



Kid Site's experience showed when he had to start over his performance of *Viral* after he could not be heard at the start of his initial appearance on stage. (JJJ)



Chrystal Cummins-Beckles had another great performance this year and captured third place. (Pictures by Lennox Devonish.)

AC COOLS 'EM DOWN

By Donna Sealy

As the clock headed towards 4 o'clock yesterday morning Adrian AC Clarke won his third *Pic O De Crop* (PODC) crown, hushing critics and answering fans who wondered if he could do better than his second-place showings in the annual contest, the pinnacle in Barbados' calypso arena.

The calypsonian, who hails from *De Barbados Public Workers Cooperative Credit Union Ltd Big Show*, brushed aside criticisms that he rehased titles from his previous songs and a "tired melody" to give a sterling rendition of *Going Fuh Crown* waking up the large audience attending the *Courtesy Garage Pic O De Crop Finals* at the *National Botanical Garden*, who by the time he hit the stage as the 16th contestant around 1:40 a.m. was growing weary.

This could be the reason. The show started 51 minutes late after the scheduled 8 p.m. owing to "technical difficulties," said MC Mac Fingall. There were some technical hitches with video presentations, one contestant had to start over, the second half started just after midnight with a performance from 1995 PODC monarch Edwin Yearwood, the results came back about 80 minutes after the last contestant finished performing at 2:08 a.m., making it the latest running finals in recent history.

Stamped authority

But the night belonged to AC who stamped his authority on the calypso clash to amass 133 points, 28 more than second place *Sir Ruel*, to lift the monarch's trophy and claim top honours 16 years after winning his second title back in 2008.

He seemed to have learnt from his performance of *Anansi* and *De Big Bad Ram* left people baffled about the lyrical changes which didn't fit in. He was clear in his reasoning for not singing "but no economy we already know it's a mess [and] therefore he isn't adding to this foolishness" neither did he want to "hear 'bout no



The crowd at the National Botanical Gardens had their favourites on the night.

consultants consulting 'bout consultation when a section of the population bordering on starvation".

Singing directly after iWeb, he referred to his rival's song *De Village Ram* singing his fans told him he has "no place as an also ran... and I don't mean like no village ram...". He also asked, "What happen to de village ram, did something get his tongue? But I know for sure he ain't getting back dis crown". And his pionic verse of the self-penned song, which was arranged by Roger Gittens, which he said he knew the audience was expecting, fit smoothly into the calypso.

His victory, though an individual one, ensured the PODC monarchy stayed in *De Big Show* after 2023 monarch iWeb failed to hold on to it as many people expected. There was a collective bewilderment across the St Michael space when he appeared to forget his lyrics while performing.

Patrons were primed for his stinging lyrics and he was going great until the pionic section of the last verse with which he was going to teach Shontae Tae Alleyne-Clarke and Trinity Trinity Clarke, the two youngest contestants,

exactly how to respond to their calypso competitors. He came eighth overall with 77 points.

C.O. Williams House of Soca's Sir Ruel had one of the best performances of the night and stood out in the first half with his self-penned song *A Single Bullet*. Yes, it was another song about the senseless gun violence vexing citizens but what raised it above the other versions was that his was personal as his late brother Dario Jon-Luc Holder-Branch was claimed by a single bullet. The emotive rendition was superb and the repetition of lyrics as he told the story of the impact it had on his family in each verse, was effective. He was awarded 105 points and the \$40 000 cash prize.

For those overheard asking how *De Big Show's* Chrystal Cummins Beckles was third after gaining 97 points, you are invited to listen to the lyrics of the perennial finalist's *De Proposal*, take in its nice melody, her great diction, and watch her performance on YouTube to see that the judges got it right. She was awarded the \$20 000 prize.

Great concept

She may have lacked the oomph to take her into the top two spots but with the ongoing summer taking place in Paris, the concept of the song was a great one as it not only lambasts successive governments for making sport at sports and athletes, but it highlights problems society is grappling with and cleverly and humorously entwined solutions.

Ninety-one points is what **C.O. Williams House of Soca's Billboard** gained to place fourth this year and bag the \$15 000 prize for a second consecutive year. Dressed in army fatigues indicating he was prepared for the battle of minds, morals, and values on the home front, his treatment and performance of *War* set it apart from *Bob Marley's War* and *Singing Sandra's The War Must Go On* which some listeners said it reminded them of. The calypsonian has found a way to get his messages of God being the salvation for this country without it being a Bible thumping. Jesus is Lord calypso.

First timer *Tae* had a dynamic performance of *A Big Circus* which belied her experience as the youngest competitor in her very first PODC finals. She nabbed 88 points and placed fifth place with the Roger Gittens arranged song which she co-wrote with Anthony *Mighty Gabby* Carter that comments on topical issues. It was enhanced by a new arrangement, her circus ring master



Fourth placed *Billboard* issued a call to arms for individuals to join the War in Barbados.



Sir Ruel, who placed second, was in top form during his performance of *A Single Bullet*.

costume, an acrobat, and circus "animals". She also poked at one or two of her fellow contestants including her cousin, singing "Tell Trinity she ain't want nutten with me".

Veteran artist *Kid Site* who placed 6th with 82.5 points is one of the few entrants this year to have humour into their work. The four-time PODC monarch showed his experience after his initial performance was cut short because of a technical hitch - he could not be heard - soon after he started singing *Viral* which castigates people for taking their malicious actions to the World Wide Web by recording incidents first before assisting victims. True to form, when he returned to sing after *Sammy G* the third contestant, he asked the audience "wunna could hear me" and worked a line in the song where he said a man told him he and that technical hiccup had gone viral.

For the third straight year, relatively new PODC contestant *John Yardie* from *COB/Payce Digital All Stars Calypso Tent* was the highest placing member of the tent which had nine of the 18 finalists. Placing seventh after amassing 71 points, he sang extremely well and with conviction and although his offering *De Ultimate Price* suited him, it was pedestrian, lacked freshness and had a sense déjà vu. Perhaps he needs to work harder on finding his voice in the genre and find issues he truly wants to highlight instead of being in the middle of the road.

De Big Show's Biggie Irie's song *QEH* has one of the most memorable melodies of all the entries. He garnered ninth place with 64 points for the song which begins with him singing he means "no disrespect" resonates with individuals who spent time or had relatives ward at the state hospital but beneath the surface of the song which evokes laughter, lays bare the working conditions of the staff employed there that people ought to hear and act on.

All Star's first timers *Trinity* who was 10th, *Grateful Co.*, who placed 12th and *Darin Holder* (No. 15) had good performances.

Completing the line-up were the other All Star contenders *Eric Lewis* (No. 11), *Sammy G* (No. 13) *Colin Spencer* (No. 14), *Sammy Dello* (No. 16), *House of Soca's Mr Deejay* (No. 17) and *Inara* brought up the rear, sounding like *Spencer's* replica.

There were also performances from former PODC monarchs *Destroyer*, *Red Plastic Bag* and *Mighty Gabby*. (GBM)