

# **I**nternational **J**ournal of **C**arnival **A**rts



**Volume 3**

**May 2021**

This volume is dedicated to:

**Calypsonian “Singing Sandra” – Sandra Des Vignes-Millington**

1957 - 28 January 2021

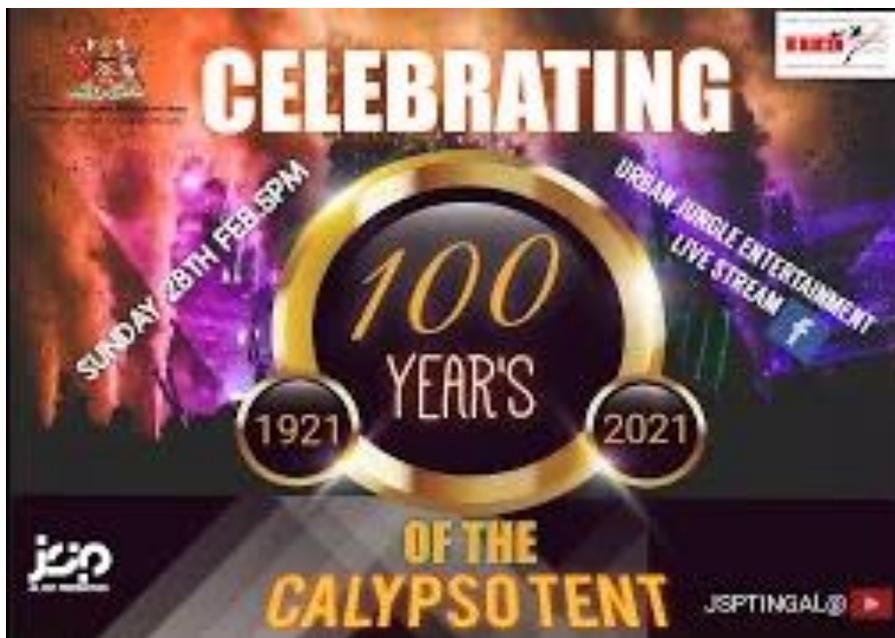
Role model and mentor; the only female calypsonian to win the Calypso Monarch title twice.

A protagonist for social reform among the underprivileged and destitute, a heroine for racial unity, latitudinarianism and liberalism

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This volume also celebrates

100 Years of the Founding of the First Calypso Tent in Trinidad and Tobago



1921 - 2021

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## Scope of the ‘International Journal of Carnival Arts: Steelpan, Calypso and Mas’ (IJCA)

[www.steelpanconference.com/journal](http://www.steelpanconference.com/journal)

The ‘International Journal of Carnival Arts; Steelpan, Calypso and Mas’ (IJCA) provides an expansive platform on which to report work on steelpan, calypso and related carnival arts. Authors are responsible for the content of their work and ownership of their material and for seeking permission to report the work from their own establishments. Confirmation of approval for the sharing of material should be submitted with the paper. IJCA conforms to high ethical standards, and published papers will have been subjected to peer-review.

IJCA aims to provide clear, invigorating and comprehensible accounts of early and contemporary research in steelpan, calypso and carnival arts. It unifies aspects of steelpan activities within the carnival arts and welcomes both academic research and the work of grass roots practitioners of the pan yards, calypso tents and mas camps. Its coverage spans both more abstract research as well as applied fields, and welcomes contributions from related areas including metallurgy, acoustics, new technologies and software, databases, steelpan forms, advances and performances, arts and crafts, movement, costumes, archiving, social commentary, music, history and development of calypso, extempo, soca and related genres and pioneering work of artists (biographical or otherwise), and the development of carnival arts globally. The journal strives to strengthen connections between research and practice, and in so doing enhancing professional development and improving practice within the field of carnival arts.

Material in the journal remains the property of authors. Papers in the journal are open access for group sharing and interaction, and do not reflect the editors’ views or ownership.

### Why publish in the IJCA?

- Much of the history of carnival arts – steelpan, calypso and mas – are oral. Statements are often based on personal views and the memory of individuals. This journal provides a forum for diverse views to be expressed and, in doing so, consensus may eventually be derived that reflects a more accurate history of carnival arts.
- Academic papers in carnival arts are published in highly specific and inaccessible journals that are outside the realm of the general carnivalist. We anticipate that this journal will allow authors of such papers to adapt some of their work for the more general audience of this journal where grassroots enthusiasts can learn and appreciate the broader aspects of this field.
- Postgraduate students are doing tremendous work on various facets of carnival arts and will continue to publish their work in well-established recognised journals for their own career development. We envisage this journal could be used by such students to draw attention to their valued work and to make it more accessible to the general public.
- The grassroots workers of steelpan, calypso and mas who drive the development of these artforms are often excluded from direct publication of their valuable work. This journal provides an informal, cost-free means to get their work aired and brought to the forefront of enthusiasts.
- Some of the legends of carnival arts – for example steelpan pioneers such as Anthony Williams, Sterling Betancourt, Cyril Khamai, Lennox ‘Bobby’ Mohammed, Alfred Totesaut and Peter Joseph – are still active and possess a wealth of information. Such individuals contributed to key stages in development of steelpan. They may be interviewed in pieces for this journal, and their incisive contributions thus brought to readers.
- We are encouraging all to write and capture a holistic view of carnival arts and not to feel intimidated by language and grammar - papers will be edited with their consent and brought to the attention of a global audience.
- Initially the journal will be published biannually – first and last quarter of the year but will be responsive to change.

**Types of Papers:**

- i) Original Full-length papers - usually 3,000 - 7,000 words.
- ii) Short Communications - up to 3,000 words.
- iii) Research Papers e.g. carnival arts studies, hypotheses and analyses.
- iv) Reviews - e.g. of relevant books, exhibitions, films etc.
- v) Request for an opinion - an author who wishes to share views on a subject.
- vi) Letter to the Editor – queries or comments on published papers.
- vii) Historical - e.g. carnival in rural town or on a pioneer of carnival arts.
- viii) Social anthropological studies on carnival.
- ix) Personal Experiences of aspects of carnival.
- x) Reports of carnival archives.
- xi) Technological developments e.g. in sound, acoustics, new material for mas etc.
- xii) Erratum – From Volume 2, IJCA will include a designated Erratum page(s) to correct any errors of the previous volume. However, this represents an important part of the feedback, and a mechanism for the informed criticism of papers in IJCA. Because much of the history of carnival arts relies on the memory of individuals, information may be skewed towards the interest and exposure of an individual. By readers submitting comments and corrections on controversial topics, eventually consensus may help to point to the most likely scenario.

**Requirements for Submission****Cover Letter:**

All submissions should be accompanied by a covering letter briefly stating the significance of the work and agreement of author/s and institute for publication. Please also submit the names and affiliations of all authors, including the contact details of the corresponding author.

**Preparation of a paper for submission** (see detailed guidelines <https://www.steelpanconference.com/> - see Journal.)

Most of the process outlined below is standard procedure but is provided to try to maintain a level of uniformity of papers within the journal. The Editors have opted to use ‘Elsevier - Harvard (with titles) Style’. Briefly this follows the format below:

**Title:** A succinct representation of the paper. Use font 14, Times New Roman. Capitalise each word. Centralised, and keep to about 40 words without abbreviation.

**Author Name<sup>1</sup> – Size 14 – Bold**

<sup>1</sup>Institute/Company/Band’s Name and Address - Times New Roman – size 12  
Add- telephone, email address of the corresponding author.

**Abstract:**

Should be informative and self-explanatory, briefly present the topic, state the scope of the paper, indicate significant results and point out major findings and conclusions. The abstract should summarise the manuscript content in less than 500 words.

**Key Words:** Size 11. This follows the Abstract and consists of a list of Key Words (4-10) and any abbreviations used in the text.

**Text: A) Research Papers (B) Reviews and other articles:****A) Introduction:**

This should set the tone of the paper by providing a clear statement of the study, the relevant literature on the subject, and the proposed approach or solution. The introduction should be general enough to attract a reader's attention from a broad range of carnival arts disciplines and should lead directly into the aims of the work.

**Description of the work:**

This section should provide a complete overview of the design of the study. Detailed descriptions of materials or participants, comparisons, interventions and types of analysis should be mentioned. However, only new procedures need to be described in detail. Previously published procedures should be cited, and important modifications of published procedures should be mentioned briefly.

**Findings and Discussion:**

This section should provide evidence that supports the conclusion of the study, while speculation and detailed interpretation of data should be included in the Discussion.

**Acknowledgements:**

Acknowledgment of people, grant details, funds, etc may be included under this section.

**B) Reviews and other articles:**

The Abstract and Introduction should follow the above guidelines, however, for the remainder of the paper, authors may devise their own headings and subheadings to follow a chronological order of work presented.

**References in text:**

Published or accepted manuscripts should be included in the reference list. Meetings, abstracts, conference talks, or papers that have been submitted but not yet accepted may be cited as 'submitted for publication', 'personal communication (abbreviate as 'per. com.') or 'Proceedings of the meeting'. References in the text should be listed by the first author's surname followed by year of publication, for example, Brown,1990. or if several authors as Brown *et al.*,1990. Multiple citations should be separated by semicolons eg. Brown, 1990; O'Connor, 1995.

The following are examples for the reference list/bibliography to be included at the end of the paper:

**Book reference:**

Hocking, C., 2005. The story of the Bridgewater Carnival from 1880 to 2005. The Bridgewater Educational Press; Somerset.

**Article reference:**

Ramtahal, Kumaree, Kumar, Marilyn, 2016. Documenting and Archiving the Ramleela Legacy in Trinidad: Practice and Prospects. Caribbean Library Journal, 4, 41-61.

**Conference: e.g.** Shah H.N., 2016. The Fusion of Steelpan with other Art Forms in the 21st Century. Proceedings of the 6th International Biennial Steelpan Conference. London, 7 - 9th October 2016.

**Tables:**

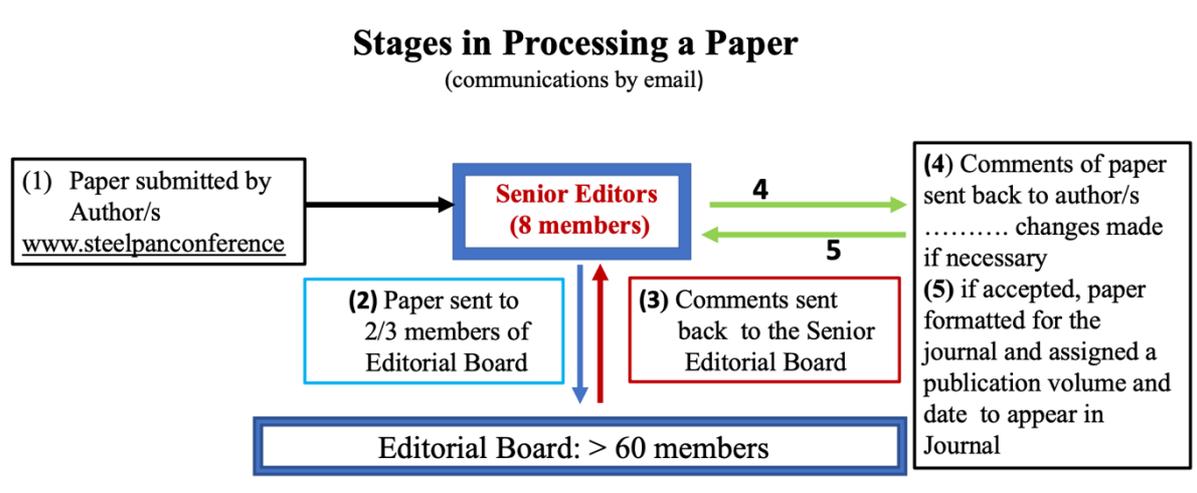
These should be designed as simple as possible. Each table should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numerals and supplied with a heading and a legend at the top of the table. Tables should be self-explanatory without reference to the text. The same data should not be presented in both table and graph form or repeated in the text.

**Figures:**

The preferred file formats for photographic images are TIFF and JPEG. Begin each legend with a title (below the figure) and include sufficient description so that the figure is understandable without reading the text of the manuscript. Information given in legends should not be repeated in the text. Label figures sequentially (e.g. Figure 1: ..... ) and cite in the text as Fig 1.

**Process after Submission for Publication – Reviewers, Report & Proofs.**

The figure below illustrates the process that takes place once a manuscript (MS) is submitted to IJCA. It shows the interaction between the Senior Editorial Board and the Editorial Board. Once the review process has been completed, a member of the Senior Editorial Board will send a letter to the corresponding author informing them of the outcome, and if required, detailing suggestions to improve the MS. The senior board member will then liaise with the author to finalise the MS and prepare it for publication.



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Katie **Segal**, Post grad. Psychotherapy. Lifelong interest/performer in Trinidad & Tobago and Notting Hill carnivals. Member; Notting Hill Carnival Advisory Council. Sub-editor of Soca News. Mas: roots, history, culture, tradition, and present day, including J'Ouvert/dutty mas. Broad interest in carnival music including Soca, chutney, zouk, bouillon, Dennery segment.

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Dmitri **Subotsky**, MA FIA Actuary, Guy Carpenter, London. Collecting and compiling information on calypso, Soca and steel band recordings. Compiled a database of such recordings from the Caribbean, USA, Canada, the UK and elsewhere, with coverage particularly strong in the vinyl era.

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Rebecca **Watson**, PhD. Reader, Leeds Beckett University. Editorial Board of the Journal Leisure Sciences. Dance, Gender, Equality, intersectionality public leisure space, popular music. Miscegenation.

Jenny **Webb**, BSc. Organiser Pan Jam. Pannist, performer, promotor, tutor, arranger, pan development, globalisation, education. steelpan history and carnival arts.

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Nigel **Williams**, PhD. Senior Lecturer, Portsmouth Business School, University of Portsmouth. Festival management and technology, impact analysis in tourism and festivals, e.g. evaluating Notting Hill Carnival using social media platforms. Development of analytical tools such as FestIM and A.I.

Salah **Wilson**, PhD, Lecturer/Performer, York University, Toronto, Canada. Steelpan development/ curriculum development, composer/ arranger of all types of steelpan ensembles/ all genre of music/ Ideas on major pan promotional programs/author of steelpan textbooks.

Ansel **Wong**, JP, BA (Hons), Dip.Ed., MEd., FRSA. Carnival Arts as practitioner, artist, band leader and governance. Educator and Race Relation Advisor. Founder of Elimu Mas Band. Managing editor at multicultural publisher, Hansib Publications.

Natasha **Young**, MA, BA. Teacher of Art and Design, North London Collegiate School, Edgware. Steelpan, calypso and Carnival Arts in general.

