

Saint Paul Black Music Month Honorees

Maria Isa

María Isa Pérez-Vega is a Boricua/Puerto Rican singer, songwriter, rapper, percussionist, actress, activist, youth worker and international recording artist born in Minnesota and raised on St. Paul's West Side barrio. Maria Isa was raised by the influences of many different rhythms of Afro-Latino-Indigenous Taíno culture and channeled it into performing arts and activism at a very early age. Isa has been trained by the masters of the Afro-Boricua Diaspora from the island of Puerto Rico (Paracumbe, Tito Matos, Los Ayalas) New York City (LP21), Chicago's Humboldt Park (Evaristo "Tito" Rodriguez) and Master vocalists trained in concert choral (Dr. William White), jazz (Mila Llauger), Afro-Latin and Hip-hop lyricism.

Since 2009 María Isa serves as CEO for her independent label SotaRico distributing over 15 albums bridging her music mix and upbringing of Minnesota and Puerto Rican culture into a fusion of sound and lyricism. From Bomba, Plena, Salsa, Rumba, Soul, Funk, R&B , Hip Hop to contemporary styles of pop Isa can write and perform it all. Isa received the National Hispana Leadership Institute's "Rising Latina Star" award for her outstanding work with You thrive Live! On behalf of working and educating incarcerated youth throughout the state of Minnesota while hosting several Nobel Peace Prize laureates through the empowerment of Hip Hop culture, music and movements for social justice. She starred as Rosa in the JD Steele and David Grant musical Snapshots: Life in the City at the History Theater and raved reviews as Mimi in the Broadway Musical RENT at the Guthrie Lab theater in 2010. She is the only female to have won the New York City Sin Sin Battle Rap Championship and highlighted by Oakland's legendary hip hop journalist Mr. Davey D as one of the top female emcees in the world.

María Isa is the 2019 recipient of the Mcknight Foundation Music Artist Fellowship amongst several awards and recognition for her original music and contributions to music from Bomba to Hip-hop. Maria Isa's music has been heard on several network shows from DISNEY, VIACOM-CBS, NETFLIX, NICKELODEON, NBC, MTV, STARZ, Telemundo, VH1, E! Bravo as well as a lead songwriter and co producer with YMMI for the music of the Fast & the Furious Video Game. She is known as one of the top artists in the Twin Cities featured on every major publication in the state of Minnesota and has performed nationally and internationally.

In 2019, María Isa's original music was performed and recognized by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History's "Descubra: Latino Art, Beats and Culture" exhibition distributing her album Sasa and in 2020 served on the Smithsonian Folk Life Arts Teaching advisory committee.

Maria Isa has performed alongside and opened for artists such as The Roots, Bad Bunny, Prince's New Power Generation , The Wu Tang Clan, Kendrick Lamar, Mos Def, Stokley of Mint Condition, Dj Pete Rock, Common, Moby, Bomba Estereo, Sheila E, Tego Calderon, Roxanne Shaunte, Las Cafeteras, Viento de Agua, Atmosphere, Pedrito Martinez, Ana Tijoux, La India, LP21, Redobles de Cultura, Kehlani and many more.

She is the founder, producer and co-host for Latina Theory: Spanglish Podcast which was known as NPR's Latino USA Top LatinX Podcast in the Country to listen to.

Her music and performance art assisted in coordinating philanthropic efforts for Puerto Rican Hurricane Relief; has pushed national awareness for Black, Brown and indigenous history and rights.

Isa's song "Como Duele: Bomba for Big Floyd," dedicated to the memory of George Floyd (who did security for her band and local Twin Cities' nightclubs) received global recognition through Spotify and other streaming distribution platforms. In most recent years, Maria Isa is currently the only elected official and Hip Hop artist to release an album on the same day she was sworn into the Minnesota State House of Representatives. The album Capitolio created history and led to her most recent project UNLOCK THE CHAMBER expressing her authenticity while touring through National colleges and institutions bridging the power of recording, performance art and political organizing movements for women of color in leadership as the #RepWhoRaps www.iammariaisa.com

Malik "Juice Lord" Curtis

From performing at open mics to performing in Brooklyn where he would gain confidence to rapping at swag in the morning. From freestyles on swag in the morning at SXSW. Juice lord has achieved many milestones that has shaped him into the artist he is today. In 2023 Juice lord sold out his release show for his album 8th Inning: Luv Vs Passion at the Minneapolis flagship First Ave 7th entry where 250+ were in attendance, Shortly after that Juice Lord went on a national tour with an artist that hails from southside MPLS prof at all sold out shows where Juice reached the hearts of many new fans.

He comes from Saint Paul Minnesota, a direct child of Rondo community that he represents the town to the best of his abilities. Although he is inspired by the likes of Nas, Kendrick Lamar, Marvin Gaye, Miles Davis and many more Juice Lord offers an updated raw and soulful sound.

Tim Wilson

I was born July 26, 1966 in Minneapolis Minnesota. I've done a bunch of incredible stuff in between being born and high school, but I won't bore you with the details but believe me it was EPIC.

Most importantly I took the opportunities given to me during that time to explore my creative side, from deejaying, making music, to writing, to recording and producing music etc. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I basically set myself up for a career in the music business.

I graduated from Washburn High school in 1984 and subsequently ITT Technical Institute after with a two year business management degree and I was off and running...

I immediately took the knowledge from college, while still doing all things I loved music related on the side, and I entered the wonderful world of sales. After a successful seven year stint of juggling all of the above and a sales career at Pitney Bowes as a national account representative I was given the opportunity of a lifetime, a chance to leave the proverbial rat race of sales and the corporate world and open my own retail music store and September 3, 1993 me and some of my closest friends got together and purchased a record store and Urban Lights Music Inc. was born.

Urban Lights Music became an important part of Minneapolis and Saint Paul's music scene becoming hosts to numerous national artists, record labels, branding and marketing events, winning numerous awards and accolades, both local and nationally all while becoming a staple in the Midway community it serves. 30 years and counting and looking forward to 30 more...