

The Garifuna Collective with Special Guest Mis Blandine

Thursday, April 2, 2026 at 7pm

This is the 1,518th concert in Koerner Hall

The Garifuna Collective

Marcela Aranda, vocals & percussion

Denmark Flores, Garifuna drum

Austin Aranda, Garifuna drum & vocals

Rolando Sosa Martinez, vocals & maracas

Kenrick Lewis, vocals & percussion

Emilio Thomas, guitar & vocals

Al Ovando, bass guitar

Eddie Allen, guitar

Mis Blandine, vocals

Emile Fandler, keyboard

Nii Sabo, guitar

Lionel Mukanbu, congas

The Garifuna Collective

The Garifuna Collective has been a driving force in bringing the rich cultural heritage and music of the Garifuna people to a global audience for the last 20 years.

Hailing from Belize in Central America, The Garifuna Collective has had a lasting impact in the Garifuna community and on the world music stage. Their work has been critical in preserving and evolving the Garifuna musical traditions, while also highlighting the ongoing struggles and triumphs of the Garifuna people. This exceptional group of musicians has played to audiences in over 30 countries, making them one of the most important cultural ambassadors in the region.

They have released a series of critically acclaimed albums including *Wátina*, which was honoured with prestigious accolades from Womex and the BBC World Music Awards. Voted as Amazon's Number One World Music Album of All Time in 2008, *Wátina* continues to be a landmark in world music.

For their 20th Anniversary, The Garifuna Collective embarks on a world tour to celebrate their rich musical heritage and their continuing role in elevating Garifuna culture globally. With performances across multiple continents, they share the powerful stories of resilience, pride, and unity through their music. The band's energetic and evocative live shows draw from their extensive repertoire, mixing traditional Garifuna rhythms with contemporary world music grooves.

The Garifuna culture: The Garifuna people, also known as Garinagu, are descendants of enslaved Africans who were shipwrecked off the coast of St. Vincent in the 1600s. These survivors, who mixed with the island's indigenous Arawak population, created a resilient culture that resisted European colonial powers for over a century. Their culture was forged in struggle and defiance, and it continues to thrive to this day.

In the 18th century, the British exiled the Garifuna people to Central America, where they settled along the coasts of Honduras, Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Today, the Garifuna people maintain their unique language, customs, and music – an extraordinary blend of African, indigenous, and European influences.

The Garifuna Collective are the torchbearers of this extraordinary culture, sharing its stories and sounds with audiences worldwide.

Mis Blandine

Singer, songwriter, and percussionist Blandine Kaniki is an award-winning Congolese-Canadian artist whose career reflects resilience, evolution, and deep cultural roots. A two-time African Entertainment Award winner (2015 and 2025) for Best Female Voice, Blandine is known for her powerful vocals and emotionally rich performances.

Her artistic journey took a defining turn with the release of her debut album, *L'Antidote*, a deeply personal and soulful body of work, in November 2019. The album features a powerful collaboration with legendary Congolese vocalist Nyboma Kanta and iconic lead guitarist Lokassa Ya Bongo, making the project both a labour of love and a vivid expression of life, heritage, and artistic maturity.

Before launching her solo career, Blandine toured the United States with the legendary group Afrisa International of the late Tabu Ley Rochereau, stepping in as a replacement for the iconic Mbilia Bel. This pivotal experience solidified her confidence and inspired her to embark on an independent artistic path.

Now based in Toronto, Blandine has established herself as a dynamic musical force. Earlier in her career, she released three R&B-influenced singles "Take It Back," "Telephone," and "To the Beat" (2011), all available on YouTube. She later chose to reconnect with her roots while embracing contemporary sounds, inviting listeners on a musical journey through releases such as "Sonné" and "Mon Bébé," a fusion of urban pop and Congolese rumba.

Blandine has also collaborated internationally, including recording projects with Toumani Diabaté during his stay in Abidjan and with Serge Ibaka in Canada for his ART Project, further expanding her artistic reach across continents and genres.

Trained in jazz music at York University and in classical vocal techniques in Africa, Blandine brings technical mastery and cultural depth to her work. Beyond music, she is deeply committed to humanitarian causes. In 2019, she volunteered with the Serge Ibaka Foundation, alongside Toronto Raptors players, helping raise tuition funds for youth in Congo and Toronto.

A strong advocate for women's rights, Blandine draws inspiration from the stories of women around the world, weaving themes of strength, resilience, and empowerment into her lyrics.

She released her first album in 2019, her second album in 2022, and her third album in 2025, continuing to affirm her place as a powerful voice in contemporary African and global.

All artists are making their Royal Conservatory debuts.