times, he has chosen to write and sing *Trinibad* music for some time at its most relevant time in history. He expressed the inspiration for his song “Build My Dreams” came from

watching his friends who would often waste their time playing video games for the entire day, but still, they spoke about having money to buy a house, land, and a car. He also sang about the injustice African men face in a society where the system is corrupted and if you want to build your dreams you must get up and fight for what you believe.

Lyrics quoted from his song are, “One thing me ah pray, get my money and build my dreams. System mad das how they set it so yuh have fi get up and ah get it! Ghetto youth dem ah dream, get your money and build your dreams. Rep your city and fix yuh schemes”. The entire movement is based upon fixing societal injustice and giving a voice to ghetto youths who have not been given fair opportunities to rise above their status of poverty. Rheon continues to create music that is patriotic, motivating and secular. (Interview with Rheon Elbourne)



Figure 6. Jovi Ton

#### Jovorn Les-Pierre – (Jovi Ton)

Jovorn Les-Pierre aka Jovi Ton or Young Veteran was born on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1995. He grew up in St. James, Trinidad and he began writing songs and singing at the age of sixteen. When he turned eighteen, he decided to take music seriously and he was heavily inspired by several dancehall musicians such as Popcaan, Movado, Vybz Kartel, and early dancehall music. Some of his biggest musical influences are Bob Marley and Buju Banton. He released his first song called ‘Make it’ on his YouTube channel with one subscriber and he posted regularly after this and his fan base grew rapidly from him constantly posting content. During my interview with him, he expressed the sadness he felt from the death of his close childhood friend Kyle George (Rebel Sixx) who was like a brother to him, as they

both grew up in the St. James community and attended the same schools from Kindergarten to High School. (Interview with Jovi Ton)

Notable *Trinidad* female artists and producers:

TriniBaddest Moe

Nessa Preppy

Sammy Jo

Jadakins

Rasta Baby

Mello

Lila

Cj Dan

Lady Lava

Kerrecia

Angel

Trinibad Producers

Figure 7. David Millien

David Millien

David Millien aka Millbeats grew up in Trincity Trinidad and he has been producing music since he left high school. After completing High School, he began experimenting with genres like Soca, R&B, Reggae, Pop, Contagious, Rap, and Dancehall. David would often listen to various types of musical styles to gain experience, knowledge, and inspiration for his productions. He was born into a musical family as his father Kevin Millien is a musician and music teacher who completed his degree in Musical Arts at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. He first heard about *Trinibad* music in 2018 from several friends and his long-time friend Trinidad James who he has done consistent work. Apart from the various popular artists, he works with David heavily supports his younger sister Denice Millien, a popular reggae singer-songwriter who has over 100,000 views on YouTube.

He explained how flawless and god-sent the Street Survivors Riddim album was produced as the vision for it came to him in a dream. He approached Richard Romano (DJ Punz) and Madmen Productions to work with him on the album. Before meeting with the various artists' Prince Swanny, Jahllano, Lawless, and 2kZelle, he developed a connection with them and explained he wanted each song on the riddim to contain a positive message as best as possible. He explained twang and slang that is local to Trinidad and Tobago are the main characteristics that distinguish *Trinibad* from dancehall. During the creative process, David noticed there are

particular snare and hi-hat tones that are used regularly and this can be heard in early 2019

*Trinibad*. (Interview with David Millien)



Figure 8. Lackaz

Akeem Ryan - (Lackaz)

Akeem ‘Lackaz’ Ryan was born on June 12, 1989, in Trinidad. He has been producing music. He first heard about *Trinibad* from the Trinidadian dancehall artiste who frequently records at his studio Central Records. During his interview some of the musical characteristics that define *Trinibad* are; Trinidadian slang, accent and dancehall musical elements. He was exposed to music production and sound engineering at a young age and was introduced to it by his older brother Dale Ryan who is the founder of Central Records.

He furthered his knowledge in producing from YouTube and other music producer friends. Some of the *Trinibad* artist he has worked with are; his cousin Boy Boy, Lady Lava, Black Wig, Raskality and Topy Boss. He expressed the feedback he has gotten thus far has been negative due to people frowning upon the music, however, he believes everything has both negative and positive aspects and it is up to the listener to interpret music from their personal point of view. He noticed there is an inability in most people to understand *Trinibad* as a creative theatrical art form and he believes the *Trinibad* movement represents a reflection of society, therefore, if a man sings about violence, it is because this is what he has experienced or witnessed. (Interview with Lackaz)

Richard Romano – (DJ Punz)

Figure 9. DJ Punz

He first heard about the word *Trinibad* in songs and conversations in 2017/2018 and he decided to do a mixed CD of the most popular songs. After he created his first mixtape of *Trinibad* music, he started a clothing brand, ‘Trinibad Urban Apparel’ to further promote the *Trinibad* Mixtape. Richard does not have any formal training in music and he stated during his interview that

he has never learnt to read sheet music, however, he has a strong ear for great music and is able to identify a hit song. He gained his musical knowledge from DJ programs in school and this evolved into him creating musical productions at his home studio. Upon graduating high school in 2001 he started a record label called Higher Records with Chromatics in 2007 and later branched off into his own studio with a friend and they named the studio Lion’s Den in 2010. He then left ‘Lion’s Den’ in 2013 to resume work with Chromatics at Higher Records.

