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Black Music Month 2014: June 15 musical salute to Jay Z



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It's Black Music Month. Enjoy the 2014 series. Support the artists. Buy their licensed music. And turn up as you dance along.

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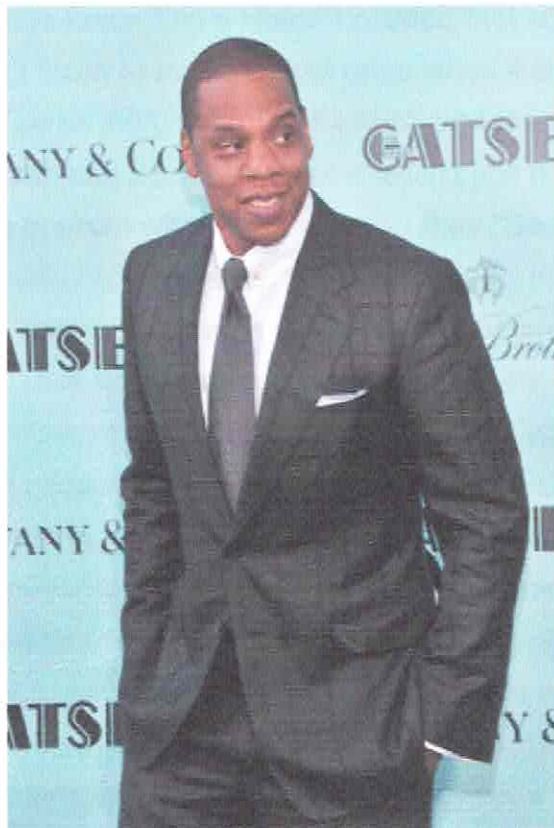


Photo by Stephen Lovekin/Getty Images

Brief history: In 2010, I wrote a music series honoring Black Music Month on Associated Content's site (republished on **Examiner**). The focus was to honor new R&B singers, veteran R&B singers, solo rappers, and evenly split the musical salute between female and male rappers. The only artists I was not willing to split up were Salt n' Pepa because they worked as a unit. In 2014, it's about time to salute more artists, but in the spirit of Salt n' Pepa's legacy, R&B groups and rap groups will be included. The pattern in 2014 will be newer R&B singers (from 2000 to present), R&B and/or hip-hop groups, veteran R&B singers, and then solo rappers, still evenly split between women and men.

Black Music Month Turn Up Factor "Turn down for what?": It's way too easy to fall into the trap of believing Jay Z is a commercial rapper who just wants to get paid. It's also naive and inaccurate. Outside of being one of the few artists who has been able to steadily maintain a career in a field that is dominated by those in their late teens and 20s, he's also (along with a few others) managed to show upcoming rappers that there are possibilities to expand their rap careers. Jay Z has been a basketball team owner (Brooklyn Nets), music label President and CEO (Def Jam), political advocate (President Barack H. Obama), charity fundraiser advocate (NYC fundraiser for President Obama, **Shawn Carter Foundation**) and quiet as it's kept, he keeps his ear to socially conscious issues, too (Trayvon Martin rally, donated half of \$1 million to Red Cross for Hurricane Katrina). This is on top of running through countless Billboard charts, selling out stadiums and making record-breaking CD sales. And he made it cool to be married, unapologetically stepping out "upgraded" with his superstar wife Beyonce Knowles Carter.

My Connection/First Memory to Artist: I don't care what song Jay Z releases. I will always favor "Dig a Hole." I blasted that song nonstop when I first heard it. To this day, I still can't listen to the song just once when it comes on. At Northern Michigan University, I did the same thing with "Big Pimpin'" and made a couple guy friends of mine love the song from me rapping it so much. But it wasn't just his music that hooked me. I was stunned to see him perform with R. Kelly during their "Best of Both Worlds" tour on September 30, 2004 at Allstate Arena. It wasn't just because R. Kelly kept doing random things onstage and walked off. The astonishment was from me originally pegging Jay Z as someone who was too cool to dance around and put on a good show. I went 95 percent to see R. Kelly, but within a few minutes, my attention was on the Brooklynite. My Lincoln University college friends and I had already been blasting "The Best of Both Worlds," but seeing them perform the songs in person in my Chicago hometown left a lasting impression and made me a far bigger fan of someone who I was already impressed by. I vehemently disagree with his nonchalance over the n-word and didn't agree with several things he said in his book "Decoded," but disagreeing with someone doesn't make me any less of a fan. I've observed his career over the years, and even when I cringe at some of his arrogant quotes (ex. "My presence is charity"), he's a fascinating interviewee, a superb business person and fun to watch. I own all of his CDs, but what I applaud him for even more is when he's humble enough to salute other artists (ex. "A Star is Born") and makes a point to mind his manners (ex. going off script and speaking to the panel on "Real Time With Bill Maher").

Numbers Don't Lie: He's not one to get on music that he doesn't believe in, think will be a

hit or at least something that'll make a point. I'm not sure the Billboard charts even matter to the man, but many of his songs are there anyway. A few of his songs that made it to the top 10 of the Billboard Top 100 are "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)" (20 weeks, peaked at number eight), "'03 Bonnie & Clyde" (23 weeks, peaked at number four), "Excuse Me Miss" (19 weeks, peaked at number eight), "Change Clothes" (18 weeks, peaked at number 10), "Dirt Off Your Shoulder" (26 weeks, peaked at number five), "Show Me What You Got" (15 weeks, peaked at number eight) and "Holy Grail" (27 weeks, peaked at number four).

For the first series of Black Music Month artists republished on Examiner (originally on Associated Content), [click here](#) to see all 30.

*Shamontiel is also **The Wire Examiner**, and for the gladiators, she's the **Scandal Examiner**, too.*

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