

The Way We Groove

Toronto's newest radio station is on the air with a signal covering most of the Golden Horseshoe: the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Niagara Falls to the south, west to Brampton, Aurora to the north and the town of Ajax to the east.

G98.7 (CKFG-FM) puts out 446 watts at 98.7 and, to hear station founder Fitzroy Gordon describe it, he's lucky to have even that. "I tell you, it's been a journey that took me down into the valley and every time I tried to get to the top of the mountain I was pushed back down . . . but you know what? We've made it."

Gordon says the making of his radio station spanned a long ten years, punctuated by frequency obstacles put up by the CBC.

When his Intercity Broadcast Network finally got 98.7, a signal that worked with Industry Canada and was identified as the only viable signal that could work in the GTA, CBC objected based on protecting its 99.1 from possible interference.

When that hurdle was leapt, says Gordon, CBC then said its 98.7 frequency in Peterborough would be affected. That concern, too, was overcome.

But "those were the biggest obstacles that we had along the way," he said. "Having said that, I appreciate what the CBC did because they really helped me to understand how to fight for what we want. It was a good fight, it was frustrating and it was long but I learned a lot of lessons along the way and I am more combative now than I was before, and in a positive way."

The logo for G98.7 is displayed in a stylized, blue and white font with a drop shadow effect. It is positioned on the right side of the page, overlapping the yellow vinyl record background. The '9' is particularly large and stylized, with a blue outline and a white fill. The '8' and '7' are also stylized, with blue outlines and white fills. The logo is set against the background of a yellow vinyl record with a black tonearm and stylus visible.

G98.7 Executive Team: ▶
Jai Ojah-Maharaj (Director of News, Current Affairs & Community Programming); Delford Blythe (VP & Chief Financial Officer); Joan Pierre (Director of Administration); Wayne Williams (Program Director); Fitzroy Gordon (Founder/President/CEO/Station Manager); Aisha Wickham Thomas (Director of Communications); Linsay O'Connor (Marketing & Promotions Manager); Roger Dey (Music Director); and Andrew Craig (Production Manager)



Photo by Courtney Boyce



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Top: *Fitzroy Gordon and Senator Don Meredith cut the ribbon to officially open the G98.7 studios.*

Photos by Ryan Bridgellal of www.RyansArtWorld.ca
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Gordon, who has more than 20 years in Canadian broadcasting, most of it at CHIN Toronto, won approval from the CRTC in June of this year (2011) to establish a station targeting 25-54s with Black and Caribbean music. Genres include R&B, Soul, Reggae, Soca, Hip Hop, Worldbeat and Gospel. Too, he promised, G98.7 will provide an outlet for local artists and businesses which have been under-represented on commercial radio in Toronto.

To that last point, Gordon told *Broadcast Dialogue*: “There are a lot of artists in Toronto who have done CDs and because they are not on a label they don’t get played by the mainstream radio stations. If you are not coming out of one of those big studios, they don’t play you. We are going to make sure that these artists—as long as the music is in good taste and good quality—will be added to our play list.

“I’m talking about artists regardless of their colour, creed, nationality. As long as the music fits within the genres that we represent, we will always try to work with them. If their music is not of good quality we will give them proper and sound advice so that they can go back and make it better.”

On the matter of making businesses more accessible to radio Gordon pointed to smaller merchants either not having the budget or not fitting a station’s criteria for accepting their spots.

“We want to make sure that we provide an outlet for them, especially smaller business people. We are going to try to have affordable rates for them to finally be able to advertise on mainstream radio,” he said.

Gordon made the point that small business wants to advertise on radio stations that play the music that they want and like. “And, of course, they know a lot of the stations that other Caribbean people listen to.”

That, he said, negates the argument about a neighbourhood shop using such a broad-based media platform.

The Flow 93.5, now owned by Bell Media, has similar roots; a Black-owned and operated Toronto radio station geared toward serving Southern Ontario Blacks and those who enjoy the music.

What is the differentiation between it and G98.7?

“I think what we are doing, the type of music that we have been playing, is more mature music. It (The FLOW) caters to a much younger audience.



Fitzroy Gordon acknowledges the efforts of Chief Engineer Greg Lowe

There was a time when WBLK Buffalo, a prominent R&B formatted station, had a large audience in Toronto and Southern Ontario, he said. Not so much now. “We have to understand [that] the urban Buffalo audience is American black, totally different from Canadian.”

Wayne Williams, the longtime program director at The New Flow and whose job came to an end when the station was sold to Bell Media, is the new station’s PD.

G98.7 engineer Greg Lowe, who’s been in broadcasting for 34 years, said he was assisted in the building of the new station by longtime build-expert Gus Sondermeyer. RAM Broadcast Systems (Barrie) supplied the majority of technical components, including its broadcast furniture, Wheatstone mixers, Cisco routers and Electro-Voice microphones, plus additional hardware for the studios. Products from OMT (iMediaTouch), RCS and SDS are also in place.

“We’ve got a lot of very experienced people on board so I think we will do very well.

We feel that there are over 700,000 black and Caribbean people in the GTA and we’re hoping to pretty well pick up most of them, having most of them choosing this station to listen to as theirs,” said Gordon.

That’s not what we will be doing. You will be hearing a lot more of the Marvin Gayes and the Aretha Franklins, Smokey Robinsons and Bob Marleys and people like those.

“And that’s why we will be different. Of course, we will be carrying news, we will have talk shows and we will have programming especially dedicated to various groups, especially on the weekends where you may have a little more of reggae played, you may have a little more soca played, the African rhythms, so that’s how we will be different.”

Monday to Friday programming will be more mainstream, he said, in that the station will be serving “a broad base of Canadians”. Gordon says he wants to give them what they want without affecting the overall goal: Providing audiences with specialty programming.



Gus Sondermeyer of G.S. Broadcast Technical Services, Burlington

What does the F and the G in your call letters stand for, *Broadcast Dialogue* asked Fitzroy Gordon, tongue firmly in cheek?

“I could say ‘fairly good’,” he responded, but ... I have worked long and hard and tirelessly for this to happen and I want to leave a legacy; I want to make a difference.”

By Howard Christensen

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