In 2016 he created his own official record label called, ‘Punz Entertainment’ and he is currently the manager and musical director for numerous *Trinibad* artists, such as Raskality and Boy Boy. Richard began pushing the *Trinibad* name with every musical release coming out of his record label and he would also executive produce works by several *Trinibad* artists. He expressed during his interview that in his opinion *Trinibad* music is the new wave of music coming out of Trinidad and it is more than Dancehall music as it can be sung on a Soca, Reggae, R&B or Hip Hop beat and artists are not required to conform to the regular standards.

Punz compared the *Trinibad* movement to the Drill movement which began in 2011 in Chicago, U. S. A. Drill music represents the violence in the ghetto areas of Chicago and it soon spread to all of London in 2012. It became a way for young disadvantaged people to talk about their lives and it has also created an epidemic of violence in London similar to the violence amongst members of the *Trinibad* movement. Punz is referred to as the godfather from his success gained in the industry through helping numerous Jamaicans, Bajan and Trinidadian artists reach their full potential. Some of the major projects he has worked on are; Jahllano's 'War dem want' and 'Send them out', Plumpy Boss 'My Journey' both production and video, KLion's first hit 'Rise it', Rebel Sixx, Raskality and he worked with Boy Boy from the inception of his career. The movement has gained recognition in numerous countries, such as; Japan, Germany, London, Jamaica and New York to name a few, however, Punz stated that the violent songs are the songs that gain the most attraction.

Punz would prefer if the artists involved in the movement paid more attention to the business and development aspect of the industry instead of futile acts of violence that create a negative influence on society. When asked what his future goals in the industry were, he said, his goals for himself have already come to fruition with the new movement as he is always developing artists to reach their full potential towards success. He is currently working on prison rehabilitation through music and he has plans to open a school in 2023 called DJ Punz Academy. (Interview with DJ Punz)

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Perception of Trinibad music by Cultural Activists and the public.



Figure 10. Omari Ashby

During his interview, Mr. Omari Ashby discussed his perception of the *Trinibad* movement and he compared it to a movement that he was a part of called the ‘Kiskadee Karavan’, which took place in the 1990s. The similarity between what motivated the young people then and what is currently motivating the young people today to speak out in such an aggressive manner is the need for youth to have a voice within a society that keeps them locked out of certain spaces in order to have a voice. The Kiskadee Karavan movement was based on an ideology of rejection against colonialism and neo-colonialism, however, the imputes are similar to that of the *Trinibad* movement. Mr. Ashby does not state whether he believes the *Trinibad* movement is bad or good, however, he believes what it created is simply different from that of the Karavan, due to the musical and modern generational influences on today’s youth. In his opinion, people are appalled by the lyrical content in *Trinibad* music based on the violence, misogynistic, and openly raw descriptions of sexual activities, but, Rapso, Calypso, Bashment, and the Kiskadee Karavan are all genres of music that have also utilized freedom of speech in their music similar to members of the *Trinibad* movement.

He states, “Each generation simply forgets what they have done”, cause when members of the Karavan were releasing music at their time this caused a stir within society and now *Trinibad* artists are releasing content that is just as heavy with more intensity. Mr. Ashby believes that after a while the momentum of a movement will slowly decrease, once society begins to

normalize and accept it. The fact that the Trinibad movement has been considered for academic research, tells us that the movement has already created an impact worthy of being documented.

(Interview with Omari Ashby)



Figure 11. Kadeem Alleyne

Kadeem Alleyne, a cultural activist from Trinidad and Tobago was also interviewed in this study. He studied music at Berklee College of Music in Boston and currently resides in New York. He first heard about the *Trinibad* movement in 2018, and it was brought to his attention by friends due to the movement being such a powerful and profound movement. He described the *Trinibad* movement as the expression of disenfranchised and less fortunate youth in Trinidad and Tobago. He further elaborated on his reason for using the word disenfranchised, which is meant to also be musically disenfranchised based on the third world disadvantages of Trinidad and Tobago's music industry. There is a lack of exposure in education to properly nurture musicianship and artistry among the youth due to a lack of financial income by citizens in poor areas. In his opinion, it is a subgenre that is empowering the youth more than other genres from Trinidad and Tobago.