## Foreword

### Trinidad and Tobago's Calypso Tent Celebrates 100 Years; The Mighty Sparrow, Calypso's enduring Prodigy and Master of the Tent

Trinidad and Tobago's centennial founding of its first Calypso Tent passed almost unnoticed in the diaspora. Although attendances in calypso tents have been diminishing in recent years, most patrons believe that this milestone would have bucked the trend had it not been for the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Credit for this landmark is

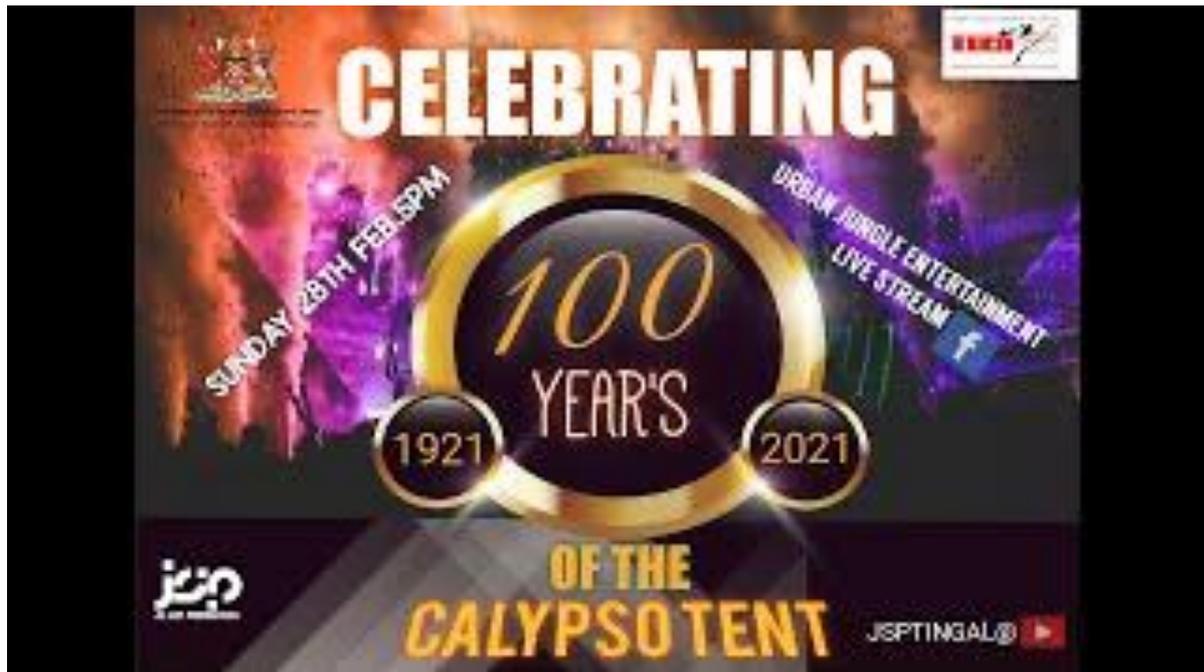


attributed to World War 1 genre-busting revolutionary, Walter Douglas who transformed the artform by establishing the Railroad Millionaires tent on 26 Duncan Street, Port of Spain in 1921. Douglas provided structure to its hitherto extempo impromptu form and succeeded in changing the style of calypso to more exhilarating expression, by incorporating subtle humour, contemporary politics, and societal aberrations often through double entendre and accompanied by bands with brass, piano, guitar and drums. A cursory glance into what these early Tents might have looked like in the 1930s was reported in the Times Caribbean (21<sup>st</sup> February 2021, left). As early as 1935, the first

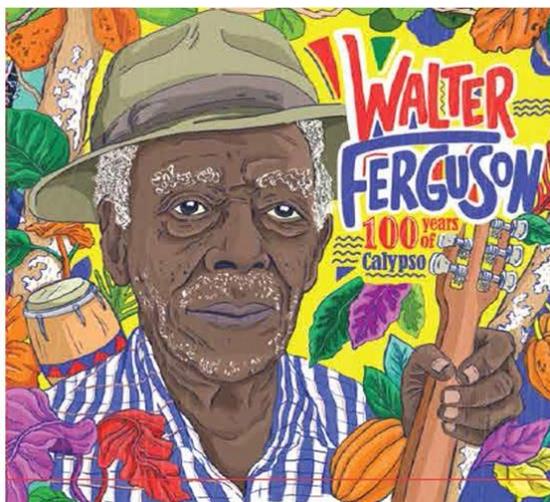
female calypsonian, Lady Trinidad made her debut at the Crystal Palace Tent on Nelson Street, Port-of-Spain while the first calypso king competition was staged on Saturday, February 11, 1939, one week before carnival. The title and \$20 first prize were won by the Growling Tiger. From these humble beginnings, other Calypso Tents spawned the century, among them the indomitable Lord Kitchener's 'Calypso Revue' and Sparrow's 'Young Brigade'. Designated the 'Golden Era of the Tent', these two titans of the art form nurtured the talent of many young calypsonians with liberating audacity.

In a typical calypso tent, the rapport between MC/artist with audiences became the hallmark of the Tent. Hence, it is to the huge credit of the country's entrepreneurs and alacritous artists who, with no audience nor a budget, heroically created a virtual Calypso Tent to mark its centenary (see poster below). Visionaries Kenny Phillip's Wack Radio 90.1FM, Iwer George's Iwer Stage and the Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organisation (TUCO) combined their skills to produce a virtual screen through which donations for the performers could be collected. Ingeniously they fashioned a virtual screen in the background of the stage at the iconic Queen's Hall and a Zoom room for the audience and onlookers to add comments.

This volume of IJCA includes a paper on this event and the virtual carnival 2021 by Kela Nnarka Francis.



Calypso centenaries are being celebrated in various forms outside its homeland. One was reached last year in Costa Rica where calypso, steelband and mas have been flourishing for decades. This was movingly expounded in calypso and visual commentary by Manuel Monestel and Paul



Lovejoy to an overwhelmed audience at the conference 'Calypso, Carnival, Steel Band: Expressive Cultures of the Caribbean Diaspora' at York University, Toronto between 26-28<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The authors brought the country's immensely rich culture of carnival arts to participants against a background of the phenomenal work of calypsonian Walter Ferguson.

Costa Rica celebrated his 100-birthday in calypso and carnival arts and proudly exhibited their tremendous work in various parts of the country. His record '100 years of calypso: Walter Ferguson' Volumes 1 and 2 bears the image to the left..

In another rare event, London Calypso Tent's four-times monarch, Cpl Sheldon Skeete led the Royal Air Force's 100<sup>th</sup>



celebration in November 2018 in calypso. Using RAF musicians, the monarch composed a calypso called 'One hundred years of celebrations' to pay tribute to the success of the RAF on this special birthday. The image (above) is from his YouTube video – see link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uua\\_CkZVz\\_4&ab\\_channel=RoyalAirForce](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uua_CkZVz_4&ab_channel=RoyalAirForce)

Residents and guest performers of the 29-year-old London Calypso Tent such as the late Mighty Tiger, veteran performers, Lord Cloak, Helena B, G- String, Giselle, De Admiral, Alexander D Great, Tobago Crusoe, D'Alberto and many others pay tribute to the living legend, the Mighty Sparrow. Many have enriched their craft under Sparrow's leadership at the 'Young Brigade' and it would be unusual for a show to take place in London without some of his old classics such as Jean and Dinah, Melda, Sa Sa Yea, Congoman, Mae Mae, Doh Back Back, Drunk and Disorderly etc being sung by calypsonians with full audience participation.

The 'King of Calypso' is revered by his fans in Trinidad and Tobago and the diaspora, hence news of his impending performance at The London Jazz Festival 2018 sent London into a frenzy. The event took place on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at the Barbican Centre, Europe's largest performing arts centre and one of London's eminent concert halls. The programme featured a wide mix of calypso, reggae, soca, Afrobeat, soul and jazz to celebrate 70 years of the arrival of the MV Empire Windrush that brought workers from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands, to help fill the post-war UK labour shortages. For the UK's Caribbean diaspora, the docking of the Windrush on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1948 is so indelibly etched that the label 'Windrush Generation' subsequently became associated with Caribbean immigrants who settled in the UK right up to 1971.

Among this first wave of 492 Caribbean immigrants who arrived on that fateful summer's day at London's Tilbury Docks in 1948 were calypsonians Lord Kitchener, Lord Beginner and the then lesser known, Lord Woodbine. Their arrival was covered by British Pathé News whose reporter thrust a microphone to Lord Kitchener to test his ability to sing extemporaneously. The great worrier obliged with his now

meritorious "London is the Place for Me" which was beamed around the globe and is today regarded as a 'national anthem' for the Windrush Generation. Kitchener was not only the bedrock of calypso in the UK then, but he attracted other legends such as the Mighty Terror, Roaring Lion, Lord Invader et al. To celebrate seven decades of the Windrush Generation would be egregious without calypso and the organisers set out to recruit the "Calypso King of the World", Slinger Francisco, ORTT, CMT, OBE, i.e. the Mighty Sparrow, who in the Claudia Jones in-door carnivals between 1959 -1964, performed with the late Lord Kitchener.

For the many who came to hear their Deity, the pre-concert atmosphere was exhilarating. Sadly, Sparrow's very brief sojourn did not live up to its high expectations. His allotted time on stage was minuscule and precluded his build up and anticipated rapport with his audience, which he thrives on, and was such an anti-climax that many of his fans walked out. However, this was hugely compensated by a captivating narrative by Vivien Goldman.

Goldman's fascinating interview with Sparrow, just prior to his departure for London, was reported in the UK's Guardian Newspaper on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018. It is a literary masterpiece, incisive, scintillating and a succinct piece that enraptures Sparrow's arrival on to the world stage in 1956 with Jean and Dinah. The article weaves its way across his illustrious career, accentuating poignant key moments in history with Sparrow and his influence on another legend, Bob Marley whose 'Redemption Song' was inspired by Sparrow's monumental immortal song 'Slave'.

It is reproduced in full with the author's permission, as a tribute to a century of the Trinidad and Tobago's Calypso Tent and to honour one of the masters of the Tent, The Mighty Sparrow.

Footnote:

Will Calypso last another 100 years or will its changing tempo destroy its inner core that has been carefully crafted and maintained over decades by traditional calypsonians?

The Mighty Sparrow with Road March wins: 'Jean and Dinah', 1956; 'P.A.Y.E'., 1958; 'Mae Mae', 1960; 'Royal Jail', 1961; 'Melda -Obeah Wedding', 1966; 'Sa Sa Yea', 1969; 'Drunk and Disorderly', 1972 and 'Doh Back Back', 1984, followed the traditional form up to the present.

Below is a brief observation by Roger P. Gibbs following his paper '*Rhythm In Calypso - Ten Calypso Guitar Strums*' (see Vol. 2, IJCA, pp 71-87 ) who asked:

### How Fast Is Too Fast?

'The evolution of Calypso to Soca tells a fascinating story. One of the most fundamental musical changes with the past is tempo. Tempo dictates the dance pulse and mood. Aside from key, it is the most important parameter in dance music.

I give 5 examples below of the Trinidad & Tobago Carnival Road Marches spanning a period from 1974 to 2018. Have a listen.

Up until the mid-80s, a fast tempo for dance was set around 115-120 bpm (beats per minute) range. By the 90s the tempo range for a fast dance increased to 120-130 bpm. By 2018 it hits 150-160 bpm.

As tempo increases, melodic phrases are compelled to become simpler and shorter, more aggressive, and agitated. Chord changes and harmony must be simplified or removed. The complexity of rhythm and melodic counterpoint have to be removed. Lead singers are forced to match the frenetic pace with simple chants, shouts, vocal interjections, etc. Call-and-response

is used a lot to give lead singers a chance to catch a breath.

What does this new norm in Trinidad & Tobago's Carnival dance music signify to you?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3O-jgw\\_V3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3O-jgw_V3Q)  
Shadow - 'Bassman' (Road March 1974) 118 bpm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t67IXPPTww0>  
Tambu - 'This Party is It' (Road March 1988) 122 bpm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCbJmoNjC7g>  
Preacher - 'Jump & Wave' (Road March 1994) 140 bpm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OOr9aZca40>  
Naya George - 'Trinidad/Right Hand' (Road March 2002) 154 bpm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Luud1xP-PAY>  
Machel Montano - 'Soca Kingdom' (Road March 2018) 160 bpm

Because we are focusing on the Mighty Sparrow here, the author further adds the BPM of Sparrow's Road Marches.

The Mighty Sparrow with Road March wins:

'Jean and Dinah', 1956; 110 bpm

'P.A.Y.E'., 1958; 111 bpm

'Mae Mae', 1960; 97 bpm

'Royal Jail', 1961; 104 bpm

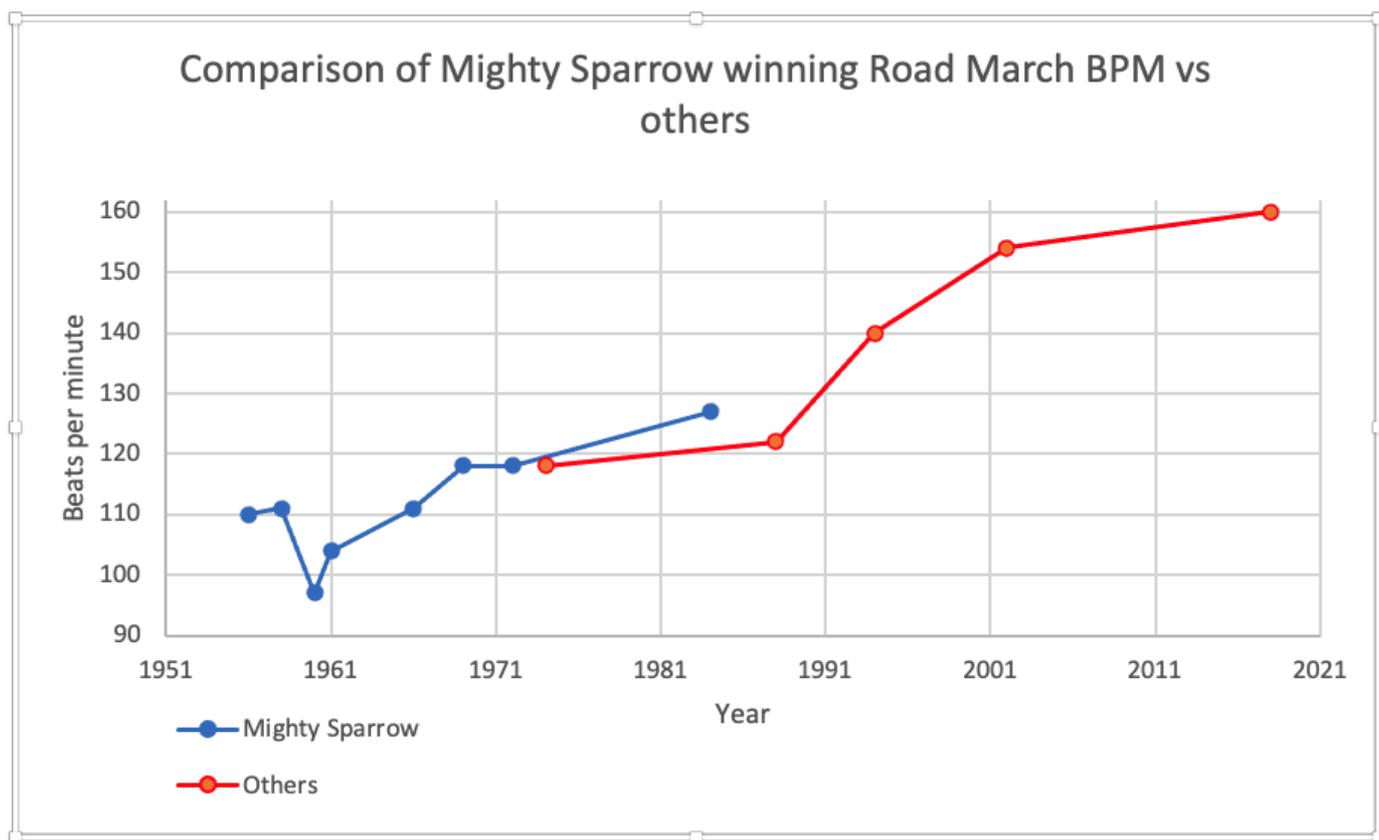
'Melda -Obeah Wedding', 1966; 111 bpm

'Sa Sa Yea', 1969; 118 bpm

'Drunk and Disorderly', 1972 118 bpm

'Doh Back Back', 1984. 127 bpm

IJCA represented the above data graphically for simple visual comparison of the changes in beats per minutes (bpm) over a 60 year period - when the Mighty Sparrow, in a watershed moment in 1956, heralded his appearance into world of calypso with his now iconic 'Jean and Dinah' (bpm 110).



