

Merritone Music

The Last Sound Standing



Company Profile

One day after school, brothers Trevor and Winston heard a sound while waiting at a Kingston bus stop. The sound was music pumping from Mr. Chin's Sky Rocket Sound System. The variety of Jamaican mento, calypso, American R + B , and country music instantly captivated them. After many visits to Mr. Chin, they convinced their father, Val Blake, to start a sound system. In 1950, St. Thomas had its second revolution with the birth of the Merritone Music Sound System.

Seven decades later, Merritone Music still rocks steady. It is one of Jamaica's longest running family-owned businesses and the only continuous sound system left from the original sound system era i.e. Merritone Music is the last sound standing.

The Merritone Sound

Val Blake started St. Thomas's first sound system. This would be one of many firsts in Merritone Music's illustrious story. His interest in Latin music, dances such as cha cha cha, waltz, and slow love songs created the foundation of Merritone Music's distinctively identifiable formula.

Val died in 1956, leaving his 4 young sons, Trevor, Winston, Tyrone and Monte to continue Merritone Music's legacy.

The four Blake brothers stood out as the only sound that featured a family of DJs. And while all brothers played, Winston was the star. Both he and Monte are the two most recognized selectors.

The Merritone Mission

To make Merri moments that last forever.

The Merritone Selectors (Musical Creative) Team

Winston Blake, OD, is the iconic force that shaped Merritone, Jamaican music and culture. After his death in 2016, he left behind his youngest brother, Monte Blake to lead and inspire the Merritone selectors: Mickey Thompson, Craig Ross, Richie Clarke, Glen Campbell, Fernando Bogle, and Jeremy Scott.

The Merritone Directors (Management Creative) Team

Monte Blake is Merritone's Director and his daughter, Monique Blake is the Managing Director.

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Brand Portfolio

Merritone Music, LTD, Merritone Music Radio, Merritone Music Foundation, LTD, World Merri Music Day and The Turntable Club

Signature Events

Annual Reunion & Homecoming (Oct), held in Jamaica; Family Fun Day (Jul) held in NYC area; Merritone Cruise (Feb) the Caribbean; World Merri Music Day (Oct) held globally

Co-Partnered Events

Memories in the Park (Nov) held in Florida; Father's Day (Jun) held in Atlanta

Our core belief: Things of quality have no fear of time

After 70+ years, we are just getting started. We recognize that the quality of our music, the positivity of our message, and the caliber of our team gives us an influential platform from which we can do a lot of good in Jamaica and in the world. We are committed to the following:

- **To unite and heal people through the positive vibes of music and dance**

Merritone Music etched out a unique space in sound system history with its focus on breaking down social barriers. Sound systems are often viewed as the purview of the people living in the inner city and Merritone is proud to bring joy to the hard working people of Jamaica.

In the 1960's, Merritone played at the University of West Indies Mona campus and attracted the daughters and sons of Jamaica's middle and upper classes. We gave sound system culture respectability in Jamaica as well as greater accessibility across a diverse group of people ranging from higglers and up-and-coming artists to famous international stars and prominent politicians including prime ministers.

- **To support and foster music education**

In 2020, Merritone Music created the Merritone Music Foundation in order to solidify and bolster its efforts to ensure access to music education for aspiring musicians. It has adapted the Pembroke Hall High School Band and have donated musical instruments to students.

- **To showcase and promote emerging artists**

In the 1970s, Winston Blake started the VIP Talent Exposure. Many of Jamaica's greatest stars first got their opportunity on his stage. They include Cynthia "Songbird" Schloss-Blake, Beresford Hammond, The Tamlins, Jacob Miller, Ruddy Thomas, The Mighty Diamonds and Scorch Dance Group. Throughout the decades, Merritone Music continues to showcase and support artists. Their collaboration with various organizations like JAAVA spotlights Jamaican talent.

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The Merri Facts

- It is the only sound system to play on all modern musical formats from shellack 78 RPM, vinyl records, 8-track cassettes, cds and digital music
- In 1975, Merritone Music was the 1st sound system to play at a hotel when it held sessions at the uptown Sheraton Hotel in New Kingston, thus breaking a major social barrier
- Turntable Club is Jamaica's longest running night club. Its dance floors were packed for 28 years
- Turntable Club was the site of the 1st live recording session featuring Dennis Brown
- It was also the place where entertainers like Marvin Gaye, Keith Richards, Johnny Nash, Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff; politicians like Andrew Young; Jamaican prime ministers Michael Manley, PJ Patterson, Portia Simpson frequented
- It was the first Jamaican-based sound system to play internationally. It continues to play the Merritone sound wherever the diaspora resides such as cities like New York, Connecticut, Miami, Ft Lauderdale, Atlanta, Toronto, London

Merritone Music Awards + Recognition

Below are some of the key awards in Merritone Music modern era:

- 1997: The government of Jamaica awarded Winston Blake with the Order of Distinction (OD), the highest civilian recognition, in honor of his contributions to Jamaican music
- 2000: St Thomas Municipal Council renamed Bay Mount (the original Merritone Music home site) to Blake Hill in recognition of Merritone Music's 50th anniversary
- 2000: Reggae Canada honored Winston Blake with the Icons Award
- 2008: The United States House of Representatives 11th Congressional district honored Winston Blake for contribution to Brooklyn, NY and its citizens.
- 2008: University of West Indies, Mona School of Business held a Symposium on Merritone Sound System as one of Jamaica's longest running family-owned businesses
- 2012: Nassau County New York honored Winston Blake for his dedicated service to the community
- 2015: International Reggae Day honors Merritone Music with a Pioneer Sound Award
- 2017: JaRIA (Jamaica Reggae Industry Association) posthumously honors Winston Blake for exceptional contribution to the reggae industry
- 2018: Turntable Club, at 118 Red Hills Road, was designated a National Heritage site
- 2022: Oct 25 (Val Blake's birthday) designated as World Merri Music Day