The ways in which Dancehall are similar to *Trinibad* is the lyrical content, rhythms, and overall approach in production. He expressed, African slaves brought to the Caribbean brought with them rhythms and spiritual chants that have influenced numerous genres if not all genres of Caribbean music, and Dancehall is no different. Mr. Alleyne believes that educating the youths in the favela areas of Trinidad and Tobago will help create prosperous opportunities for economic growth, societal development, and help increase the quality of the performing arts.

(Interview with Kadeem Alleyne) Mr. Ashby and Mr. Alleyne both agreed during their interviews that although the *Trinibad* movement is an empowering and profound movement its influence on the youth of Trinidad and Tobago is indeed negative, as it has the power to make some citizens who consume *Trinibad* music react to the lyrical content in the music. This is evident in the survey statistics and reports of gang violence from the numerous *Trinibad* artists who have been killed by gang activity.

Data collected from the survey clearly shows that the younger generation from ages 24 and under have a larger percentage of individuals who have heard of *Trinibad* music, and based on the data collected the percentage declines as the older age groups progress.

Age group	Have you heard Trinibad music? - Yes
17 and under	82.10%
18-24	84.70%
25-34	69.70%
35-44	63.40%
45-54	37.50%
55 and older	26.10%

Figure 12

The results for the survey question; How often do you listen to *Trinidad* music?

