

Black Music Month 2014: June 1 musical salute to Mario

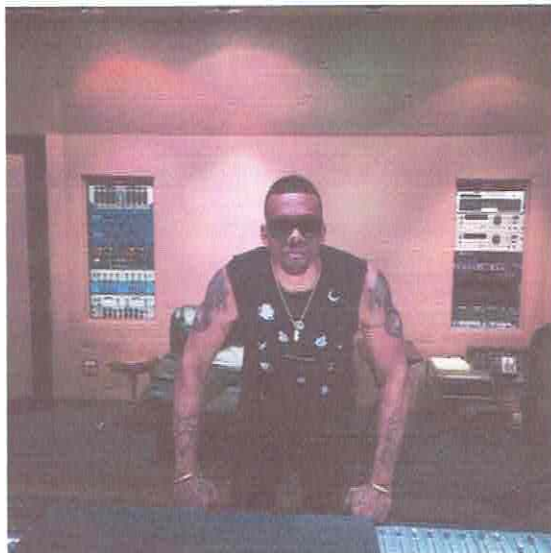


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It's Black Music Month. Enjoy the 2014 series. Support the artists. Buy their licensed music. And turn up as you dance along.

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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), veteran R&B singers, R&B groups and/or hip-hop groups, and then solo rappers, still evenly split between women and men.

Black Music Month Turn Up Factor "Turn down for what?": Who can forget the soulful homage to Biz Markie's 1989 hit "Just a Friend" that stayed on the **Billboard charts** for 22 weeks and climbed all the way to number nine. Mario, with a "52" baggy jersey and braids,

reminded us how hot the song was again in 2002. But he did it with a little bit less heartbreak and a helluva lot more swag. And it worked. The song stayed on the **Billboard charts** for 21 weeks and peaked at number four. He released four CDs total: "Mario" in 2002, "Turning Point" in 2004, "Go" in 2007 and "D.N.A." in 2009.

My Connection/First Memory to Artist: I was already a fan of his music and like many others, I thought he looked a helluva lot like a younger version of Chris Rock but slightly cooler and a bit more intense. But when I heard "Right and a Wrong Way" on the "Go" album, that blew me away. I have heard many artists hit a high note, and I'm usually not impressed. It seems like the go-to trick when singing the song's lyrics fail. Not so much with Mario. The opening to that song was incredible, and I have yet to listen to it without repeating the beginning at least five more times before I can hear the rest of the song. He's one of those artists who I think sounds good with or without the music, and watching him on "**Sway in the Morning**" just enjoying his own music proved he's a force to be reckoned with.

I had a temporary bone to pick with him for doing a PETA ad for "Ink, Not Mink" and then sending out a tweet saying, "Shout out to all my nigs walkin out the club wit [sic] the Minks!! Shit, at least u warm!" As a vegetarian who despises real fur, I felt some kind of way about that. Not just the encouragement of fur but to tweet it after doing the PETA ad. If you're down for a cause, be down for that cause. I wrote an op/ed piece for AC called "Do the celebrity models behind 'Ink, Not Mink' PETA ads really oppose fur?" However, I'm just not as extreme as Mayte from "Hollywood Exes" and came to the conclusion that you can't change a person's mindset by lashing out about it. And while I still cringe at the tweet, whenever I hear him sing, all I can think is, "What a phenomenal artist."

I also respected "Do Right." I miss the days when R&B singers would not only make women swoon while they croon but also bring awareness to bigger issues. In Mario's case, it was bringing awareness to the battles of drug addiction from his own family life. When artists present personal sides of their family life (and not in a planned reality show way), it's not only brave but may help someone else. And how can you not respect a man who sees the beauty in the **Janelle Monaes** of the world? It's nice to hear the love for chocolate women who keep their clothes on and still keep it sexy.

Numbers Don't Lie: He didn't stop with "Just a Friend." Several other Mario songs made it to Billboard, including "Braid My Hair" for eight weeks (peaked at number 74), "Let Me Love

You" for 36 weeks (peaked at number one), "How Could You" for 17 weeks (peaked at number 52), "How Do I Breathe" for 10 weeks (peaked at number 46), "Crying Out for Me" for 20 weeks (peaked at number 33), "Break Up" featuring Gucci Mane and Sean Garrett for 23 weeks (peaked at number 14) and "Ooh Baby" cracked the top 100 at number 95.

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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