## Mighty Sparrow: The King of Calypso on Freedom, Windrush and Oral Sex

### Vivien Goldman

British Freelance Journalist, Professor, Musician, Filmmaker, Writer, Educator and Broadcaster

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The Mighty Sparrow:

He inspired Bob Marley's political awakening, survived a coma, and has sung about everything from sex workers to Khrushchev. And at 83, the calypso great still wants to turn the news into song!

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We used to put on a show!' Mighty Sparrow onstage, 1989. Photograph: Frans Schellekens/Redferns

**He inspired Bob Marley's political awakening, survived a coma, and has sung about everything from sex workers**



**to Khrushchev. And at 83, the calypso great still wants to turn the news into song.**

'Can you put on the TV news?'" asks Slinger Francisco, AKA Mighty Sparrow. While the photographer sets up in my living room in Queens, New York City, the 83-year-old calypso originator scrutinises the screen, where the US midterm elections offer gold to this instinctive satirist.

Watching Sparrow watch the news, eyes narrowed in concentration, is a reminder of the decades of conflict he has processed

into poetry – from the impact of US naval withdrawal on Trinidad sex workers, on the infectious 1956 song Jean and Dinah, to the space age and cold war on 1963's Kennedy and Khrushchev. More recently, he has hymned a pre-presidential Barack Obama, and railed against Russian oligarchs on *Neurosis of the Rich*. "If you have time to look at the news," Sparrow observes, "you see where most of those songs' inspiration comes from. There's no question about it." The concept of fake news is anathema to him. "Certain people are telling the audience: 'Don't believe what you see, don't believe what you hear or what you read.' But I do believe."

Rather like today's verbal argy-bargies between rappers such as Drake and Pusha T, early 20th-century calypsonians also elevated barbed banter into a showbiz art called picong, and locals would gleefully look forward to calypsonians' response to every scandal and row. The rivalry between Sparrow, Lord Kitchener and Lord Melody, for example, gripped the calypso fans known as Bad Johns and Saga Girls, edgy dressers who danced the reel and quadrille in the carnival tents and were Sparrow's constituents. "We used to put on a show!" he chuckles.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/nov/16/mighty-sparrow-the-king-of-calypso-on-freedom-windrush-and-oral-sex> (The Mighty Sparrow: Neurosis (of the rich

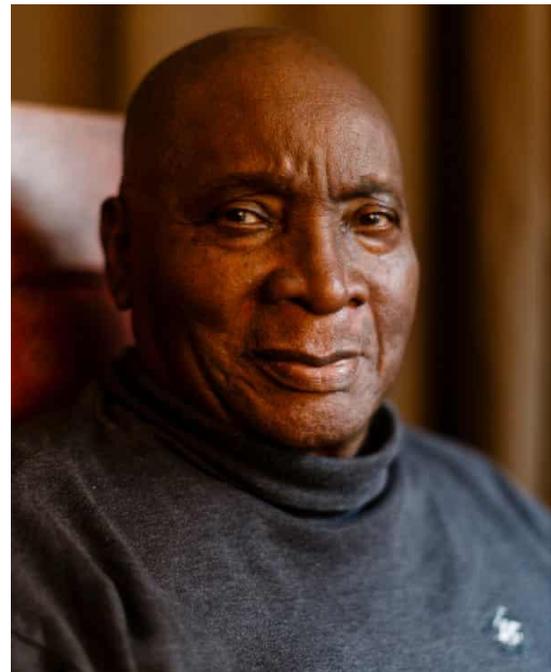


According to the Trinidadian writer and broadcaster Isaac Fergusson, “Even politicians were afraid of Sparrow and what he would reveal about them in a song. Until he came along, most calypsonians were semi-professional. People paid them with rum and food – a treat, rather than a salary. They survived on the gratitude of the people. Sparrow changed all that. He wore a suit like a businessman and insisted on being paid. He could be demanding, but musicians loved to play with him, because he treated them the best.”

Despite conflicts with the establishment behind Trinidad’s fabled carnival (1957’s Carnival Boycott documented his strike for fairer pay for male calypsonians), Sparrow is nevertheless an eight-time winner of each of the carnival’s Road March and Calypso Monarch awards, and is often dubbed Calypso King of the World.

‘We always wanted to belong to the English side of things, that’s all we knew’ ... Mighty Sparrow.

Photograph: Max Burkhalter/The Guardian



The lyrical sting of calypso and the instrument associated with it, the steel pan, may be pop’s most embedded form of resistance. Starting in 1740, the legal banning of the African-style drum (made of wood and animal skin) under slavery and colonialism encouraged the invention of the steel pan. Hammering industrial metal into tempered scales, steel pans were made out of oil drums from the island’s chief export; this was music made by any means necessary, to defy those who benefited most from the island’s resources. Calypso’s lyrics, too, became a forum for thrashing out the issues of the day, reporting on anything from industrial disputes to sexual peccadilloes.

Colonial-era education and studies of the English poets remain foundational for Sparrow. “We always wanted to belong to the English side of things, because that’s all we knew,” he says. “As we grew up, America became a second part of us. But going to England felt like going home.”

Throughout our conversation, Sparrow sings to make a point. “Remember this?” he asks, before breaking into Rule Britannia: “Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.”

When his mother Clarisse brought the 18-month-old Slinger and his elder brother on a small boat from their native Grenada to Trinidad, they were moving from one UK colony to another. Though both islands like to claim him, his ancestors were involuntary immigrants. Sparrow’s gripping track *The Slave*, from the 1964 album *True Life Stories of People, Passion and Politics*, set a template for how Caribbean music could interpret its bloody history. Fergusson recalls his friend Bob Marley confiding: “When I heard the Mighty Sparrow sing *The Slave*, I knew what I wanted to do with my music.” Over a propulsive Afro-Cuban jazz rhythm, Sparrow’s pointed enunciation and swelling attack on the chorus build a narrative that presages Marley’s *Redemption Song*.

“I got to make a brilliant escape /  
But every time I think about the whip and  
dem dogs /  
My body starts to shake.”

As Sparrow soars into the line,

“Lord, I wanna be free”,

the track stops so abruptly that it feels as if the listener is leaping from a cliff into the ocean to escape the slave-catcher’s dogs at their heels.

Sparrow’s life since has reinforced these creative imaginings. Few people have survived a coma to perform again; in 2013, he hovered between worlds for two weeks. Even fewer have teased those writing them off, as evidenced by 1970’s Sparrow Dead. And not many descendants of stolen Africans have managed to make the return journey, but Sparrow did. Inspired by a visit

The Mighty Sparrow – “Slave”  
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/nov/16/mighty-sparrow-the-king-of-calypso-on-freedom-windrush-and-oral-sex> .



to Nigeria in the 1970s, he has recorded in Yoruba, as well as Creole French, Spanish and Dutch. Despite the military regime, Sparrow found Lagos a paradise. “I never thought I’d reach there – it was like the garden of Eden. They basically did everything like we do in Trinidad.” Sparrow met the firebrand Afrobeats creator, Fela Kuti, and was honoured with a title, Chief Omo Wale of Ikoyi.

But he had already toured Africa in song, taking a fantasy trip on one of his most beloved numbers, 1964’s hilarious *Congo Man*. Opening with a lusty chuckle, it finds Sparrow revealing his envy of a cannibal who has enjoyed eating two white American girls, one cooked and one raw. Despite the song’s popularity, it was banned from local radio till 1989. In my lounge, Sparrow sings the familiar verses and even enacts a typical audience reaction: “I never eat white meat yet, except” – a beat, eyes twinkling – “all right, just one time in Canada!” Cue the audience, corpsing. Well-versed in calypsonian double entendres, they understood that he was skewering not so much racism or cannibalism, but another taboo: oral sex.

The reason for today’s interview, however, is more serious. Sparrow has been called to England to perform at the London jazz festival’s Windrush celebration, curated by

Anglo-Trinidadian poet and teacher Anthony Joseph, and featuring Calypso Rose, Cleveland Watkiss, Gaika and others. It is a strategic reminder, after the recent scandal in which some of those Caribbean immigrants were redefined as illegal by the Home Office, of the defining contribution that Afro-Caribbean artists have been making to British culture ever since Sparrow's frenemy Lord Kitchener walked off the Windrush in 1948 and sang "London is the place for me" into a Pathé News microphone – a catchy line that heralded the arrival of multicultural Britain.

Contemplating Brexit, Sparrow mutters: "I wonder why that happened?" He has confronted such divisions and dashed dreams of solidarity before, in 1959's Federation, his comment on the crash of the post-colonial ideal of a united Caribbean. "We were trying to benefit [from independence] and we wanted to get all these islands together, create a federation where we could bargain better and benefit by all being together," he says. "But once individual prime ministers in the Caribbean had tasted power, nobody wanted to give it up. Suddenly, before you could really get together, it's all broken up. What do you do? It was terrible.

"In a way, it was similar to the scandal around the Windrush," he continues. "Suddenly you are told you are a non-person, not to be treated with any respect. They say they don't want you."

Sparrow has succeeded in translating his witty island authenticity to the world, in a one-man demonstration of the role that



Mighty Sparrow gets crowned Calypso Monarch. Photograph: Echoes/Redferns

culture plays in uniting humankind. Having seen and heard so much and compressed it into so many searing songs, as he anticipates performing to symbolise the beleaguered, resistant Windrush generation, how does Sparrow think we should approach the future?

"What would I like to see? People get together and get involved with fixing things instead of just having everything severed," he replies. "We have to just hope that the younger ones step in and get involved as early as they can, to make things better. You know, singularity is not a thing that we want too much. We don't want to be singular, as time goes on. We want to be together."

## Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival 2021: A Review

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### Abstract

Trinidad and Tobago has one of the oldest Carnivals in the Americas. The practice, introduced during Spanish rule, survived the changeover to British rule in 1791 and the attempts to suppress the festival by the Newspapers (starting in the 1840s) and by Captain Arthur Baker (Captain of the Police) in 1880-81. Carnival survived cancellation during World War II from 1939-1945, and postponement in 1972 because of a Polio outbreak (Doyle, 2021). From Boxing, Trinidad is alive with celebration. New music is released on radio and social media. Masquerade bands advertise their creations to potential players. Feting season officially launches in the first week of January with Soka In Moka and other large-scale events. Calypso Tents open. Steelpan yards start ringing out. Trinidad and Tobago prepares for the two official day of Carnival—the Monday and Tuesday before lent. For 2020, Carnival was held on February 24 and 25. One month later, on March 22 Trinidad and Tobago closed its borders due to COVID-19 and enforced stay at home measures on March 29. As the Pandemic unfurled, and restrictions remained in place, many questioned whether Carnival could take place at all. For months, no definitive answer was forthcoming. The official government response was that we needed to wait and see. However, after months of speculation, the Government announced in September 2020 that Carnival 2021 was cancelled—COVID protocols prohibited all public mass gatherings. In the background, carnival enthusiasts, practitioners, and business entities began pitching the idea of a virtual festival, Carnival on the internet. But, as Carnival is a communal experience, a chance to reconnect and reinvigorate with humanity through camaraderie, can the festival go virtual? This review looks closely at the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival events of 2021 in an attempt to assess strategies employed to adapt Carnival to survive (and grow) despite cancellation.

**Key Words:** Carnival 2021, Trinidad and Tobago, Steelpan, theatre, Soca, Calypso.

### Introduction

Every year, on Boxing Day in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a tangible shift of energies. The air tingles sweet and cool against the skin. The feeling of torpor after a full day of feasting for Christmas dissipates. You could stand in your yard and feel the electricity on the wind fill your spirit with anticipation—Carnival is coming. For as long as I can remember, I would sense the

shift in the wind. And despite being conscious that there would be no physical Carnival this year, I still felt it. Faint, like a low frequency thrum, I could feel it turn me to face Town. It didn't help, or perhaps it did, that the radio was playing a steady stream of Soca, but there was my friend, Carnival Anticipation, teasing me.

You see, on September 28, 2020, the Prime Minister, the Honourable Dr Keith Rowley, announced that Carnival

2021 was cancelled due to COVID 19 measures. The primary reason was that crowds lead to spikes in infection, and, as the *Trinidad Guardian* Editorial put it, “Crowds are the lifeblood of the festival” (Carnival Cancelled, 2021). Truer words were never published. Carnival is immersion in music, art, and people. It is community in motion—sometimes harmonious, sometimes cacophonous—a moving surge of bodies in the hot sun, pulsing to the same beats. This immersion is part of the Trinidadian psyche, our garrulousness, our need to touch each other to communicate. We are a Carnival people. We mould our lives around Carnival. Some of us embrace it. Some of us flee from it. Either way, it is central to our lives, driving our actions.

Thus, there was a mixed response to the cancellation. For some, there was relief. For many there was heartbreak. How could you cancel it? What did cancel even mean? We went through stages of grief. Denial. Memes of people dancing in foliage circulated on social media. Anger. We argued that Carnival is of the people and could never be cancelled, only postponed. You will rue this decision when it hits the economy, some said. Negotiation. Look at 1972, we said. “Mas in May” we said. Kitchener told us what to do then; why can’t we do that now? Depression. *Tabanka* hit us hard. For me it crashed down on my head when I passed Adam Smith Square and there was no flurry of activity—no stands, no contractors, no judging station. And Acceptance, but not completely. We accepted that we would need to find another way. We could not accept no Carnival at all. Instead, Carnival would go virtual. Virtual Carnival would be better than no Carnival at all.

## Paving a Way forward: WACK FM provides a Virtual Platform

The San Fernando radio station, WACK 90.1 FM, describes itself as “a culture, crazy radio station” dedicated to playing “any and every genre of music indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago” (WACK 90.1 FM, 2016). WACK FM broadcasts “traditionally” on the airwaves as well as on YouTube and other social media platforms.



Figure 1 WACK Fm Logo

As stay at home measures began affecting the music community, Kenny Phillips, founder and CEO of WACK FM and veteran producer, started looking for a way to generate funds. He already had a social media presence and a YouTube channel, but Trinidad and Tobago is not one of the countries YouTube allows to monetize content. He needed an alternative platform for that. Luckily a new website, Fundemtn.com, a local crowd funding site, came on stream and reached out to Phillips. On March 29, 2020, in collaboration with the FundMeTNT.com platform, he and his co-host Mr Desmond livestreamed “Tune for Tune” (a DJ battle). This broadcast of what Phillips describes as a regular Sunday radio programme raised \$11,070 TT. Soon WACK FM launched a series of livestream concerts on the platform (Phillips, 2021).

“It worked. We ran with it,” Phillips recalls (Phillips, 2021). The format is simple—see the show for free and pay what you can via the website

FundmeTnT.com (Blue Guruz Inc., 2018). Viewers could tune in via YouTube, Facebook, or FundMeTnT.com and enjoy shows featuring all local talent. We got “Up Close and Personal” with Terri Lyons, Baron, Blaxx, Ziggy Ranking, Oscar B, Singing Sandra, Super Blue and Ronnie Macintosh, Cro Cro, Sugar Aloes, Mighty Chalkdust, Brother Resistance, Sparanglang, and the list goes on. Most of these artistes had not had paying gigs since Dimanche Gras 2020. For them and WACK these shows were “survival business” (Phillips, 2021).