17 and under

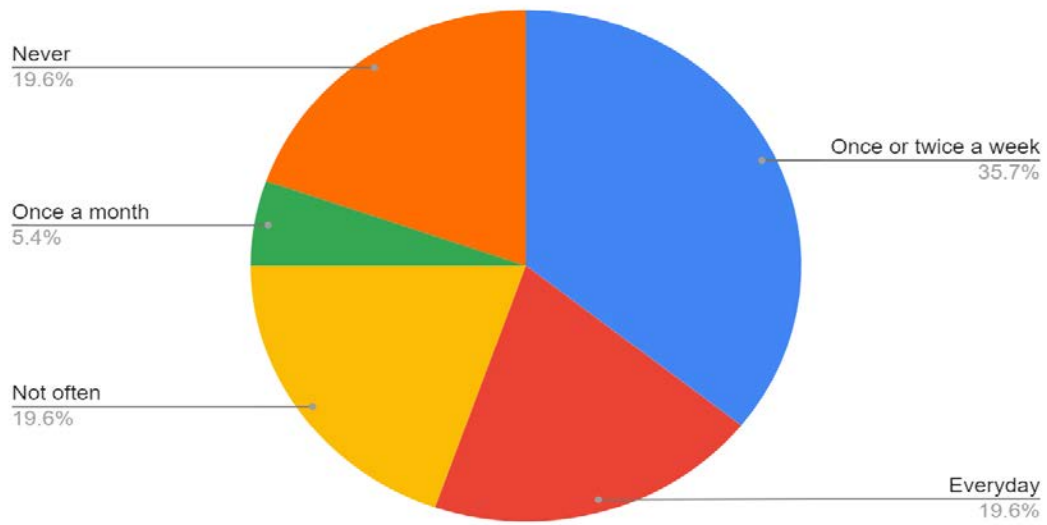


Figure 13

18-24 year old

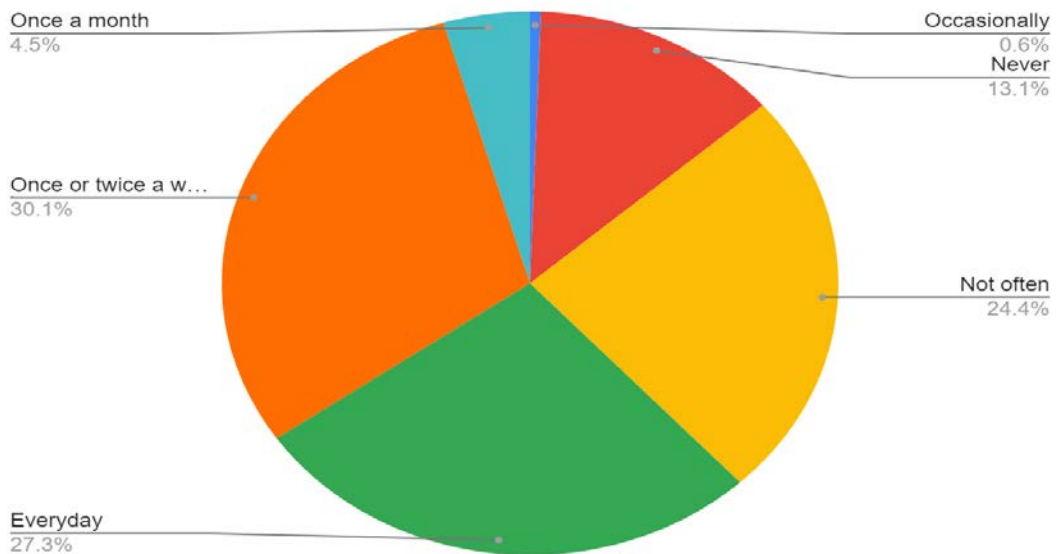


Figure 14

25-34 year old

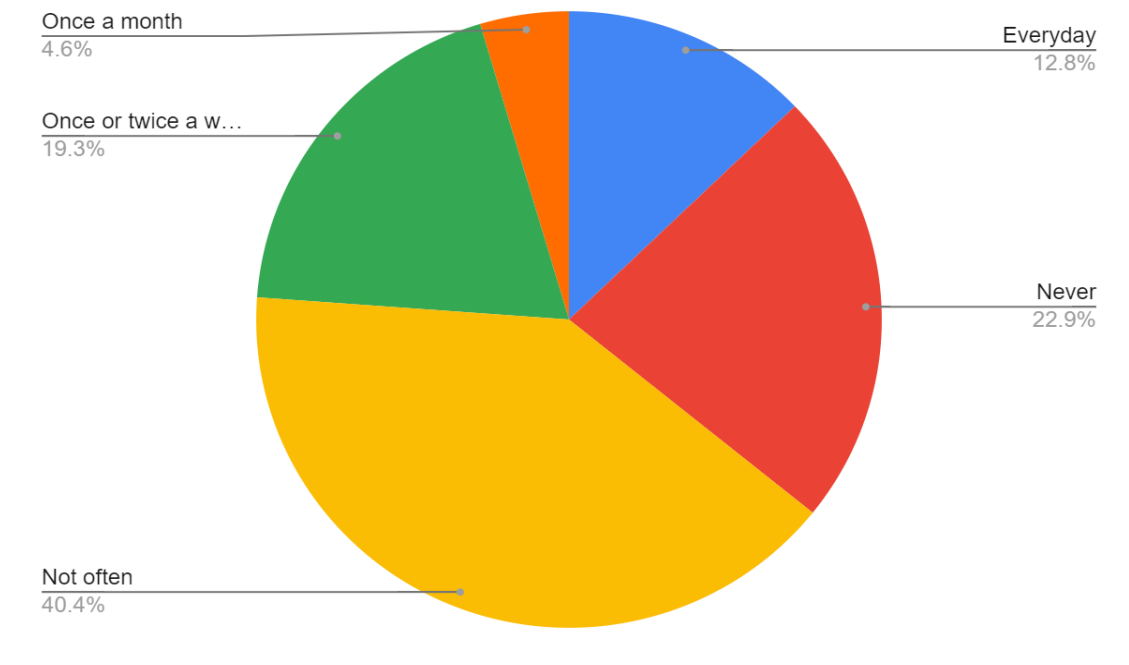


Figure 15

35- 44-year-old

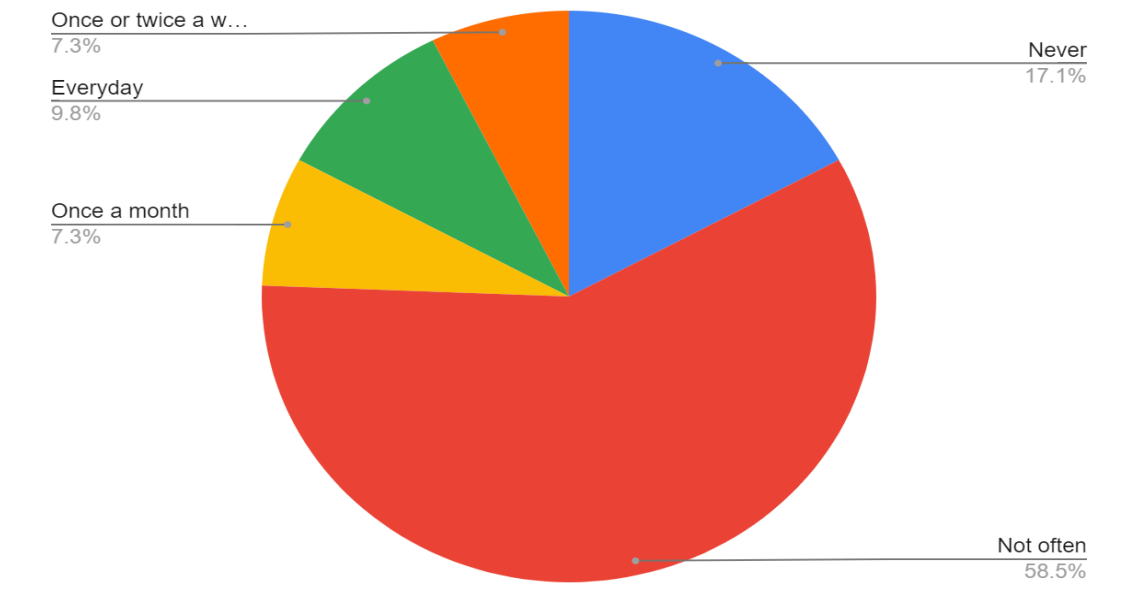


Figure 16

45 - 55-year-old

