

MONDAY MAN: 'Suga' sweet on Bajan vibes

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BORN IN Lodge Road, Christ Church and raised a short distance away in Thyme Bottom, Hugh Clarke wears his love for his homeland on his sleeve, chest, head and hands.

No matter where he goes in the world, there is always evidence of his Bajan connection, be it through his dress or speech. But no representation is more evident than through his latest endeavour called the **246 Bajan Vibes Radio UK**.

Bajan Vibes is a streamed radio show that promotes Caribbean music, particularly Barbados' soca music. It celebrated its first anniversary last April but those familiar with **DJ Suga Dee**, as Clarke is more popularly known, know that the origin of this show spans over two decades.



It all began when **Suga** migrated to the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. However, he would tell you that for him, pushing soca was always in his blood, dating back to his earlier days in Barbados when every Saturday a relative would be blaring music on a little Phillips transistor radio. Later Clarke would become friends with popular emcee Wayne **Kool** Simmons, who he considered his mentor and who actually taught him most of what he knew about mixing, feeling the beat, and so on, and it just grew from there.

In 1987, Clarke travelled to England to pursue academia and he read for several degrees in mechanical engineering. He started a life as a lecturer but he also began a career as a deejay, thanks to **Squibbly Jamming Dee**.

During an interview with the **DAILY NATION** while in Barbados recently, **Suga** said **Squibbly** was the first person to give him an opportunity to display his talent to the listening public. This was in 1994. At that time, **Squibbly** worked at what was known as a pirate station, **Station FM 89.8**. He was headed to Barbados for the **Crop Over Festival** and hence, needed someone to fill in his slot for three weeks.

"I called him one day and he said to me, 'Can you play music?' He said he was going to **Crop Over** and he wanted someone to cover his show. I said, 'You asking a drinker if he could drink?'" **Suga** recalled in laughter.

So **Squibbly** took him to the station on the Friday he was due to leave, made introductions and **Suga** was expected to start the next day.

That Saturday, he left home with some vinyl and a Walkman CD player confident for the two hours ahead. But on his way, that built-up confidence almost melted away.

"I was a bag of nerves and I stopped and bought myself a bottle of brandy," he said. "When I got to the station and watched the other deejay in front of me, he was on fire – literally on fire. Playing and having a vibe and people calling up. I sat down, drinking my drink and trying to calm my nerves. When it was my time to go on at 12 o'clock, I plugged up, plugged in the Walkman CD player and I put on the first song. The first song was a **Square One** song, **Raggamuffin**, and from the first song my nerves went."

Maybe it was the alcohol kicking in, he joked, but whatever it was, his first 15 minutes on air proved so dynamic that even the manager of the station came into the studio to applaud him.

Clarke recalled: “His words [were], ‘Damn, I’ve heard guys play music before but none like you’. He said he was out there on the streets and he heard every car, every shop, every house logged on to his station and the volume cranked up – and then when I dropped a Gillo, it all over from there.”

Pushing Bajan music

A past student of Graydon Sealy Secondary School, Clarke said after that show, he was so much in demand from other underground stations that he began to stretch himself thin by working at least three every weekend, and teaching during the week.

“I wasn’t getting any money for this. Unless you working for a legal station, no deejay in London would get paid, so we do it for the love of it. I did it because I knew there was not enough Bajan music being pushed out there. I started then to push **krosfyah** and all the youngsters whose music wasn’t being heard on the mainstream. The only place you heard soca music in England was on **Choice**, which started as a pirate station and went legal. They had one soca DJ called **Martin J**; he was the only person doing soca shows. His one show was on Sunday evenings while I had two shows – on Saturday afternoons and Sunday evenings.”

This programme continued for many years until about three or four years ago, Clarke said he began to grow tired as a desire to establish his own radio station increased. One day after inquiring about how he could do so and that help wasn’t forthcoming, almost by fate one of his students intervened.

This student created the domain and **Suga** did the rest. At 7:22 p.m. on April 22, 2015, for the first time music was streamed on **246 Bajan Vibes Radio UK**.

The station operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and has secured the services of presenters such as: **Iceman The Niceman**, **Jamaike**, **DJ Lady CC**, **DJ Lady M** and the newest addition DJ Gino.

Clarke said the aim of **Bajan Vibes** was to grow and help promote West Indian music, with Barbados at the forefront.

At 52 years old, Clarke said his yearning to promote Bajan music has not been without its challenges. The majority, he related, was from the said artistes he wanted the rest of the world to learn about.

“It has been difficult because from 1994 to 2000, before we became Internet au fait, it was a problem. I was coming home every year and anybody who knew me, knew how my six-week holiday would be spent. From the time I landed at Grantley Adams [International Airport], put down my suitcases, I was running all over Barbados to get music, to the point that one artiste told my aunt I had to buy his music to promote him. There were others though, like **Gorg**. Nobody in London knew about **Gorg** before I started pushing his music and the **Outpatients**,” Clarke said.



Some people might have thought he was gaining financially, but he made it clear he was not.

No profit

“To infringe on someone’s intellectual property means someone is gaining from it . . . and that is not what I am doing. I do not, and I will make this clear to everyone out there, I do not copy. I don’t even profit off my own radio station; that hasn’t happened yet. Due to the equipment, to run Internet, electricity and keep the domain name active, I haven’t profited; I haven’t even gotten a cent back yet.”

So why does he persist in spite of no financial gain and the sometimes unappreciative response of music producers? According to Clarke, music is his “destressor”.

“When I play music and I got people out there listening and reacting and interacting, it gives me that adrenalin rush,” he said.

In the long run, **Suga** wants his business to actually make money, but in the interim his main goal is to promote Barbados, promote the cultural music and promote the artistes who are not getting heard.

“I’ve heard presenters say when a man send them a CD and they don’t like the music, they use it as a drinks tray. I said you can’t be doing that. An artiste pays his money to go into a studio. What might not be good for you, may be good for somebody else. Give the people an airplay, and that is my take on music. As long as it is not vulgar, derogatory or swearing, it will be played,” he said.
(SDB Media)