These virtual shows, as Phillips explained, raised the radio’s online subscriptions. Before the pandemic, WACK “was struggling to reach 8000” subscribers, but after Carnival they are nearing 16,000, doubling their numbers. And this figure does not reflect people tuning in without subscribing. But this “survival business” is expensive work. Phillips laid out the costs per show conservatively as \$19,500 to \$20,000 TT (space rental, PA system, Lighting, camera equipment and cameramen, bandwidth, advertising, radio broadcast, DJ, set design, and other miscellany). These costs need to be recouped before the performer could get his or her 50% cut of the funds raised. After all, it is a business at the end of the day, and the radio station needs to survive (Phillips, 2021).

Still, “entertainment *has to* become hybrid,” Phillips said; a sentiment he has been pushing long before the pandemic hit (Phillips, 2021). And WACK is proving it. To date WACK has hosted 157 shows on the website, raising over a million TT (gross) thus far, reaching a wider, international audience, and giving artistes a

chance to put something in their pockets to keep the arts going.

### **Tradition meets tech: The Tent Goes Online**

Not surprisingly, after the Government announced that Carnival was cancelled, and the National Carnival Commission (NCC) declared that going virtual was pointless (a decision they would later abandon), WACK FM’s platform became the best alternative. However, the move was not that straight forward for the Trinbago Unified Calypso Organization (TUCO), the governing body overseeing Calypso activities.

Shirlane Hendrickson, general secretary of TUCO, said that it was a slow process indeed. TUCO North met in March 2020 when the cancellation of Carnival was only a possibility. At that meeting Hendrickson pushed for Calypso to go virtual, but this proposal was mothballed until October when any lingering hope for Carnival 2021 being “normal” was squashed (Hendrickson, 2021). TUCO made the leap into the *digisphere* for Calypso History Month when they broadcasted the TUCO Thanksgiving event via iENT (Myron Bruce’s streaming platform). In the same month, the TUCO executives called for tenders, and from the several proposals opted for WACK FM as the platform to stream their virtual Calypso tents (Hendrickson, 2021). Meanwhile, Kenny Phillips reached out to TUCO South, asking the executives for that division what if any plans they had for Carnival 2021 (Phillips, 2021). After a going back and forth, on January 15<sup>th</sup>, Showcase Productions (representing TUCO South) put on a livestream Calypso show via WACK FM called “The New

Calypso Tent Experience.” This was the only show to come off from TUCO South. The northern division, however, would stage a total of seven shows: Kaiso Karavan, from TUCO East division (January 22), Calypso Review (January 23, 29, and February 3), Klassic Ruso (January 28), and Kaiso House (January 27 and February 4).

One of the best side effects of going virtual was the decision to space out the



Figure 2. Copy of Kaiso House Tent Flyer

shows. Rather than have competing events, each tent had its own night and attracted a larger audience than it would have during a “regular” tent season. Typically, during Carnival all tents are open from Thursday through Sunday and Calypso enthusiasts would try their best to attend as many tents as possible. Looking out from the stage on such nights, facing such stiff competition, the audience would seem small. The temptation to lament “Where is everyone?” is quite strong. However, as the tents went virtual, each on a separate night, they attracted thousands of audience members from at home and throughout the diaspora. After years of mourning the dwindling audience and the slow death of the Calypso tent, going virtual has proven that the audience is there. This is a major gift to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commercial Calypso tent. The question now is if the various tents will adapt based

on the success of spacing themselves out and having a virtual component, or will they revert as soon as our government gives us the all clear to *lime* in public again?

Something else to consider is the actual show. Most of the tents opted to go “vintage” with the singers performing classics (their own or covers). With Carnival *tabanka* rankling many, this nostalgic offering was like a panacea. This sense of nostalgia was also fuelled by the need to memorialize Singing Sandra (Sandra Des Vignes) who passed away on January 28, 2021 (Loop News, 2021). A Stalwart of the art form, one of the first members of Kaiso House Tent, and a mother to many of the younger performers, each tent took the opportunity to pay tribute to the legend, singing covers of her biggest songs. We tuned in to hear comforting familiarity, to dispel the strangeness of the “new normal” by listening to the soundtrack of the old normal, to mourn and commemorate.

At the same time, I was eagerly awaiting the 2021 crop of Calypsos. So much to sing about, to record, dissect, and analyse in song, there must be tonnes, I thought. But, I must admit, I was disappointed. Few calypsonians’ new songs made it into the public domain this year, at least from what I could tell. And perhaps this is the downside of social distancing, limiting casts to no more than 10 calypsonians, and having fewer shows. Many artistes also complained that the cost of producing a song, and (now) a video to get the song in the public domain, was out of their reach, and with no possibility of prize money, they couldn’t justify the cost.

Of the new Calypsos that crossed my radar, I would like to highlight 5 exemplars. The first is Brian London’s “All

Fours—No Trump,” a witty commentary on politics in the United States (Edwards, 2020). London’s narrative uses the card game, all fours, as a vehicle for discussing the aftermath of Donald Trump’s presidency. If you are not familiar with the game, it is usually played in pairs—either two individuals or in two teams of two. Each player is dealt six cards before the dealer puts the pack on the table and flips the top card, leaving it face up. This suit of the flipped card is called *trump*. It is the most powerful suit for the duration of the round. For example, the deuce of *trump* beats the ace of any other suit. In the song, London, trapped in the US because of the pandemic, is teaching everyone to play all fours, but can’t convince anyone to hold on to their *trump* cards so they keep discarding them. With the double entendre *trump/Trump*, London highlights Trump’s election loss because no one wants *trump*, not even if it means avoiding a “hang jack”—a strategy that earns many points during the game. Instead, President-Elect Biden and Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the last verse want to change “hang jack” to impeachment and change the rules so that two impeachments automatically ousts a player from the game. This suggests another meaning from the phrase “not holding *trump*”—the refusal of the Republican Party to hold Trump accountable leading to failed attempts to indict him in congressional hearings.

London’s song is not the only one to address politics. Mistah Shak (Selvon Noel) tackled local politics during his performance for Kaiso House, February 4 (WACK 90.1fm Official You Tube Channel, 2021). First, he updated his 2014 hit, “Bois,” to discuss the recent elections in Tobago, and various political scandals. For

his third song, he premiered his 2021 composition “Vigilante.” Addressing Commissioner Gary Griffith, Mistah Shak declares himself a vigilante bounty hunter because the laws are ineffective (Noel, S., 2021). Keeping hold of his bois man warrior persona, Mistah Shak voices concern for the spike in crimes against women and children, an increase exacerbated by the pandemic and stay at home measures. The song debuted after two murders of young women, Ashanti Riley and Andrea Bharatt, exactly two months apart, had the nation on edge (women especially). Then he reworked his 2016 song “Twilight Zone” to reflect on the strangeness of the “new normal,” including Trump’s presidency, the pandemic, and the murder of George Floyd.

While Brian London and Mistah Shak tackled politics head on, many of the Calypsos for 2021 focused on the pandemic. All Rounder, Anthony Hendrickson, instructed us how to wash our hands. Shirlane Hendrickson poked fun at the people who travelled out of the country after being warned not to (WACK 90.1fm Official You Tube Channel, 2021). Crazy, Edwin Ayoung, claimed that COVID was a man-made wake up for humanity to change our ways, the not-so-mad scientist trying to play God (Randoo, S. 2021). Heather Mac Intosh’s Calypso “Give Thanks” gives a fresher perspective. Mac Intosh reminded us to look at the positives—the silver lining around the gloom of the pandemic and year-long restrictions (Mac Intosh, 2020). Look around at the clearing skies and reduction in pollution. A few months after the pandemic struck, Calcutta’s smog dissipated. Los Angelinos could breathe easier, and the Seine ran clean and clear through Paris. We were forced to slow down, learn skills, and

reconnect with family and friends. To be reminded of this in February, as we neared the first anniversary of stay-at-home measures, was refreshing. Mac Intosh boasted that this was her first completely solo-written project. Indeed, she could say “Thank God for COVID” for that.

The other option that calypsonians took this year was to avoid COVID altogether and focus on culture. Maria Bhola’s Calypso, “Yuh Too Petty,” does just that by reminding us to stand up for Calypso, Soca, Carnival, and the artistes who make it all possible (IENtv, 2021). Bhola dramatized the encounter between Nicki Minaj’s husband, Kenneth Petty, and Neil “Iwer” George in 2020. Minaj, Petty, and George were on the same music truck, but when George reached out to raise Minaj’s hand and encourage her revel like a Trinidadian, Petty pushed George’s hand away (Stabroek News, 2020). This caused an uproar on social media, and Minaj soon issued an apology, citing Petty’s inexperience with Trinidadian culture. Bhola, assuming the persona of Nicki Minaj, imagined the conversation between wife and husband. In so doing, Petty became the punchline for the humorous Calypso.

The most interesting feature of the Calypso, for me, is Bhola’s crafty allusions that conjure Iwer George’s music by working in his popular phrases into her own lyrical narration. For example, in the first verse Petty slaps George’s “hand hand hand hand hand” while later she makes an overt reference, calling George the “Water Lord.” Kenneth Petty’s name is an added boon—a natural pun. When Bhola performed the song at TUCO’s celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Calypso Tent, held in

Queens Hall under strict COVID protocols, the audience called her back several times.

At that show, the reigning Calypso Monarch, Terry Lyons, performed her new calypso, a praise song to the art form. Lyon’s “Calypso” represented old and new

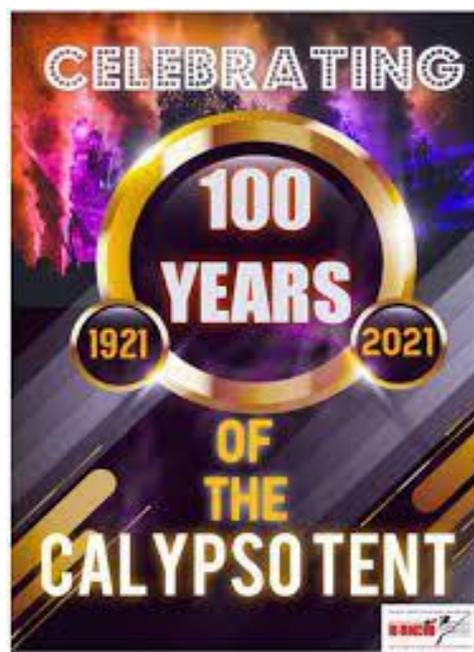


Figure 3. Copy of the flyer for TUCO's 100 years of the Calypso Tent

styles simultaneously. On the one hand, she brought her dynamic Soca-tinged stage presence—an erasure of the Calypso versus Soca feud that has developed. From her Afro to her heels, the tight shorts and crisp shirt, she would be comfortable on either the Soca or Calypso Monarch stage. Her performance was a reminder that the genres belong to the same family. On the other hand, the music pulls from the ancestry of Calypso (Lyons, 2021). The overt doption is overlaid with references to belé, highlighted by the dance moves Lyons performed (deftly in six inch heels and sweeping shirt tails of her outfit). She too received several encores. She had debuted the Calypso days earlier at the “Uncrowned Queens” Concert, one of the few pre-paid virtual Calypso shows. It is also one of the

few Calypsos that made it to YouTube (most of the Calypsos mentioned here are on YouTube). The song resonates as an exuberant celebration of Calypso, at once calling to mind David Rudder's "Calypso Music" if only to highlight the different energies the songs produce.

While the Calypso offerings were small in number, the glaring silence (there were 10-20 new songs when we usually have to narrow the field down to 40 by Calypso Fiesta, the semi-finals for Dimanche Gras) raises rather large concerns. Yes, money concerns are legitimate at a time when the artistes' revenues are compromised; however, the idea of "saving material" for the next "season" is troubling. For far too many, though, Calypso season begins with the Tent openings and ends with Dimanche Gras results.

I spoke to Selvon "Mistah Shak" Noel who said he could not understand why people referred to a Calypso season at all (Noel, 2021). For him, music has no season, and Calypso is no different. He has been releasing music steadily between Carnivals (Noel, 2021). Yet many calypsonians, radio stations, and even fans seem to accept that Calypso is seasonal. At the heart of this seasonality seems to be Dimanche Gras and the *crown syndrome*. Without the competition, releasing music is not worth it if there is no potential prize money or the prestige of the Monarchy. Paying a songwriter, producer, and videographer all in the name of releasing a song should have compensation in the end for the singer, at least to create a push into the semi-finals. But such levels of production for the joy of the art are not necessary. Today a microphone, a guitar (or other instrument), and a webcam (or phone) could be enough

to make and share a song recording. Low budget and low key, but so effective especially now during a pandemic. Where are the budding musicians? What does it mean if too few calypsonians can pick up an instrument and play something for the love of music? What does it mean for the future if the main motivation is winning a crown? This is may be a selfish perspective, but it is insulting to think releasing music to please fans rather than to compete is a waste of material.

### Soca gets Serious

Carnival and its competitions might have been cancelled, but Soca artistes released much material, enough for a two hour long Private Ryan DJ mix (dubbed Soca Brainwash 2021) (DJ Private Ryan, 2021). Perhaps one of the reasons for the difference in the amount of Calypsos and Soca songs relates to the technical aspects of the genres. Soca production differs from Calypso in the use of *riddims*. While in Calypso each song tries to have original and unique musical arrangements, Soca could produce multiple songs with the same basic music, with minor tweaks to the arrangement. For example, Farmer Nappy (Daryl Henry), Patrice Roberts, Lyrikal (Devon Martin), and Jaiga TC could release songs on the Back Yard Jam Riddim produced by De Red Boyz. Another reason for the disparity in music production is the expected return on investment. Soca artistes do not rely solely on winning competitions to earn money. If the song is a hit, then the artiste will gig in many fetes during Carnival. If it is big enough, the artiste could travel regionally and internationally from Carnival to Carnival. The culture surrounding production, then is markedly different. Soca artistes will produce several

songs every year, strategizing which songs to release when. Added to this is the fact that typically Soca artistes have two avenues for live performances—concerts and fetes. So, this year, despite Carnival being cancelled, there was a possibility that live Soca events might still happen.

The Government agencies might have cancelled their plans for carnival 2021, but there were some promoters, who took on the challenges of COVID. After all, fetes are usually thrown by private business entities. If they could find a way to do it safely, there was no legal obligation not to. Fete *brands* like Soka in Moka and Caesar's Army to pivot by transitioning the fete experience to the virtual world.

Dexter Charles, PRO of the Soka in Moka Foundation explained on the TTT morning show "Now", that he foundation "couldn't let a year pas without Soka in Moka" (TTT live online, 2021). In its two plus decades, the fete has raised funds for Trinity College, and (more importantly some might argue) launched the Carnival fete season. This year, as Charles said, the foundation decided to keep the vent alive with "Soka in Moka Uploaded"--an immersive virtual reality experience. For \$15 US, on January 17, patrons could attend the virtual fete via yellartv.com (Dowrich-Phillips, 2020). Once there, you could walk around to the various booths, win prizes, and watch the show featuring Nadia Batson, Nailah Blackman, Patrice Roberts, Olatunji Yearwood, Voice (Aaron St Lewis), and the A Team Band. All of this from the comfort of your own home, safely distanced.

About two days later, Caesar's Army announced their "Antillea Virtual World." Here users would log onto the platform, create an avatar of themselves and explore different events in Antillea East or

Antillea West (Dowrich-Phillips, 2021). For the full immersion, users would need a virtual reality headset. This would allow you to wave your hands when greeting other users or dancing. You could navigate the space using your mouse, but you would not be able to interact fully. Unlike Soka in Moka Uploaded, which Charles explained as an individual experience, in Antillea, you could *lime* with your friends. However, neither in the article published on LoopTT.com on January 19 nor in the interview on TV6 on January 20, was a specific launch date provided. It was unclear if it had launched or would launch later. The website is up, now, though (Olton Interactive, 2021).