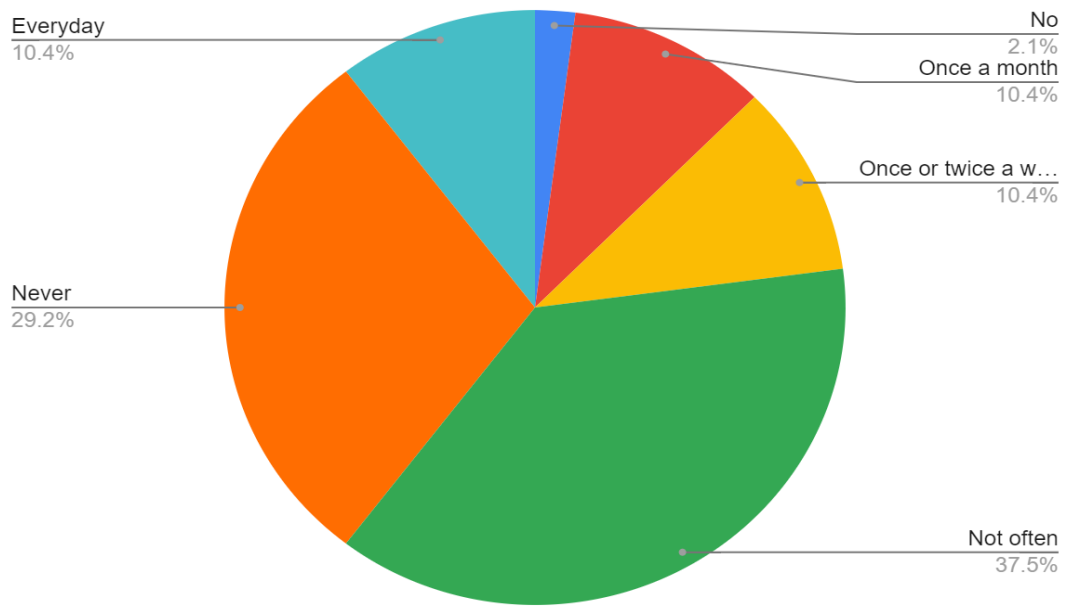


Figure 17

55 years and older

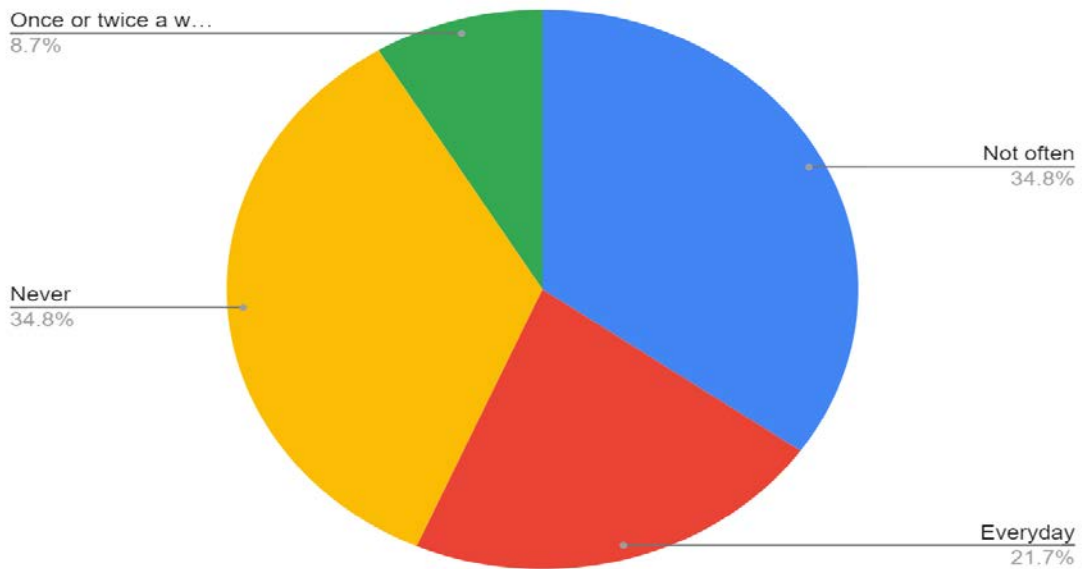


Figure 18

These percentages in each age group help give us a clear understanding of who listens to *Trinibad* music from each age group and how often do they listen to *Trinibad*.

