

A CLASSIC CRUSA

Radio show boasts vintage calypso menu — and focus

By Glenda Cadogan

On Saturday at 8 p.m., the radio airwaves from a modest Brooklyn studio take on a different vibration, and a “revolution” takes place.

Leading the offensive at the microphone is Trevor Wilkins, a confessed crusader of vintage calypso music.

“Some people tell me that it will take a revolution to save calypso,” he says. “Well, my friends, welcome to the revolution.”

Convinced that contemporary calypso/soca music has collapsed to the point of being simplistic, Wilkins refuses to play “jam and wine” songs on his WNYE 91.5 FM program.

“This new blend of music does not enhance us as a people,” Wilkins says. “Real calypso is the projection of an idea in a musical structure. Therefore, authentic calypso is more lyrics and less music. But today’s calypso is more music and less lyrics. Quite frankly, it’s more like no lyrics at all.”

He refers to his weekly program, known simply as “The Trevor Wilkins Show,” as the “no-surrender calypso show.”

For his two hours on the air, he plays nothing but calypso music from his vast collection of oldies that date to the 1930s.

Wilkins says he started playing music about 20 years ago in Trinidad and Tobago, his homeland.

“As a party deejay, I was known as ‘Ranking T’ and played the major party venues. But I always had a proclivity for radio,” he says. “In 1982, when I migrated to the United States, I tried to break into radio, but it was a very difficult endeavor.”

Eight years later, Wilkins got his break on WNJR radio, where he remained for two years before producing his own show on WNYE. Wilkins launched his program in 1992 as a talk show that covered Caribbean issues from sports to politics. But that changed in 1997 when he acquired a calypso collection of music from the 1930s to the 1960s.

“I conducted my own study of the New York market and found that there was a large listenership of people between 24-54 years who were turned off by the music they were hearing and so had turned to vintage calypso,” he says. “My challenge was to find out if there was enough financial support to build an audience for vintage calypso.”

Wilkins created his niche in the market with increased listenership on his program, which airs every Saturday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

“Soca music is now becoming big business as more artists are breaking the mainstream barrier,” says Wilkins, who is content to remain — if need be — the lone crusader of vintage calypso.



■ **RADIO HOST** Trevor Wilkins at console of his calypso show.