Both attempts at virtual feting, Soka in Moka Uploaded and Antillea, highlight a specific problem. A fete is more than booths for food and games with a live show in the middle. A fete is a communal experience. It requires people, hot sweaty bodies pressed together, crowds. How do you translate that into the virtual world? Soka in Moka Uploaded did not attempt to address this need for what Jocelyn Guilbault calls public intimacies (Guilbault, 2005). The event, in the end, was a livestreamed concert. Viewers were as isolated as if they had been watching regular television or listening to the radio. There was no "tiefin a wine" or jumping around in a group of friends (and sometimes likeminded strangers). Antillea promised to simulate the public intimacy of a fete crowd, but the avatars look inhuman, and induce a different feeling of isolation. Looking at these peg figures with flattened CGI faces, armless hands, and no feet (you are a floating torso), you feel disembodied.

You are a disembodied voice. “So Leh We Fete” but not really.

There is no physical contact (how can there be?), no dancing in the thick of a crowd, no public intimacy. And what is a fete without dancing? This meant, for 2021, there were few fetes on offer.

The fetes may not have manifested, but several Soca artistes adapted to the new normal and adjusted their annual concerts



Figure 4 Screenshot of Antillea avatars (Dorwich Phillips, 2021)

to suit. This seemed the case when Sekon Sta (Nesta Boxill) was first out of the gate with his concert “Sekon Sunday” in Queens’ Hall January 10 (Cyrus, 2021). Following the COVID protocols, Sekon Sta and live band took to the stage. The socially distanced audience enjoyed the show, at some points during the night getting up to dance on the spot in their seats. However, the show raised concerns that the audience’s behaviour could cause a spike in cases. As a result, live-show protocols were updated to prohibit dancing at shows.

Nevertheless, Kes (Kees Dieffenthaler) the Band, Bunji Garlin (Antonio Alvarez) and Faye Ann Lyons, Nadia Batson, Patrice Roberts, Blaxx (Dexter Stewart) and the All Star Crew, and Nailah Blackman had hybrid concerts, performing on stage with social distancing in place while broadcasting to a wider audience either on television or social media. The more hybrid concerts like

Bunji’s show relied on ticket sales and sponsorship, and others like Nadia Batson’s show “Artform 3,” aired on Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT), relied solely on sponsorship. Notably absent was Machel Montano who opted to rebroadcast his “Machel Monday: The Wedding” from 2020 (also releasing an album of the same name this year). Many of these shows provided opportunities for several supporting acts and guest appearances, underscoring the communality of Soca music (not to ignore the stiff competition that exists in the genre).

Out of the plethora of Soca music this year, six Soca songs stood out to me. Perhaps these songs resonated more with me because they not only lament the cancellation of Carnival, but also offer optimistic resistance and resilience. These six songs represent Soca’s ability to be serious, even as it promotes partying.

First on the list is Bunji Garlin’s “The Heart of the People,” a serious social commentary Soca that explains the true impact of cancelling Carnival both financially and spiritually (D CarterHDVEVO, 2020). Bunji opens the song questioning our perceptions, repeating the line “I know you see two women in the dance with a man in the middle.” What we see when we think of Carnival is the fete, especially the sensuality of the fete. This perception is turned on its head when Bunji asks us if we ever stop to consider the work that goes on behind the fete—the economic potential for the contractors, security guards, and vendors—and admonishes us for not “taking stock” of the layers of impact one fete could have, the “level of employment.” From there Bunji outlines the depth of Carnival—“a sea that deep” with significance. Not only is Carnival a

multi-layered economic enterprise, but it is also rooted in the heart of the people, a living expression of our humanity.

What Bunji alludes to in “Heart of the People” is better developed in his other 2021 release “All House is Road” (JulianspromosTV, 2021). This road march contender opens with a serious questions probing people’s desperate reaction to Carnival’s cancelation, and then Bunji challenges the listener by asking “I cancelled?” the idea that Carnival is rooted deep within the Trinidadian heart is expounded here with the rhetorical affirmation that Carnival cannot be cancelled. To do so would be madness. Although confined to the home, through the process of imagination and engagement, we could bring Carnival inside. “All House is road!” from the front gate to the back yard. The song figures Carnival, not as a public gathering, but as a transformation. The music drives the feeling of the road home as the 8-bit Riddim has a thumping beat associated with the street parade and crossing the stage. (Faye Ann Lyons’s “Sleepwalk,” also on the 8-bit riddim, paints Carnival as a dreamlike experience).

While Bunji defiantly vows to fete at home, because Carnival can’t be cancelled, MX Prime (Edghill Thomas) in his songs “Torture” and “Mad City” take a more sombre turn. In “Torture” Prime suggests that the application of the laws are biased, singing that “they lock the Carnival in a jail/ and let the criminal out on bail” (Ultimate Reject, 2020). From the opening line, Prime juxtaposes Carnival with crime, alluding to the uneven fates of those accused with little or no money versus criminals with resources. The chorus, instructing us to put up our hands and “prance up again” is an open act of defiance

against the criminalization of Carnival. One inference to be drawn here is that the song comments on the perceived marked difference between the police’s response to illegal COVID parties based on the patrons. The song was released in December 2020. Earlier in September, the police refused to raid a pool party held in a gated community, but both raided other gatherings and posted pictures of the patrons. This created a flurry of negative commentary on social media and in the news. Many questioned the police’s motives, especially as tensions were still running high after several police shootings earlier that year.

In case some people took the song, “Torture,” as an excuse to break COVID protocols, MX Prime released his second song “Mad City” on January 18. Using a Grenadian Jab Jab rhythm, “Mad City” instructs us to “move away the couch,” “run around the yard,” and “*wuk up* in the kitchen” (Ultimate Rejects, 2021). While this is similar to Bunji’s “All House is Road,” Prime goes further to urge us to stay home because “we doh have no business in the road,” and that if we must go anywhere because we are “greedy” to put on a mask. Again, making an inference, the “Mad City” refers to people refusing to comply with COVID protocols despite the fact that “the police, army, they ready to charge we” because they do not want us out on the road. This is highlighted by the bridge where Prime, using standard Soca language about bad behaviour accuses us of not wanting “discipline” and being “miserable” and “bad.” However, these assertions are also admonitions because this is precisely the time for discipline and adherence to the law.

Taking another tack, Ziggy Ranking (Khori Francis) and General Grant (Curtis

Grant) affirm that Soca is “bigger than the virus” in their collaboration “Normal” (Francis, 2021). While Grant repeats the refrain “I wake up in the morning and give thanks for life” and Rankin reminds us that “Corona cannot divide us,” both express their eagerness to go back to normal—hugging friends and family, going to bars, and returning to communal life. This lamentation highlights the ongoing plight of the bar owners who cannot operate under current restrictions. Embedded in the affirmations and assurances that God is in control, is a similar strain of defiance found in “All House is Road.” There is an exuberance despite current conditions and empty pockets, a hallmark of Carnival. This defiance becomes more overt when Ranking sings to “kick Corona straight in the dustbin” and then curse it. This instruction is a necessary counterbalance to the longing for normalcy. Without mentioning it directly, Ranking and Grant suggests that normalcy can only return once COVID is eradicated or tamed. So we might be tired of being at home, but it is necessary to stay at home if we want to ever see a more normal, gregarious Trinidad and Tobago.

Following a similar current, Nadia Batson’s “A Love Note to Carnival” a yearning for Carnival with the assertion that normalcy will return (NadiaBatsonVEVO, 2021). As the song opens, Batson expresses disbelief that Carnival could be cancelled at all, then quickly goes on to agree that the move was necessary. Still Batson asks what is she to do without the “beautiful way to escape,” the love the festival has for us. Batson links Carnival with intrinsic Trinidadian-ness because Carnival allows us to be ourselves. She is heartbroken, but she assures us that we will be “loving up”

and “hugging up again.” By personifying Carnival, the promise of the chorus is also the promise of a return to normalcy and intimacy with loved ones. Thus, through grieving for Carnival, the song gives us an opportunity to grieve for the loss of intimacy during the pandemic. When we place the song alongside Batson’s other offerings for 2021 like “Counting My Blessings” and “First Fete” the narrative arc moves from lamentation, to an acknowledgment that things could be worse, and then to the promise to double up on the revelry once we make it through the current crisis.

As our Soca artistes were forced to slow down and adjust, several engaged in the practice of *sankofa*—looking back to move forward. A growing trend in Soca, this year artistes like Olatunji Yearwood and Sharlan Bailey remixed older songs. Olatunji takes the chorus from The Duke of Iron’s (Cecil Anderson’s) “Don’t Stop the Carnival” (1946) as his inspiration (JulianspromosTV, 2020). Not only does he sample the chorus, but he sings in a staccato style like single tone Calypsos from the twenties. This is most appropriate as Anderson’s song is already a revival of the road marches at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sharlan Bailey reworked a song closer to home, taking Winston Bailey’s, the Shadow, “Jam the Calypso” and *respeaking* it as *Hysteria*” (Bailey, 2021). This *respeak* is a commentary on younger artistes claiming to upgrade older songs by “refixing” them as well as an assertion of Shadow’s influence on modern Soca. The song also allowed Sharlan Bailey’s (Dread Wizard) to sing with his father the Shadow (Allstars Brass, 2021). In an era of *tabanka*, this nostalgic reworking of the past is comforting for many. This feeling of

nostalgia also undergirds Farmer Nappy's "Back Yard Jam," especially in the bridge when we are instructed to form our own rhythm section.

Like Calypso, Soca also had an overall response to the cancellation of Carnival. Most of the songs we can consider "groovy" rather than "power" Soca. But it brings another question to mind. What do we really mean by power Soca? Is it enough to designate a song groovy or power based on beats per minute alone? The songs described above all exuded a certain power to heal, a balm, a way to cope despite the current situation. They have the power to ease the frustration of stay at home measures by at once calling up a nostalgia for normalcy while assuring us that, as Patrice Roberts sings, better days are indeed coming. Fast or slow, Soca has the power to move us this way.

### **Can Pan be Virtual?**

With the official cancellation of Carnival 2021, there was no Panorama. Concert/fetes like All Star's "Soca by the River" had to be cancelled (tntisland.com, 2021). However, there were four Carnival-linked pan events: Phase II's "Another Phase" on January 27, Pan Trinbago's "Pan is Spirit Virtual Concert Series" on February 7 (medium bands) and 13 (large bands), and Caribbean Airlines Skiffle Steel Orchestra "Tempo in Sando" on February 13. Three of the four events required tickets for access while Skiffle Steel Orchestra's concert was simulcast on TTT and WACK Fm. While the tickets were not exorbitant, the highest priced ticket was \$20 US, Trinidad and Tobago was not accustomed to paying for online shows (tntisland.com, 2021). We still have not yet grown accustomed to the donation-

based platform. For me though, the price was not the issue. While Calypso and Soca transitioned to online platforms, the question remained could pan do the same? We have had pan concerts rebroadcast on television and YouTube before, but where Calypso and Soca are packaged for airplay, recorded sans audience in a studio, typically pan is recorded with an audience. This is particularly true of Panorama and pan in Carnival when the music experience is immersive.

Skiffle Steel Orchestra's concert addressed this issue by performing in front of a limited live audience in the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts (SAPA) Sundar Popo Auditorium (Caribbean Cyber Stream, 2021). The audience may have been socially distanced, but for those of us watching on TV or YouTube, we could still feel and hear the interaction between Skiffle Steel Orchestra, the guest artistes and the crowd. We were immersed, at home, by proxy. Included in the immersion experience is the continuous feedback loop between the performer/message sender and the audience/message receiver. In a recent interview on TTT, Pan Trinbago's President Ms. Beverly Ramsey-Moore passionately stated that pan is communal activity (TTT live online, 2021). But this communalism is typically expressed in the fans coming to the pan yard or liming on the drag leading up to the stage or in front of the stage. This communalism vibrates in the bones because the audience is in the middle of the sound rumbling out of the steelband. These aspects, this spirit, is hard to reproduce without an audience.

Nevertheless, Pan Trinbago plans to host concerts featuring the small and single pan bands in Easter to round off the Carnival 2021. As Ramsey Moore said in

an interview in *Newsday*, the organization must “ensure that at the end of this difficult period that we will all be here to continue the legacy of our ancestors” (Lindo, 2021). The formula will be perfected as they continue pushing beyond Carnival (perhaps pan is the most successful Carnival-derived art form that is no longer associated solely with the festival) and into the *digisphere*.

### I Come Out to Play

Perhaps one of the most positive side effects of the cancellation of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago is the space this



Figure 5. Copy of ad for Pan Trinidad's Pan is Spirit medium band concert.

provided for Carnival theatre to be seen. While plays are produced every year based on Carnival and during the “season,” usually Carnival is so jam packed with activities that theatre productions are buried. But this year, as we could not play mas in the streets, we could watch mas transformed for the stage. This year there were four productions about Carnival and staged during the Carnival. Although it is a stretch to say that these productions were virtual in the strictest sense, three of the productions were deliberately hybrid.

Every year Eintou Springer mounts a re-enactment of the canboulay riots on Carnival Friday morning. Written by Springer, the play dramatizes the tensions between the stick fighters in Port of Spain and Captain Arthur Baker leading up to and during the 1881 Canboulay riots. Starting in 2020, leading up to the broadcast, they also launched the Kambule Campus which streamed events covering the preparation of the play. Springer and her organization the Ikeda Group used their Facebook Page, Kambule Movement to host the Campus. Also, because the world had slowed down, the Kambule Movement translated the play from street theatre production to filmed docudrama which aired on TTT Carnival Monday (February 15) morning at 5 am (Idakeda Group Ltd., 2021).

Also aired on TTT was Lost Tribe's “Lavway: Our Story” (February 14). While the Kambule Movement re-staged history, Lost Tribe attempted to mythologize Carnival. Written by Muhammed Muwakil (Freetown Collective) and Valmiki Maharaj and choreographed by Bridgette Wilson, Lavway is a loose narrative about Carnival *tabanka* (Lost Tribe Carnival, 2021). Savannah, the youngest of three siblings is waiting for his older, beloved sister Carnival to visit. We are taken from vignette to vignette highlighting how Savannah prepares himself for the visit and the gifts Carnival brings with her. The scenes are connected through Savannah's soliloquys, but there is no real plot or character growth. Instead, the play focuses on music and spectacle. Carnival characters are transformed for the stage. Moko jumbies bring the poui trees around the savannah to life. Dancers in shimmering candyfloss skirts represent the fallen pink poui flowers. Jouvay is clad in mirrors,

perhaps to reflect the revellers. The choice of mirrors is interesting here because several African cultures, and by extension Caribbean cultures, attach supernatural significance to mirrors—as portals to the spirit world. Savannah introduces the second act/scene by inviting Soca artistes to sing in honour of Carnival. This leads to an extended jam backed by African drums with different Soca artistes performing their songs, shifting seamlessly from one performer to the next. There was no need to change rhythms. Whatever the song, the drums were more than adequate accompaniment. The third scene/act was an extended, and gratuitous dance sequence with no contextualization offered for the white latex figures dancing in a shallow pool of water. The play ends in an open space between two trucks with pretty mas dancing in the background.