Melissa Durham, a 2019 graduate who studied musical arts at The University of the West Indies reached out to me to give her input on the *Trinibad* movement. She resides in the heart of the ghetto in Diego Martin, Trinidad where Dancehall music was the forefront of her childhood and members of her community grew up listening to Dancehall music. She recalls her younger days of anticipating the newest Dancehall songs at parties from Jamaican artists and now that her country has musicians producing Dancehall music, she sees the need to support them. She mentioned that *Trinibad* music is played in her community from morning to evening non-stop and even though it hasn't impacted her community in a drastic manner, it has certainly taken the forefront of entertainment as more Trinidadian Dancehall is played instead of Jamaican Dancehall.

Figure 19. Melissa Durham

Melissa expressed, *Trinibad* music represented a new era of music in Trinidad and Tobago until it started to become confrontational as the artists became a representation for their hometowns and this is when the confusion began. She noticed the hype of *Trinibad* music has slowly decreased following the rise in violence and the death of two major *Trinibad* artists KLion and Rebel Sixx. Despite the violence and the negative influence, it promotes in youths she believes it is good for the music industry's development and she is grateful for the variety of music to enjoy by members of her country. Soca music is great party music to enjoy, but Dancehall music has lyrical content describing the struggles and lifestyle in the ghetto and she

appreciates this, because she can identify with the messages in the music. She stated that everyone's thought process is different and not everyone in the ghetto has the capacity to enjoy the music for what it is without acting upon it. Music has the power to influence a person's mood and behaviour and she has also witnessed the change in behaviour from people who are influenced in a negative manner. Melissa believes *Trinibad* music should be supported by the government of Trinidad and Tobago, because she has observed the way it is evolving the economic side of the music industry and this can further generate income for the government and it shouldn't be disregarded. When rap music first began in America it had the same controversy, but it has turned out to be one of the most successful genres of music and the same can be done for *Trinibad* music due to the music having more pros than cons in her opinion. (Interview with Melissa Durham)

## CONCLUSION

This study has confirmed the influence Jamaican Dancehall has on a newly emerging style of Dancehall music created in Trinidad and Tobago called *Trinibad*. The origin of the term *Trinibad* to describe Dancehall music created in Trinidad and Tobago was first established in 2017/18. The characteristics that define *Trinibad* music are the twang, slang, Trinbagonian accent and lyrical content. The *Trinibad* movement represents underprivileged ghetto youths who are fighting to create a space for themselves in the music industry with the hopes of gaining success both regionally and internationally. Despite a large majority of the population frowning upon the movement, it has acquired a large following from a diverse global fanbase. The popularity of *Trinibad* music was confirmed by this study, through interviews and survey questions the ongoing evolution of the *Trinibad* movement continues to develop.

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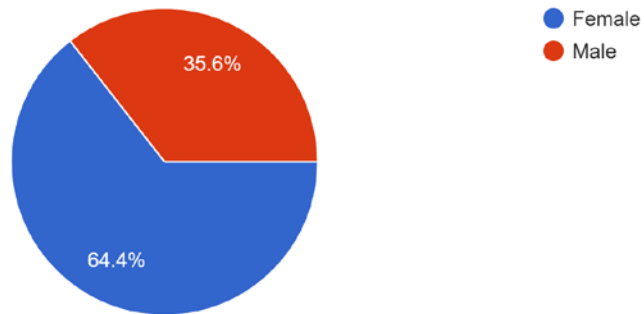
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- Interview with Jovi Ton  
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- Interview with Makamillion  
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- Interview with Omari Ashby  
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- Interview with Kadeem Alleyne  
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- Interview with David Millien  
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- Interview with Akeem Ryan  
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- Interview with Richard Romano  
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- Interview with Melissa Durham  
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## APPENDIX A

### Perception of Trinibad survey questions and results.

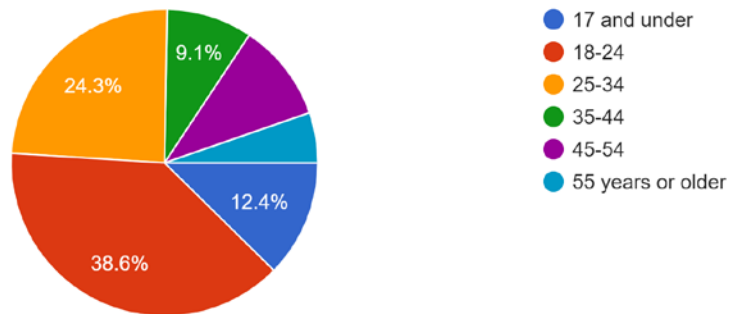
What is your gender?

