

# History of Soca Music, a Child of Calypso

## Soca Music

### What is Soca?

Soca is a modern form of [calypso](#) with an up-tempo beat. There is a popular misconception that Soca is a fusion of American soul music and traditional calypso. Hence the name "so-ca," soul/calypso. Though this sounds plausible, it is simply not true. Soca music originated as a fusion of calypso with Indian rhythms, thus combining the musical traditions to the two major ethnic groups of Trinidad and Tobago.

### The Father of Soca

Born October 6, 1941 in Lengua, Trinidad, Garfield Blackman would become the creator of soca. Blackman began singing calypso at the tender age of seven. Performing under the name Lord Shorty, he rose to fame in 1963 with his recording of *Clock and Dagger*. The name Lord Shorty is a paradoxical reference to his imposing height of 6-ft 4-in.

Talk that calypso was dying, and reggae was the new thing, prompted Lord Shorty to experiment with the calypso rhythm for nearly a decade. He combined Indian rhythm instruments (particularly the dholak, tabla and dhantal) with traditional calypso music. The result was a new energetic musical hybrid called soca. In 1973, Lord Shorty introduced soca to the world with his hit song *Īndrani*. The release of his 1974 album *Endless Vibrations* prompted dozens of musicians to adopt the new soca style.

Lord Shorty initially referred to his musical hybrid as "solka", representing the true "soul of calypso." The "Indianization" of calypso brought together the musical traditions of Trinidad and Tobago's two major ethnic groups, the descendants of African slaves and of indentured laborers from India. The name was later changed to "soca" by a music journalist.

*Endless Vibrations*, the first soca album, contained the popular *Om Shanti*, a song that sparked controversy because of its use of a Hindu chant in the chorus line. Lord Shorty was no stranger to controversy in the ensuing years performing songs such as *The PM Sex Probe*, which poked fun at the Prime Minister. He was equally adept at performing songs dealing with social and political issues as in his hit *Money Eh No Problem*.

By the turn of the 1980s, "the father of soca" had become disenchanted with music he had created, saying that soca was being used to "celebrate the female bottom, rather than uplift the spirits of the people." Lord Shorty's classic hit *Sugar Bum Bum* is a prime example of what he meant.

Around 1981, Lord Shorty converted to Rastafarianism, changed his name to Ras Shorty I, and moved into the Piparo forest in southern Trinidad, 50 miles from Port of Spain. There the prolific musician, composer and innovator continued to explore new musical frontiers while devoting himself to writing songs about spiritual matters and the dangers of hedonism. He formed the group Love Circle with his wife Claudette and several of their children. (He is said to have fathered anywhere from 14 to 20 children.) In the late 1980's he introduced a new style of music, jamoo, (Jah Music) which combined elements of reggae and gospel.

In 1997, he released the anti-drug song *Watch Out My Children* which went to the number one spot in the Caribbean. The song became an international hit and has been translated into ten languages.

On July 12, 2000 at the age of 58 Ras Shorty I died after a battle with multiple myeloma, a cancer of the bone marrow. His greatest legacy is the soca rhythm he created, bringing calypso into the modern era. The infectious soca rhythm has made calypso assessable to the young and the young at heart everywhere.

## The Evolution of Soca

Innovative Montserrat singer Arrow did much to popularize soca internationally with his 1983 number one soca classic *Hot Hot Hot*. Arrow has also recorded a string of CDs including

*Knock Dem Dead* (1988), *O'La Soca* (1989) and *Soca Dance Party* (1990) which have become timeless examples of the best of the genre.

Some of the most popular soca recordings include *Sugar Bum Bum* - Lord Kitchener (1978), *Soca Baptist* - Super Blue (1980), *Meh Lover* - Lord Nelson (1983), *Hot, Hot, Hot* - Arrow (1983), *Tiny Winey* - Byron Lee & The Dragonaires (1985), *Nani Wine* - Crazy (1989), *Teaser* - Becket (1990), *Dollar Wine* - Collin Lucas (1991), and *Jump* - Rupee (2000).

Soca has continued to grow and evolve giving rise to offshoots such as ragga soca and the increasingly popular chutney soca. Today soca is the definitive indigenous musical form associated with the Eastern Caribbean. Thanks, Lord Shorty.