The third play for the season, *Revenge of King Jab—Play Mas with Shakespeare*, written by Wayne Lee Sing and produced by Lourise Lee Sing (Brown Cotton), attempts to use Carnival as a framework for investigating the world. Staged both on the stage in Little Carib Theatre and streamed on WACK FM, the play is set in the Land of Mamaguy. According to the play *King Jab*, the Jab Molassie, Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade and Jamette are responsible for all the catastrophes of 2020. We meet the monarch in hell consulting with his minions who pitch nefarious schemes to destroy mankind. These plans are interspersed with musical performances—characters take turns singing classic Calypsos—and liberally sprinkled with Shakespeare quotes (with citations). However, neither of these elements advance the plot nor clarify the story. The meeting continues until the Baby

doll enters as the other characters' conscience, demanding accountability. Soon after, King Jab decides the play is over because he said so (*devil ex Machina*). Despite the plot holes, the most disturbing thing about the play was the use of traditional characters as representatives of evil, a trope we should have dispelled by now. The other disturbing feature was the gender-swap casting. Disturbing because it was not clear how this informed the meaning of the play. It was done, so it seems, "just because."

As for the fourth production, I am privy only to hearsay as I was unable to see the play. Produced by James Remy and written by Muhammed Muwakil "*Mas*" was staged at the Northern Academy of the Performing Arts (NAPA) on Carnival Monday (February 15) and Tuesday (February 16), with the intention of creating a film out of it. Currently it is post production, so the commentary here is more about the concept than the actual enactment. Like "*Lavway*" and "*Revenge of King Jab*," "*Mas*" was also an attempt to engage Carnival in a mythic way. In her review, Laura Dorwich Phillips summarizes the plot: Ratto (Levee Rodriguez) is an unconscious stick fighter who, with the help of Moko (Kevin Humphrey) must collect four aspects of himself before he can return to Carnival (Dorwich Philips, 2021). Thus, building on the theme of Carnival as odyssey, the play takes us, through the underworld of Carnival to achieve a catharsis. The budget shrank significantly which affected the actual staging, but there is little more I can say, in all fairness, without studying the resulting film.

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## Discussion / Conclusion

Carnival may have been cancelled officially, but as Calypsos, Soca, Pan, and plays tell us, there is no way to cancel spirit. Unlike Toronto and especially London that was highly orchestrated and sponsored (Phillip, 2020), Trinidad and Tobago, without central coordination, managed to have a hybrid Carnival—mostly virtual with some face to face encounters. So much so, in fact, that this review does not cover everything that happened. What it does cover, however, is a fair representation of how resilient Trinidadians and their festival really are. As Bunji says, Carnival comes from the heart of the people while Ramsey-Moore proclaimed, it is our spirit. You can cancel the parade, but you could never cancel the Carnival. Overall, I think this year's virtual experiments will make future Carnivals stronger. We saw attendance for tents skyrocket because the audience was both expanded and undivided. People could

appreciate Soca's more serious side and draw inspiration from the contemplative lyrics. Pan continues to grow its reach, adapting its packaging to attract larger audiences. And plays became more visible in the festival space. The virtual Carnival might not have cured the *tabanka* outright, but it was a much-needed treatment nonetheless. As for that low frequency thrumming energy, that carnival anticipation that blows in every Boxing Day to titillate Carnivalists, I look forward to feeling it again, stronger, and with renewed vitality.

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## ‘CarniVAX’ - Steelpan and Calypso at London Hospitals to Boost Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Vaccinations

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### Abstract

Boroughs in London with a preponderance of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups show the highest rate of Covid-19 deaths yet paradoxically struggle with the highest level of vaccine hesitancy during the ongoing viral pandemic. This project initially focussed on the Notting Hill Carnival community in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) where local GP’s surgeries and healthcare centres began hosting a number of events on social media and in healthcare centres to dispel myths about the value of the two currently available vaccines, Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca. With uptake still poor, a Webinar and Q & A was held by a panel of practitioners and a representative of Notting Hill Carnival on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021 that helped to stimulate vaccine uptake. To further reach the community, steelpan and calypso were taken to the entrance of St Charles Hospital immunisation centre on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Its impact was visible and dramatic. The reduced tension and camaraderie in the vaccination queues was evident while vaccinees personally expressed their gratitude to band members. By midday it was announced there was only one recorded case of vaccine refusal. This contrasts sharply with the previous Saturday when many joined the queue but 120 left unvaccinated. During the day interviews and statements by band members and residents were recorded and edited versions posted on social media to advocate immunisation. With news of the event reaching other hospitals a second performance was held at Northwick Park Hospital, the major vaccination centre for the London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust. The event which took place on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April following vigorous promotion, was highly successful and drew in 186 health workers.

The combined thrust of health workers/volunteers to increase vaccine advocacy in RBKC was remarkable. At the commencement of the programme, Blacks and Asians demonstrated the highest level of hesitancy. However, with novel approaches to community engagement and intensive campaigns, parity between ethnic groups began to emerge by the second vaccination and eventually even surpassed their white counterparts in the first quarter of 2021. Consequently, steelpan and calypso were invited back to St Charles Hospital on 16<sup>th</sup> May to not only support a day of second vaccinations but to celebrate the tremendous success of their programme and the work of its dedicated squad.

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**Key Words:** Steelpan, Calypso, COVID-19 vaccination, CarniVAX, St Charles Hospital, Northwick Park Hospital

## Introduction

The first COVID-19 vaccine was granted regulatory approval on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This internationally acclaimed agency has responsibility for medicines, medical devices and blood components for transfusion and for ensuring their safety, quality and effectiveness. Their approval gave the green light for the UK's vaccination programme to commence, and it did so with a degree of fanfare. A near 91-year-old UK grandmother, Margaret Keenan was the first person globally to be given the Pfizer Covid-19 jab as part of a long-awaited mass vaccination programme. This was the first of 800,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and it commenced at University Hospital, Coventry and was sagaciously choreographed for television. With several vaccination hubs then operational, rollout of the over-80s vaccine followed and over four million doses were given by the following month. Most recipients were relieved to be vaccinated with Margaret Keenan (above) describing it as the "best early birthday present".

The first to be vaccinated in RBKC was also an elderly lady but in a more subdued event. However, scepticism about the safety of the vaccine began appearing on social media and particularly among the Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups, including some doctors and healthcare workers, and it was soon apparent there would be significant hesitancy to vaccination (Feleszko et al., 2020, Freeman et al., 2020, Salali and Uysal, 2020). This may have been exacerbated by the refusal of several European and American countries to include the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine into their programmes. Concerns were raised about the use of this vaccine, which had revealed a few cases of thromboembolic events (ie.

rare (and sometime fatal) syndrome of thrombosis and thrombocytopenia [reduced platelets], (Geddes, 2021, EMA, 2021). This was vigorously taken up by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and their recommendations were to reserve this vaccine for the over 65-year-olds. With the UK's immunisation programme in ascendancy and its success being broadcast daily, EMA's uncertainty did little to forestall the enthusiasm of the British public to continue vaccination.

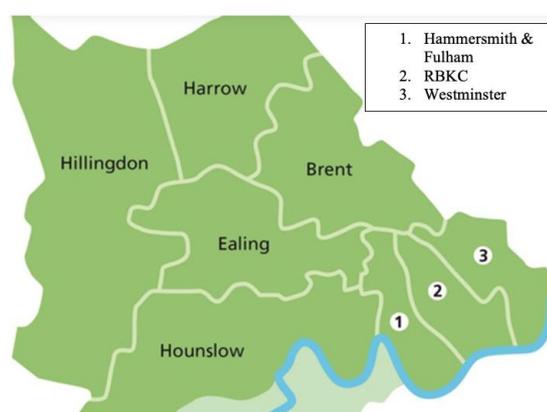


Figure 1. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and its proximity to the seven boroughs in North West London where vaccine hesitancy was around 50%.

RBKC is the smallest borough in London (Figure 1) but is one of the most densely populated administrative regions in Britain and includes affluent areas of Notting Hill, Kensington, South Kensington, Chelsea, and Knightsbridge. The borough contains some of the most expensive residential properties in the world while simultaneously harbouring some of the most deprived communities in London. It is home to the Notting Hill Carnival and large numbers of its residents are Blacks, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Here the views on vaccination were very different among the UK's ethnic minorities, many of whom were openly embittered. In the North Kensington area, residents of Caribbean descent refused and, in some cases, became

increasingly envenomed when asked to consider vaccination. Members of several medical centres and clinics in this area were reporting approximately 40 -50% resistance to vaccination by Blacks, Asian and minority ethnic groups. This current project focused initially on RBKC (labelled '2' in Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows a map of RBKC in which areas of deprivation are highlighted as a heatmap ('Index of Multiple Deprivation', 2007, the last available). In general, 'Indices of Deprivation', published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, use statistical techniques to combine information on economic, social and physical issues to produce scores for each geographical hierarchy in England. These scores were then used to rank these small areas according to their relative level of deprivation. In RBKC the level of deprivation correlated precisely with

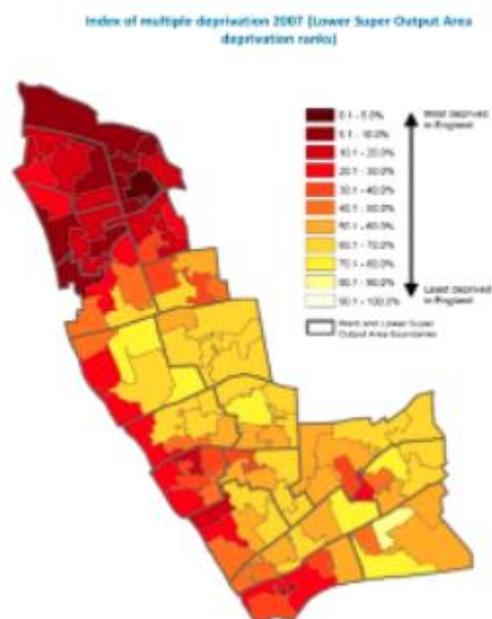


Figure 2. Heat Map of RBKC on a sliding scale of the most deprived areas (red) and most affluent (yellow); which also correlated with vaccine uptake. These reddish areas show the highest levels of vaccine hesitancy; conversely the yellow shows the highest vaccine uptake. Data from Index of Multiple Deprivation',

vaccine hesitancy (Figure 2) and provided a sound basis from which to work.

Personal interviews by the authors to unravel the underlying root cause of hesitancy surprisingly did not point to fear over the media hype of the thromboembolic events of the AstraZeneca vaccine but rather a deep-seated distrust of the political system and prior historical events (see e.g. Goldstein et al., 2015, Larson et al., 2018, Salmon, et al, 2015). Most of those interviewed cited as one example the cynicism of government over the treatment of the Windrush Generation, their lack of parity in many aspects of daily life, such as jobs, police harassment, housing and social behaviour and considered this to be a surreptitious opportunity for them to be "removed from society". Some questioned the manner in which the clinical trials were conducted and applauded African countries for not taking part. They pointed to Brazil (who agreed to the clinical trials) and when compared to Africa (on the same latitude), the latter saw nothing on the scale of the disaster that Brazil was enduring. With such deep feelings of distrust, it was evident that an enormous amount of work had to be done in this and similar communities to win their confidence and trust (Barello et al. 2021).

### Community Immunity Zoom Seminar, North Kensington and Westminster Residents.

In an attempt to bring the Notting Hill community together, doctors in the area, led by Dr. Yasmin Razak created a vaccination working group on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The following were involved: The Golborne Medical Centre, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust (LNWH), NHS England & NHS Improvement, St. Quintin Health Centre, NHS England & NHS Improvement, North West London Collaboration of Clinical Commissioning Groups, The Ridgeway Surgery, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Imperial College Healthcare



Figure 3 Initial 'Community Immunity' logo designed by Dr. Yasmin Razak (above with 'carnival colours'). In the final (below) the London bus emphasised social distancing.

NHS Trust. Information sent out on social media was readily recognised by its London bus logo with a socially distanced community (Figure 3). In one week, the group organised a Community Immunity Seminar for residents in North Kensington and Westminster on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021 between 16.30 - 18.30. North Kensington has a long cultural and historical presence of Caribbean immigrants who began settling there from the 1950s. The world-renowned Notting Hill Carnival grew out of this milieu, thus it was considered necessary to invite a member of the carnival community to join the panel. Author, Haroun N. Shah was invited, based on his career as a clinical scientist with some 40 years in the field of infectious diseases, initially at university and subsequently at Public Health England. He participated in Notting Hill Carnival from 1967, is conversant with many of the local Caribbean residents and has been a director/player of the UK's oldest steelband, Nostalgia, since 1998. The band

is located in North Kensington and organises numerous activities in the area with local residents.

Once the panel was formed, topics were selected for speakers to address. The evening consisted of very brief talks/presentations in a greatly condensed 30-minute session to leave maximum time for subsequent questions. This event was run as a seminar on Zoom with an anticipated 1,000 attendees from the community that was also live-streamed on YouTube, with a further 1,300 viewers on social media. It was recorded for subsequent translation into other languages, to facilitate more informed community discussions around Covid 19 and vaccination.

The programme was as follows:

- 1) **Mr Abdurhaman Sayed** (AlManar/MCHC) Introduction to the event and the host.
- 2) **Dr Yasmin Razak**. Chair and Founder (The Golborne Medical Centre). Introduction to Neohealth PCN. (Primary Care Network of eight GP practices that serve 38,000 citizens).
- 3) **Dr Sarah Elkin** (Clinical Director Integrated Care and Consultant Respiratory Physician, Imperial Healthcare NHS Trust). Presentation: *“COVID 19 a clinical perspective; how has this illness affected individuals and impacted on the provision of healthcare, long covid?”*
- 4) **Samira Benomar** (Co-founder of Community Voices - a movement for change) Presentation: *“How has COVID 19 affected the local area and communities in North Kensington and Westminster?”*
- 5) **Haroun N. Shah** (Professor of Proteomics and Infectious Diseases, Middlesex University, London). Presentation: *“Transmission of pathogens: Protecting yourself and the community from COVID, what measures can you take? Non-pharmacological interventions and why they are important”*.

6) **Dr Umar Ebrahimsa** (SpR Infectious Diseases/ General Medicine). Presentation: *“A historical perspective on immunisation; How do these vaccines work and are they safe?”*.

7) **Jeffrey Lake** (Deputy Director of Public Health RBKC & Westminster). Presentation: *“How is the Council facilitating vaccinations and addressing vaccine uptake?”*.

8) **Dr Manpreet Bains** (Associate Director NeoHealth PCN). Presentation: *“What do we know about the distribution of vaccine in Kensington, and about the uptake of vaccine? How do you book your vaccination?”*.

The event was highly successful, and several other events emanated from it, including discussions on vaccine supply and transport for the elderly. As early as Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January, the North Kensington Recovery team invited NHS staff and volunteers to a local workshop in which local GPs were at hand to speak to those who had concerns and fears. A RBKC Covid-19 engagement meeting followed in which several community and faith centres came forward to offer their sites as community vaccination clinics. RBKC would later incorporate material from these events to help reduce vaccine hesitancy in the borough.

Ideas and activities mushroomed, one of which was to create the spirit of carnival through music and song at St Charles Hospital. The logistics of this was actively deliberated between Dr. Yasmin Razak and Haroun Shah with just one week to organise an event that was unfamiliar to all. Because the country was still under Covid-19 lockdown there were many unforeseen issues to address before the proposed event could proceed at St Charles Hospital.