450 responses

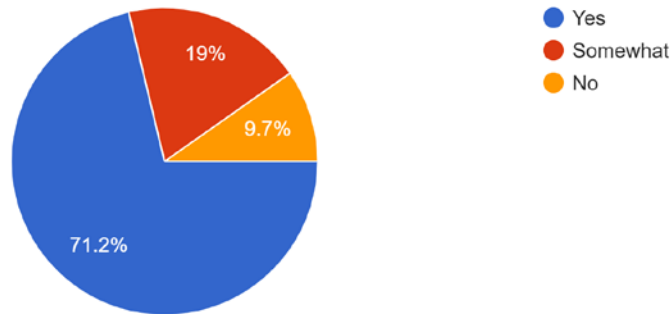


What is your age group?

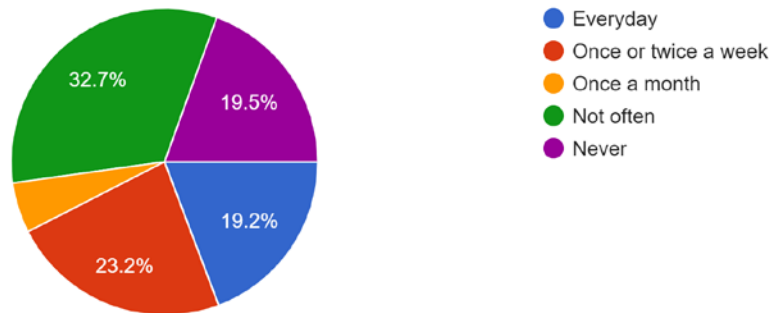
453 responses



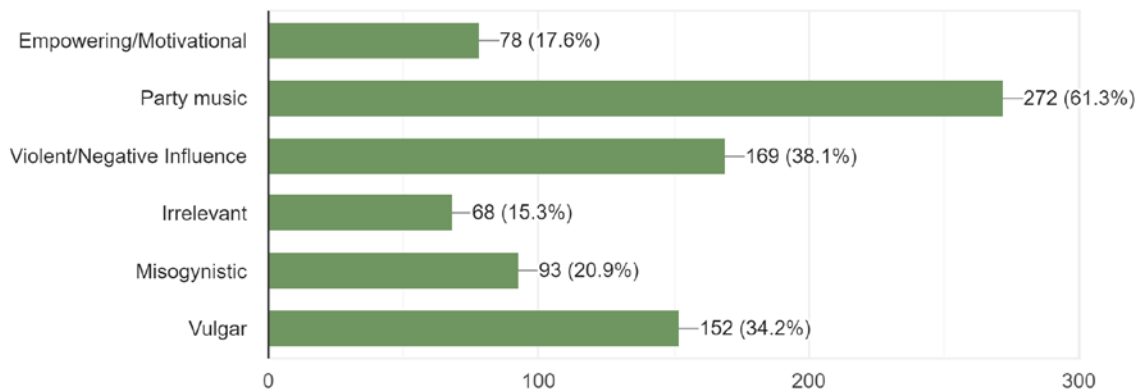
Have you heard of Trinibad music? (Prince Swanny, Jahllano, Plumpy Boss, Boy Boy, Rebel Sixx etc.)  
452 responses



How often do you listen to Trinibad music?  
452 responses

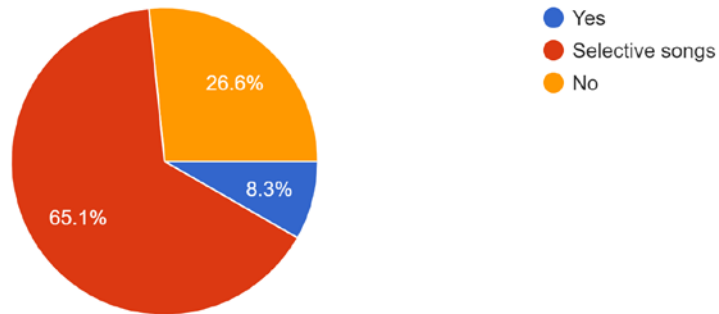


How do you view Trinibad music?  
444 responses



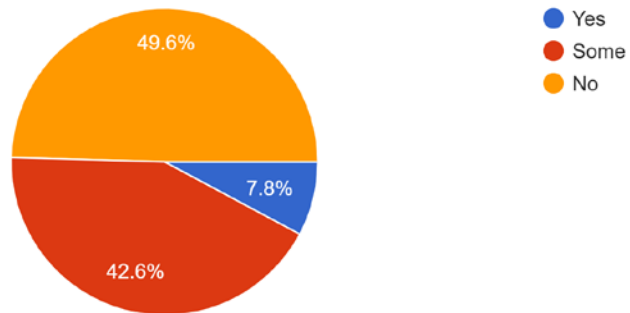
Do you like the lyrics in Trinibad music?

