

Year in Review: Who's Dancehall's best male deejay for 2011?

In years past, when Dancehall fans asked who deserved deejay of the year honors, it virtually became a one man category given the dominance Vybz Kartel exerted annually. However, 2011 may have witnessed the most wide open race for the deejay of the year title, primarily due to the effect that personal issues had on the musical side of things.

One of the most intriguing years in Dancehall history, 2011 produced several reputable efforts from an established group of superstars as well as a newcomer who's drawn several comparisons to Vybz Kartel in recent months. Six artistes in particular showcased those efforts with regularity.

5. Popcaan – Unquestionably the fastest rising Dancehall superstar since Mavado's debuted in 2004, Popcaan announced himself as a potentially elite deejay; particularly with the release of the party anthem, Ravin's. His first number one single ever, Ravin's proved that Popcaan was more than just Vybz Kartel's right hand man, he became his own entity within the Portmore Empire; drawing several comparisons to his accomplished mentor. Ravin's began a run of several number one hits for Popcaan as he also earned similar acclaim with follow-up efforts such as Clean as well as the pulsating single, Only Man She Want. All three singles showcased Popcaan's lyrical dexterity and swagger, reminiscent of a young Vybz Kartel while proving that a bright future of the Portmore Empire could occur. Though Deejay of the Year might be a stretch for him this early in a promising career, Popcaan set the foundation for himself where he could earn several accolades, commercial deals and even collaborations going forward. As long as he continues to meet rising expectations, a deejay of the year award could come his way in the very near future.

4. Beenie Man/Bounty Killer – You can't mention one without the other when it comes to Dancehall legends, Beenie Man and Bounty Killer and 2011 once again re-emphasized said point. This year, Dancehall saw the revival of their long-standing feud as well as their individual careers. Beenie Man dazzled fans with the release of his hit single, Go Go Club, which charted well on local and international Dancehall charts. Additionally, the self-professed "King of the Dancehall" proved his worthiness of the crown by strongly asserting himself on the internationally-acclaimed Overproof Riddim with the singles, Let's Go and John Crow. Many fans regard Let's Go as the Riddim's best song given its substantialized lyrical content. Meanwhile, Bounty Killer bounced back from a somewhat disappointing and turbulent 2010 with his own reputable effort on the Overproof Riddim entitled, Galactic Gallis, calling out deejays who only sing about being with girls but don't practice what they preach. Additionally, Bounty Killer released No Cream To Mi Face, a sharp-shooting lyrical attack on former protégé, Vybz Kartel, as well as the Boardhouse Records produced single, Ready Fi Dem. Each of these efforts proved that Bounty Killer not only remains relevant within Dancehall circles, he's still a major force within the industry. However, after a short truce, Beenie Man and Bounty Killer soon engaged in another lyrical feud; exchanging diss singles such as Shut Up and Cah Puff Mi Chest amongst others. Their battle led to open competition on several productions, leading Dancehall observers to wonder if the two will forever be intertwined. For that reason, they might cancel each other out with regards to the deejay of the year award.

3. Assassin: Boardhouse Records artiste, Assassin aka Agent Sasco produced his best run yet in 2011; asserting his presence within the Dancehall fraternity while finally achieving elite status. During the first third of 2011, Agent Sasco firmly announced his candidacy for deejay of the year with strong singles such as Talk How Mi Feel and Nothing At All. Never previously had Dancehall seen such a fierce side to Assassin's lyrical display as his range clearly expanded to levels demanded the notice of his peers within the industry. At one point, he had fans wondering whether or not a clash between Sasco and long-time rival, Vybz Kartel was soon on the horizon, thanks to his single, Yuh Madda. This one-verse masterpiece seemingly was a direct counteraction at Kartel's single, Real Badman; offering a potential prelude to what could have been an intriguing STING clash. Run Di Place, Nuh Loose Ting and Dem Bad In A Gang allowed Dancehall observers to look on Assassin with a new found sense of clarity as not only did the deejay make substantial growth within the industry, Sasco ascended to a class that gained him international appeal as several of these singles gathered regular airplay overseas. Awarding Assassin with such an honor isn't a stretch, it's quite possible given such an accomplished resume as well as notable performances across the Caribbean and other regions that showcased his stage presence; finally reaching the potential he displayed when bursting onto the Dancehall scene in 2003.

2. Vybz Kartel: A controversial placement for who many still regard as Dancehall's best, but 2011 was a rollercoaster year for Vybz Kartel to say the least, leaving many to wonder if his personal antics trumped his musical prowess, Kartel managed to prove his critics wrong by switching his style. In January, Kartel teamed up with long-time producer, Russian for the single, Look Pon We which earned "Di Teacha" one of several number one hit singles this year. Then, in an unusual twist, Kartel gave fans glimpses of his old persona with "badman" singles such as Real Badman and Duh Weh Yuh Wah Fi Duh; proving he still had that "gangster" element to his lyrical arsenal. However, following Assassin's counteraction, Kartel issued a self-imposed ban on performing gun lyrics, returning to performing only girl-related singles. Though it seemed like a seemingly restrictive move, Kartel once again showed defiance; releasing strong efforts such as Come Yah Nuh Mi Gyal, Go Go Wine, Nymphomaniac amongst others. But Kartel's status took another move up with the summer anthem, Summer Time, one of the biggest Dancehall singles of its generation. A number one hit for several weeks on local and international charts, Kartel's effervescence was on full display for the world to see; leaving fans to wonder if his various antics would ever catch up to him. However, following a September arrest and subsequent murder charges that sent shockwaves throughout the Jamaican music industry, many fans wonder how much these antics have hurt his legendary status. Additionally, his popular reality show, Teacha's Pet may have also hurt his musical reputation given its apparent "sideshow" effect. Though his impact on Dancehall continues to loom large and his achievements in 2011 warrant such an award, there remains the question of "What could have been?" had he stayed out of trouble.

1. Mavado: Considering the meaning of what the Deejay of the Year title

represents, by accomplishing mass success locally and internationally, nobody fit the bill more in 2011 than Kartel former rival, Mavado. The "Gully Gaad" reached unprecedented heights in 2011; accomplishing a slew of number one hits locally, while opening new doors for his Dancehall compatriots overseas through the acquisition of his United States visa. Mavado opened the year in resounding fashion through the release of singles such as the controversial, Stephen "Di Genius" McGregor single, Tump as well as his first number one hit single of 2011 entitled, Star Bwoy. Immediately, Mavado re-emphasized his elite status following a quiet second half of 2010, setting the foundation a well-rounded year. Pepper became Mavado's next number one effort; earning him countless plays across local and international airwaves. Also, efforts such as Final Destination, Do Road and another number one, Settle Down on the Overproof Riddim, displayed lyrical dexterity from Mavado that hadn't been seen since the height of his feud with Kartel in 2008. However, what sets Mavado apart from the pack was his ability to regain his United States visa in July and immediately use it to his advantage. Sealing a deal with hip-hop producer, DJ Khaled and We The Best Music Group, Mavado finally landed the international deal he craved; earning collaborations with hip-hop superstars, Akon with Survivor and Ace Hood with Emergency. Additionally, Mavado unveiled a well-received collaboration with Grammy-winning R&B superstar, Ne-Yo for the remix of I Know You Want Me and also sported the crossover single, Delilah, earning him stronger acclaim. Given his list of local and international achievement as well as widening the potential for local artistes to achieve greater things overseas going forward, Mavado most warrants the honor for 2011 male deejay of the year.