## St Charles Hospital

Opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1881, St Charles Hospital has retained



Figure 4a (above) The grandiose buildings of the early St Charles Hospital. Originally, St Marylebone Union Infirmary in 1881, it became St Marylebone Hospital in 1923 and finally renamed St Charles' Hospital in 1930 (Curle,1981). Figure 4b (below). Main entrance to the present vaccination centre of St. Charles where the band played on 20<sup>th</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> May to support the local vaccination

much of its majestic architecture over the years in spite of continuous changes in structure and function (Figure 4a, 4b). The hospital rose to national prominence in 1918 when it became the epicentre for treatment during the Spanish influenza pandemic (Curle, 1981). As the first world war came to an end, around half of the hospital's nurses had been called to military service. Many were decorated for bravery in the battlefield but sadly later succumb to

the woes of this global contagion (Honigsbaum, 2020).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV4mTfBrGWk&ab\\_channel=Viralanimation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV4mTfBrGWk&ab_channel=Viralanimation)

Today, its health facility on Exmoor Street, North Kensington finds itself in the heart of the Notting Hill Carnival (NHC) community and not only serves the health needs of many of NHC residents but like it did a century ago, also became a major vaccination hub, this time for COVID-19. The UK and London's core steelbands, Ebony, Mangrove, Metronomes, Glissando, Pan Nectar and Nostalgia alongside a plethora of Mas Bands and Sound Systems are sited in this area. The NHC route and the Carnival Village (Tabernacle and Yaa Centre) which also house the London Calypso Tent are juxtaposed against a vibrant community of carnivalists, many of whom are pioneers of NHC and host the two million participants who have been present at Notting Hill Carnival for over 50 years. The Caribbean community are already familiar with the workings of the Centre while the Pembridge Hospice on its grounds has provided specialist palliative care for many NHC patrons over the years. For example, the NHC pioneer, jazz pianist and pannist, Russell Henderson, one of the founders of the Notting Hill Street Carnival, spent his last weeks in August 2015 there. The

hospice generously facilitated the community to engage unreservedly during Henderson's stay. Thus, calypsonians such as Tobago Crusoe, D'Alberto and Alexander D Great performed frequently (Spark, 2015) while many musicians, including pan players held daily bedside concerts for him. The staff were welcoming and solicitous, often supplying accessories for visiting artistes which included an assortment of percussion such as household items, bottles and spoons. With such support for the NHC community, the hospital's request, led by Dr. Razak, to support their vaccination programme was warmly received by Nostalgia Steelband's members and veteran calypsonian, Alexander D Great. With Dr. Razak, a novel plan was contrived to use steelpan and calypso to woo in vaccine hesitant members of the community. There were many hurdles to straddle, both from the hospital management and NHS staff policies and confirmation to perform was only received at 4pm on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March to play from 8.30am the following day.

#### **Performing at such an extraordinary event**

The four Nostalgia members (Laila Shah, Aisha Goodman, Haroun Shah and veteran pannist, Cyril Khamai) and calypsonian Alexander D Great had not performed together since 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020 (Shah et al.



Figure 5. Group at the entrance to St. Charles Hospital during COVID-19 immunisation on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021. See - <https://vimeo.com/526948614>

2020) and as COVID-19 guidelines did not permit a practice session, there was considerable apprehension. Furthermore, most of the equipment was in storage while only the three senior members were COVID-19 vaccinated. Our arrival at St Charles Hospital at 8am commenced with the execution of COVID-19 tests using the Lateral Flow Test as part of the agreed protocol. Having all tested negative by 8.15am, an induction with Dr. Razak took place before any instruments were set up. The band was placed at the left front hospital's entrance while the right side was reserved for the immunisation queue (Figure 5). Instruments were spaced according to social distancing protocols as shown in Figure 5 and music promptly commenced at 8.30am as the vaccination queue began.

A short distance from St Charles Hospital looms the draped shell of Grenfell Tower, destroyed by fire on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017, with the death of 72 of its occupants (BBC, 2019). Notting Hill Carnival pays tribute to its disaster victims annually on both days of carnival with all bands standing for a minute's silence at 3pm, followed by each band playing 'Bridge Over Troubled Water', the refrain that has become a memorial anthem for its ill-fated victims.

Therefore, it was imperative that the band started by playing this poignant melody while the queue for the vaccinations began and soon extended around the corner of the hospital's entrance (Figure 6). It was evident that those in the queue stood frigidly, almost to attention when they began arriving for the first appointments at 8.40 am. However, as soon as the music commenced it was noticeable that the tension was markedly reduced and trifling dance movements were apparent while others exchanged conversation with those around them.

The band played alone for a period then switched to a supporting role while Alexander D Great played guitar and sang from his repertoire of old and popular calypsos that included memorable pieces such as 'Jean and Dinah', 'Sugar Bum

Bum', 'Bees Melody', 'Pan in A Minor' and David Rudder's 'Calypso'. The band responded with a mix of calypsos and a range of popular songs, some requested by residents as they left the hospital and passed band members at a safe distance to voice their gratitude. The chorus to 'Hey Jude' was sung by all for several minutes and was clearly one of the favourites of the day. There were intermittent breaks during



Figure 6. Local residents forming social distance queues at the entrance to St. Charles Hospital during COVID-19 immunisation on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

which interviews were conducted, statements taken, conversation with residents exchanged while numerous vaccinees came personally to thank band members for making their experience more tranquil. At 1.00pm as the band began to close the session, Dr Razak announced that during the performance period, only one person who joined the queue subsequently refused to be vaccinated. This was in stark contrast to the week before when over 120 who had joined the queue declined immunisation. Soon the band began its closing pieces with 90-year old icon, Cyril Khamai at the helm, performing a medley of his favourites on the double tenor. He was given a tumultuous ovation with an extended round of applause when he closed with his signature piece “Nice One Cyril”

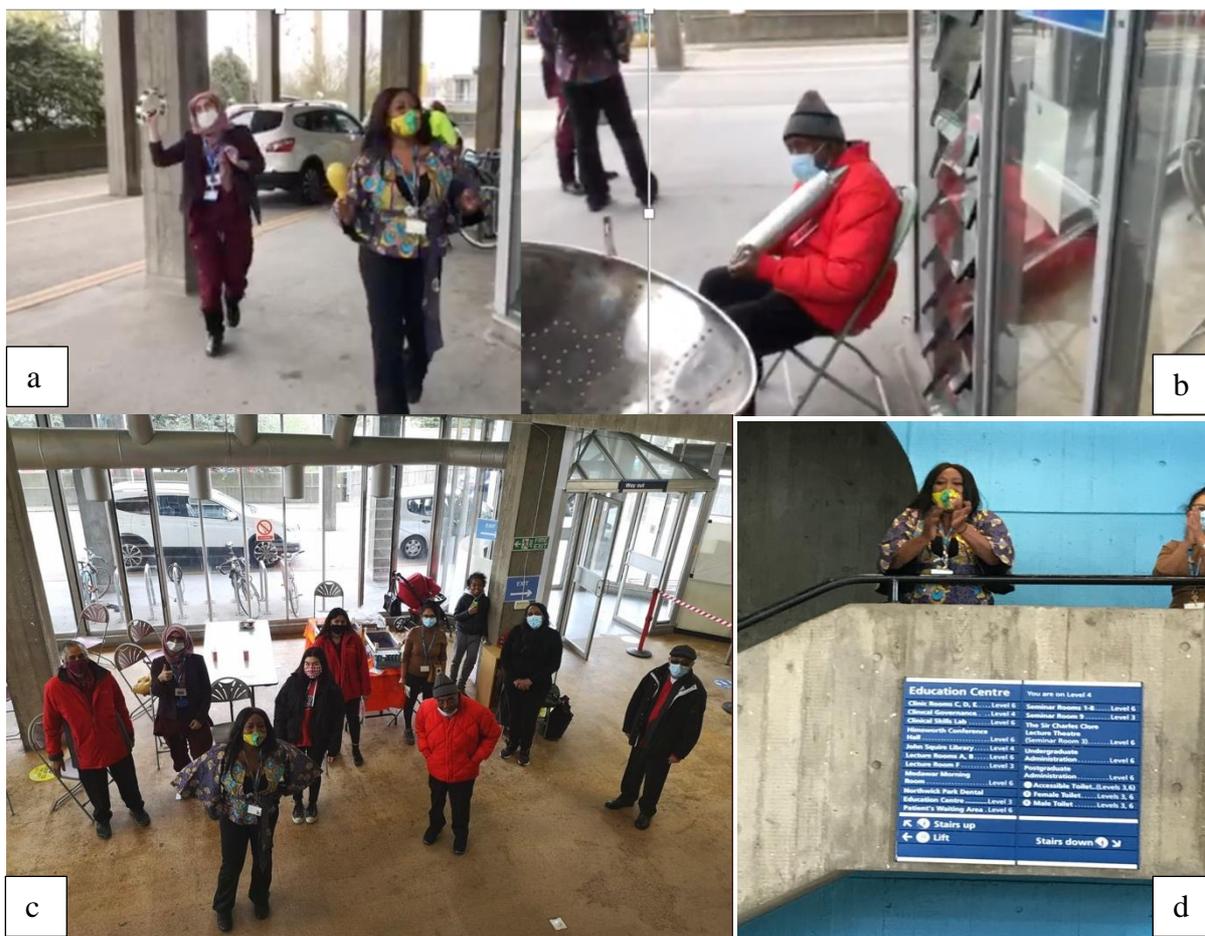
The project was seen as a great success and there was a feeling of great achievement by the entire team. This became evident by the end of the evening as YouTube videos and social media showed several clips from the day’s event. Requests also came to repeat this performance at other hospitals in the borough. Unfortunately, most of these coincided with other scheduled events. However, the one proposed for Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April at Northwick Park Hospital appeared more achievable and soon both groups began to focus on details. As before numerous hurdles needed to be initially overcome.

### **Northwick Park Hospital**

News of the success of the event at St Charles Hospital reached several hospitals and vaccination centres and was picked up by staff of RBKC. Snapshots of interviews used at St Charles Hospital were used to encourage vaccination uptake in the borough (see YouTube link: [https://youtu.be/v\\_y7qjMOJNc](https://youtu.be/v_y7qjMOJNc)). However, by far the most enthusiastic request was by consultant Evelyn Mensah who is based at the Central Middlesex Hospital, Park Royal. She was convinced that steelband

music would have an impact on also persuading healthcare workers were still undecided, to get vaccinated. Dr. Mensah holds several senior posts at the London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust (LNWH) and since February 2021, has been leading on vaccine advocacy. Plans were further developed to stage a similar event at Northwick Park Hospital, the major site for the vaccination programme of LNWH. The latter, along with St Mark’s Hospital, Harrow, Central Middlesex Hospital, Brent and Ealing Hospital, Southall are part of the same Trust that was formed in October 2014. Together they form one of the largest integrated care Trusts in the country bringing together hospital and community services and the largest emergency department in Europe. The Trust provides community services in Brent, Ealing and Harrow; areas in which a large number of ethnic minorities live, and a great deal of carnival activities take place (Figure 1).

Prominent carnivalists include the 20 year-old steelband, St Michael’s and All Angels Steel Orchestra led by Patrick McKay and the world renowned Mas Band ‘Mahogany Carnival Arts’ led by the UK’s most prominent carnival artist, Clary Salandy. Like the previous event, it was essential for the group to play outside the hospital to reduce the risk of infection. Dr. Mensah succeeded in procuring the Medical Education Centre (MEC) of Northwick Park Hospital’s as a vaccination site, while the group was sited directly outside the entrance of the MEC. Although England was in the midst of Spring and the country was experiencing many warm days of >20°C, the UK’s Met Office had forecast sub-zero Arctic winds for the weekend of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April. This manifested in snow in many parts of the country and



Figures 7a - 7d. Organisers Dr. Yasmin Razak (left in photo, St Charles Hospital) and Dr. Evelyn Mensah, right, 7a, Northwick Park CarniVAX) outside the entrance of the MEC’s temporary vaccination centre. Fig. 7b Cyril Khamai with the louver windows to his back. Band members inside the vaccination centre getting ready to depart (7c) organiser, Dr. Evelyn Mensah (7d) giving a vote of thanks to all following the event.

while exempt from this, the MEC is located on an incline which seemed to accentuate the cold perpetual winds that prevailed that weekend. It was clear that we would be unable to perform there for three hours and moved to the opposite site of the MEC where its high walls provided an artificial break. With agreement of the organisers (Figure 7a), a few louver windows were opened (Figure 7b) to enable the sound to reach inside of the foyer (Figures 7c, 7d) where vaccination queues assembled. The band (Calypso, Alexander D Great and Steelpan; Laila Shah, Aisha Goodman and Haroun Shah with percussionists Cyril Khamai and Frank Ward performed between 10am - 1.00pm, intermittently

performing alone and also combining steelpan with calypso (Figure 8). The repertoire was expanded to include requests from staff and those in the queue for vaccination and judging from the festive atmosphere in the vaccination hall, Dr Mensah’s vision of how it may alter the pre-vaccination atmosphere appeared to have been borne out. Since the vaccination ethos was one of a ‘pop-up’ clinic, many more people attended than was expected. The steelpan music and refreshments provided helped those waiting in the long queue. Many remarked how wonderful it was to hear the music and how it uplifted their spirit and reduced anxiety.



Figures 8a (left). The band performing outside the entrance of the MEC. Figure 8b (right). Laila Shah (front) playing on a tenor pan while Cyril Khamai (back) moves from playing percussion to a steelpan.

This event took place at a time when mainstream media were carrying unduly high levels of anti-vaccine narratives that heightened vaccine hesitancy. The result was that upcoming GP vaccination clinics witnessed cancellations that began causing considerable concern. Following the steelband's performance, a video of the event using local voices to share experiences of having the vaccine at the centre that day was circulated to the remaining non-vaccinated residents using the NHS booking system. This triggered a positive impact, prompting new residents to come forward for inoculation. They in turn sent out positive social media messages that helped thwart the flow of hostile divergent narratives.

The event at Northwick Park Hospital differed from St Charles Hospital in that the vaccination programme was solely for hospital and NHS staff. The group scheduled a Q & A Webinar on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> April and used this to also promote the Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2021 event. Images and videos of Nostalgia Steelband past performances were sent ahead to the organisers. This enabled them to create a carnival atmosphere with their vaccination programme that was aptly branded 'CarniVAX'. However, up to the preceding day, there were concerns that the event may be illegal, and consent was needed at the CEO level. When band members asked how

many are likely to get vaccinated the response was 'may be a dozen or so'. Dr. Mensah later proudly reported that they vaccinated 186 of their colleagues and for many it was their first dose. She noted that the feedback from those in waiting queues was upbeat and gratifying.

#### Impact on Reducing Vaccine Hesitancy

The impact of these performances and other activities were having on reducing vaccine hesitancy may be summarised in Figures 9a - 9c below. Figure 9a is a compilation of data obtained from all eight boroughs given in Figure 1 at the commencement of the vaccination programme. The data revealed a common profile across all eight boroughs viz. the most deprived group (1) that encompassed Blacks, Asian and minority ethnic groups showed < 50% uptake of the vaccine whereas group 10, the most affluent registered >75%.

The project then focused on RBKC where much of the Notting Hill Carnival community reside and where the major vaccination thrust was in progress. Figure 9b shows the remarkable achievement of the healthcare team for this borough. The data indicated a steady rise in vaccination uptake by groups with the lowest level of deprivation (1-3); now reaching similar levels to that of the most affluent groups (9,10).