447 responses



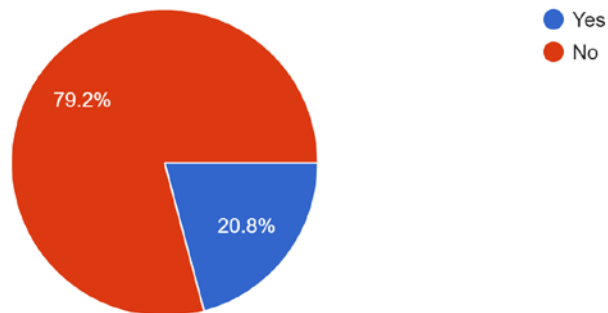
Do you like Trinibad music videos?

448 responses



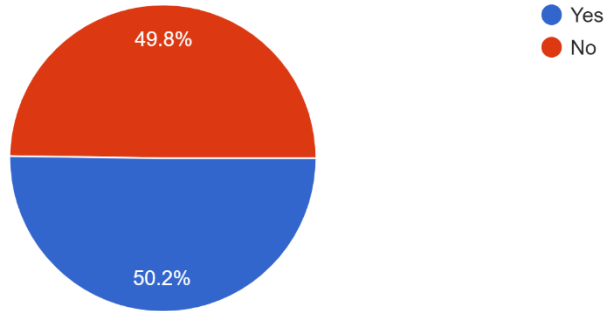
Have you ever attended a live performance of a Trinibad Artiste?

451 responses



Should Trinidad music be supported by the government of Trinidad and Tobago in the same way as Soca, Chutney and Calypso?

450 responses



## **APPENDIX B**

### Interview Questions for Rheon Elbourne, Boy Boy and Jovi Ton Interviews:

- 1) What inspired you to perform Trinidad music?
- 2) What would you like your music to represent?
- 3) What is your creative process like?
- 4) What is your most successful song(s) and career recognition gained thus far?
- 5) How do you view the public's perception of your music and what has been your feedback?
- 6) What is your perception of Trinidad music?

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions for David Millen Interview:

- 1) Who came up with the word “Trinibad”? And when did you first hear about it?
- 2) How did the Trinibad movement develop?
- 3) What part of Trinidad was it developed?
- 4) What musical characteristics define Trinibad Music?
- 5) What is your musical background?
- 6) How long have you been making Trinibad music and what lend you in this direction?
- 7) Who are some of the Artiste you have worked with and who would you like to work with in the future?
- 8) How far do you see Trinibad music reaching internationally?
- 9) How is Trinibad music related to dancehall?
- 10) From your perspective how do you think Trinibad music has been viewed by society?
- 11) What does Trinibad music represent?
- 12) Who are some of your musical icons and what about their work inspires you?
- 13) Who have you been listening to recently?
- 14) Are you affiliated with a label, and do you have connections with publishing, A&R, TV/Film or any radio companies?

## **APPENDIX D**

### Interview Questions for Punz Interview:

- 1) Who came up with the word Trinibad and when did you first hear about it?
- 2) What is your background in music? (Knowledge, Experience, Jobs)
- 3) What does Trinibad music represent?
- 4) What inspired you to start a clothing line called ‘Trinibad Urban Apparel’?
- 5) What is your role in the Trinibad music industry and what major projects have you worked on?
- 6) How far do you predict Trinibad music reaching and developing internationally?
- 7) What are some of your future aspirations for Punz Entertainment and what is your ultimate goal in the music industry?

## **APPENDIX E**

### Interview Questions for Omari Ashby and Kadeem Alleyne:

- 1) When did you first hear about the term Trinibad?
- 2) How would you describe the word Trinibad and what does it represent?
- 3) Do you see Trinibad as a musical movement or a new
- 4) In what ways are Jamaican Dancehall influential or similar to Trinibad?
- 5) What is your personal perception of Trinibad music?
- 6) What has been the public's perception of Trinibad music?
- 7) How far do you see Trinibad music reaching globally?

## **APPENDIX F**

### Interview Questions for Melissa Durham:

- 1) Do you like Trinibad music and why?
- 2) What are some of the ways people in your community are impacted by Trinibad music?
- 3) What do you think the Trinibad movement represents?
- 4) How often is Trinibad played in your neighbourhood?
- 5) What is your personal perception of Trinibad music?
- 6) Do you believe Trinibad music should be supported by the government of Trinidad and Tobago? and why or why not?