

The last few years found the music industry lacking new ideas, suffering from declining sales and, overall, experiencing a very stale climate

on the musical horizon. This is probably one of the reasons that major labels sought the mostly untapped resources of the Caribbean to breathe some life into their business. The '90s found a number of bands playing with and fusing their styles with the traditionally Jamaican sounds of ska and reggae. Groups like No Doubt and Sugar Ray were on the ska/reggae bandwagon and even teamed with the likes of dancehall superstars Bounty Killer and Super Cat, though the fad would quickly fade due to an abundance of mediocre bands and the nagging feeling that barely any of these groups were actually "authentic."

With that opportunity temporarily squandered, the recording industry went back to the Caribbean and this time fished out the Latin music craze. Though it put traditional Latin-American and salsa/Afro-Cuban music back on the map—with the Buena Vista Social Club being one of the most notable examples—the honest truth is that the less said about Ricky Martin, the better. Fast-forward just a couple of years and the industry is back at it, only this time they seem to have hit the mark. Dancehall and soca are huge now, and everybody and their grandmother knows the names Sean Paul, Beenie Man and Wayne Wonder. From the parts of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic comes the current reggaeton (a hybrid of hardcore rap, reggae, salsa and merengue) craze that spawned superstar Tego Calderón. Now, the industry is ready to introduce the soca music of Trinidad and Tobago to mainstream audiences—following the breakthrough of Kevin Lyttle—and they've already got a soca poster boy by

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STAR**

RUPEE



the name of Rupee.

Born Rupert Clarke, Rupee is the multi-ethnic son of a Barbadian father and a German mother. This ethnic diversity led to young Rup traveling between and living within the cultures of Germany, England and Barbados. "My older brothers were performing rap in Germany and England," he recalls. "They would always take me out with them, and I'd scribble down my little verse or two." He'd really get his start in Barbados after winning a talent show as a teenager and joining the popular Barbadian band, Coalishun. "In Coalishun, my role was to [rap]," he explains. "When one of the vocalists was unavailable for a session, I ended up singing a calypso song, even though dancehall was really my thing." This might have been Rupee's introduction to soca.

Soca is a form of modern calypso that was created in the early '70s by a Trinidadian artist named Lord Shorty. Realizing that reggae had stolen the spotlight from his beloved calypso music, he decided to fuse the musical traditions of Trinidad and Tobago by introducing Indian instrumentation and rhythms to his calypso music. He dubbed it "solka," but music journalists would later call it soca—short for soul and calypso. The trend spread like wildfire throughout the Caribbean and when it came time for Rupee to try his hand at it, he gave it his own modern spin.

"Caribbean music as a whole has had a marvelous resurgence in the last two years," he proudly acknowledges. "It's a beautiful thing. With the background I have, it's natural for me to experiment, and I think it's necessary and good for the music." Rupee was quick to work on the evolution of his style, finishing college to become a graphic artist and then hitting the road, performing at carnivals around the Caribbean and various U.S. cities (i.e., New York and Miami).

Rupee's current goal is simple: introduce this popular style of music to the masses. And he plans on doing just that with his major label debut, *I On I*. "I wanted to accomplish a diversity in this album and expose different sides of soca music," says Rupee. "I didn't want to tread a fixed line. We used a lot of acoustic guitar and percussion, and a lot of universal sounds: you can hear rock, R&B, and hardcore reggae, as well as pure soca. I think it's possible to bring various elements of music to the soca art form, and that can bring it to a wider audience." —A.Q.C.