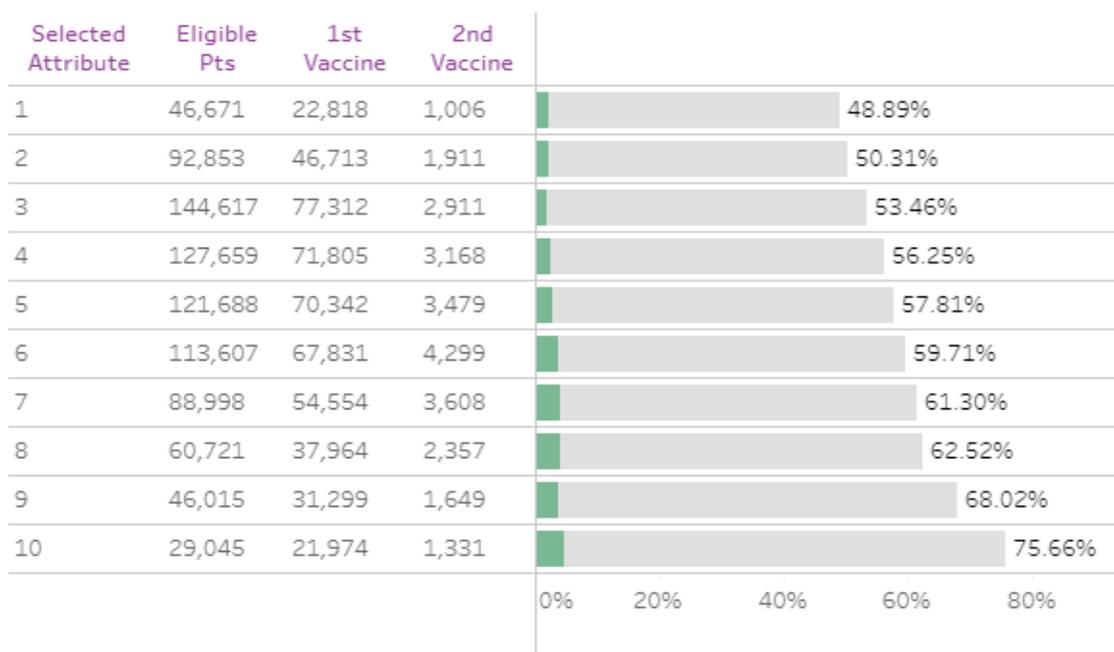


Figure 9a. Vaccine acquisition among Black, Asian and ethnic minorities. The groups 1 to 10 correlate with the heat map in Figure 2 with group 1 representing the most deprived [~ 50%] and group 10, the most affluent [~75%] vaccine uptake at the commencement of the programme. Abbrev. - Pts: patients who were eligible for vaccination. The grey bars signify the level of uptake of the first vaccination dose while the green represent the 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccination dose. Data from WSIC Covid-19 Vaccination Dashboard, NWL. <https://www.nwlondonccgs.nhs.uk/professionals/whole-systems-integrated-care-wsic-dashboards-and-information-sharing>

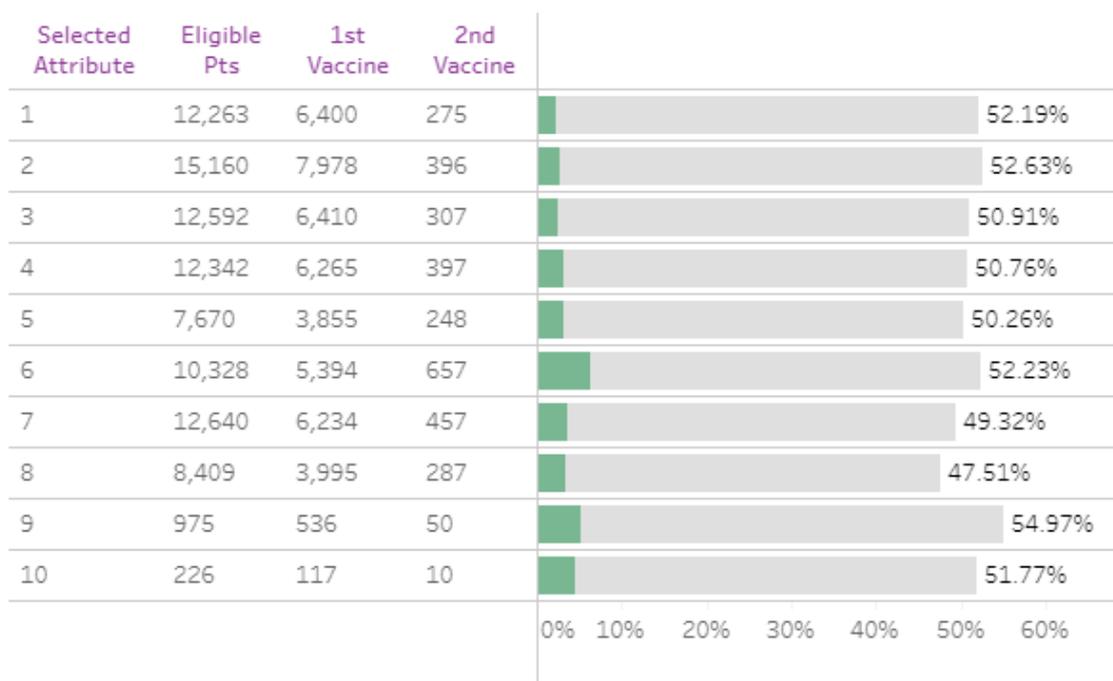


Figure 9b Vaccine acquisition among ethnic minorities. As before the panel 1 to 10 correlates with the heat map in Figure 2. However, as the March/April 2021 drive reaches the community, there is parity in vaccine uptake (grey bars).

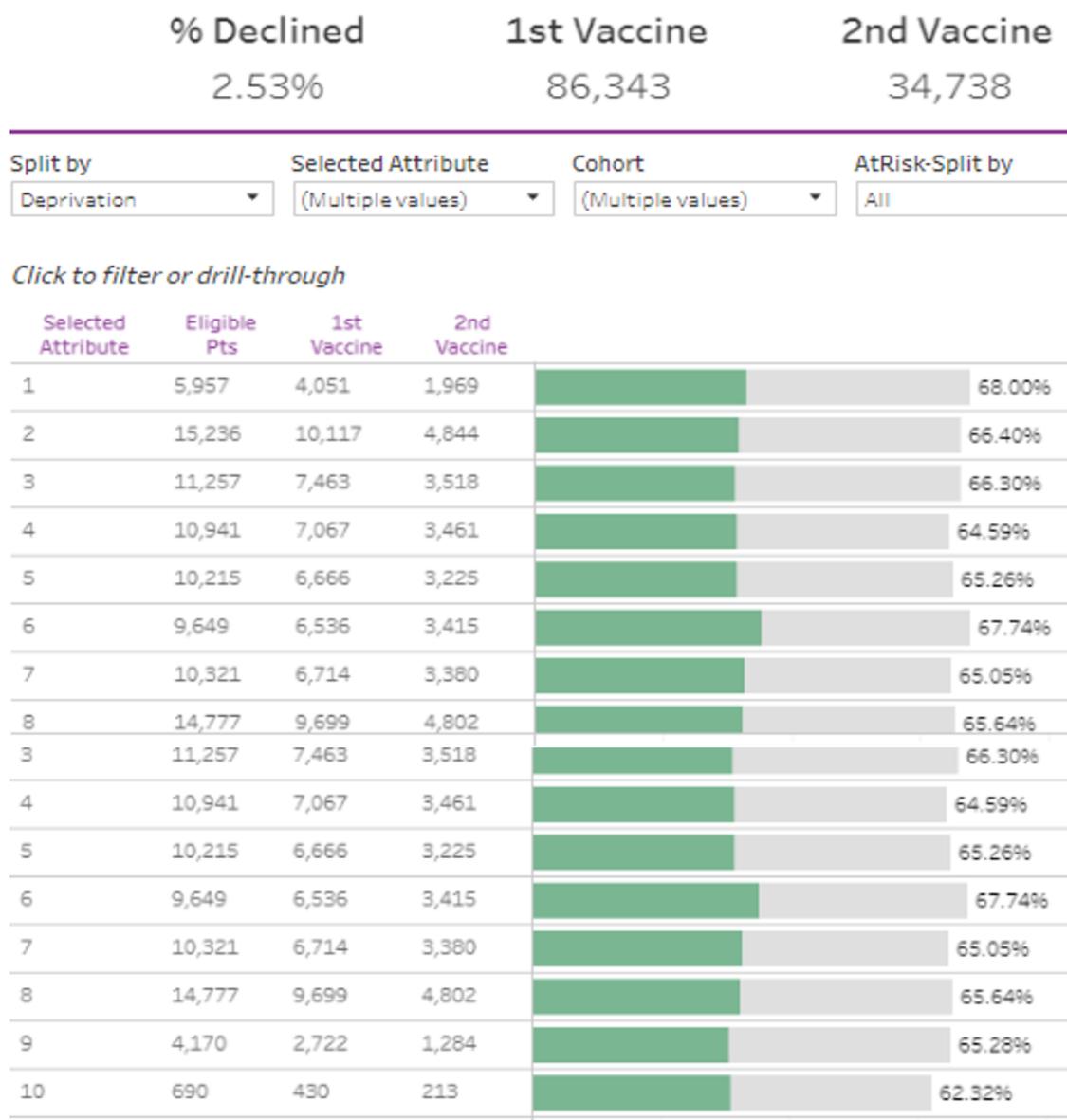


Figure 9c Vaccine acquisition among ethnic minorities. As for Fig. 9a, the panel 1 to 10 correlates with the heat map in Figure 2. However, as March/April 2021 drive reaches the community, there is parity in vaccine uptake

However, the next phase would surpass everyone’s expectation. Here, with confidence of the first vaccination dose being so positive, the 2<sup>nd</sup> jab (green bars) shows an uptake even greater (3-5%) than the most affluent groups (Figure 9c).

This represents a triumph for the team and provides a model that may be replicated in other boroughs where the pattern of vaccine uptake is still disproportionate in diverse communities.

### Final Performance at St Charles Hospital



Figure 10a The band performing under hospital’s entry arch alongside the vaccination queues. From Left to Right: Alexander D Great, Jaki Thompson, Cyril Khamai, Vernon Thomas, Frank Ward, Louise Shah (front), Laila Shah and Aisha Goodman. To the front (taking photos), Dr. Evelyn Mensah and veteran carnivalist, Sister Monica.



Figure 10b Final curtain at 4pm of ‘CarniVAX’ on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021. From Left to Right: Dr. Evelyn Mensah, pannist, Laila Shah, Dr. Yasmin Razak, pannist/singer Aisha Goodman, 8-year old Amaya Faso-Shah (played percussion) and pannist Louise (Lou Lou) Shah. The project began 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and witnessed a marked uptake in vaccination over the weeks in RBKC.

With the huge success of the RBKC programme, the team arranged a final day of vaccination at St Charles Hospital, this time with a greater emphasis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccine. Whereas previously, the team vaccinated at 110 individuals per hour, this renewed confidence permitted them to boost this number to 200 vaccinations per hour and also allowed them to administer

the two available vaccines in one day. The performance of the band this time was more confident and allowed those involved to create a carnival atmosphere (Figure 10a), heightened by the presence of the BBC reporters who filmed segments of the day’s performances and interviewed some members of the band. One of the most popular and entertaining pieces of the day was the twist of Lord Invader’s celebrated calypso ‘Don’t Stop the Carnival’ being sung as ‘Don’t Stop the CarniVAX’. The day ended at 4pm with a fanfare and emotional speeches of gratitude by the local doctors for the volunteers and band members; along with refreshments, gifts, and ‘thank you’ cards under a rainbow of balloons and pageantry (Figure 10b).

#### Vaccination rates

By ethnic minority in England

**58.8%**

people identifying as black African

**68.7%**

among black Caribbeans

**91.3%** people identifying as white

Source: ONS

Figure 11. Figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) released - 30<sup>th</sup> March. (from BBC News 30<sup>th</sup> March -).

Discussion

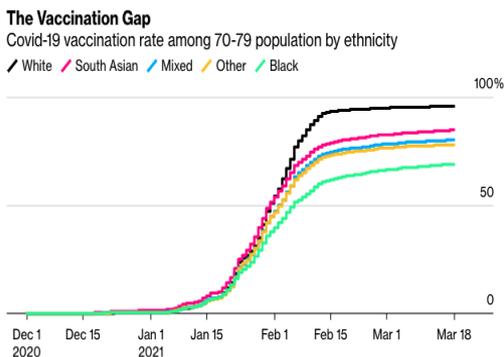


Figure 12. Vaccination Gap in >70 age group for various ethnic groups. The top (black)graph are represented by Whites while Blacks are in low (turquoise) lines Bloomberg Equality

The impact of multiple approaches to build trust and reduce vaccine hesitancy in ethnic minority groups in RBKC is yielding unparalleled data with levels of uptake by the community as a whole approaching equivalence. However, in other boroughs such as Brent and Newham, it is evident that a disproportionate number of black/brown Britons continue to be critically ill with Covid-19 infections and losing their lives, with vaccine hesitancy remaining a major barrier to disease reduction (Figures 11 - 13). London, whose ethnic minority groups make up about 40% of the capital’s population is therefore viewed by public health experts as the reason for London lagging behind the UK’s vaccine roll out (Cameron-Chileshe et al. 2021). Organisations such as ‘Black Health Initiatives’ are reporting that vaccine hesitancy is leading to a recent upsurge of abuse in black communities (BBC News -6 May 2021).

Disturbingly, data from the Office of National Statistics reveal that among the Black African or Black Caribbean communities, deaths from Covid-19 have been running at about double the rate for White communities. London’s boroughs

such as Brent, Newham and North Kensington where part of the present project was initiated and where the majority of London’s carnival artists reside, unfortunately remain among the highest risk.

Brent, with >60% population of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups had the highest Covid-19 death rate in the UK between March - June 2020; with Newham closely behind. Newham, suffered almost 456 deaths per 100,000 people over the past 12 months, the highest in England and more than twice the national average (Paton, 2021).

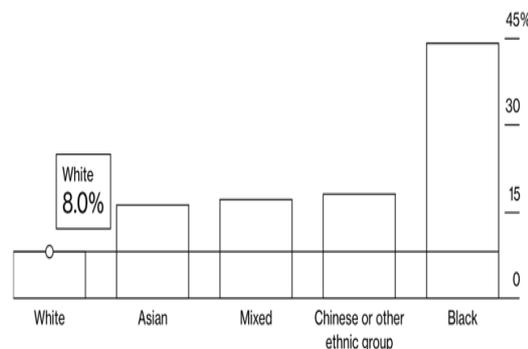


Figure 13. Vaccine Hesitancy - taken from Bloomberg Equality (Paton, 2021) - data from the UK’s Office for National Statics between 13<sup>th</sup> January to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

In the USA, vaccine hesitancy is not divided along racial lines as in the UK (Engber, 2021). Hence, it is often stated that COVID-19 highlights a major issue in U.K. society (Razai et al. 2021). However, these problems predate the coronavirus pandemic and successive reviews from 1981 (see Table 1) have come to the same conclusion viz. inequalities between ethnicities in education, health, employment, historic abuse and mistreatment by police toward Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (Abdul, 2021, Paton, 2021). The fact that a recent review commissioned by the current Government overturned these strongly held views fuelled further animosity. The report released on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 (Gov. UK

Report, 2021) was denounced by many well recognised organisations while academics such as Professor K. Andrews of Birmingham City University branded the report as “complete nonsense” stating “It flies in the face of all the actual existing evidence. This is not a genuine effort to understand racism in Britain. This is a PR move to pretend the problem doesn't exist” (BBC 31st March 2021). The community felt even more disillusioned as this was the first review panel that contained nearly all Black Caribbean and African, Asian and ethnic minority commissioners and was chaired by the prominent black educational consultant, Dr Tony Sewell CBE.

Much work will be needed to gain trust among these minority groups (Barello et al. 2021). The government has appointed a prominent black clinical scientist from Public Health England to bridge these gaps while celebrities in arts such as Sir Lenny Henry are using their public platform to make open appeals nationally to these groups to be vaccinated (BBC, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021). Unfortunately, many in the black community construe this disparagingly, so

theories and reduce vaccine hesitancy. Some have taken campaigns online, on the street, door-to-door, and have conducted workshops to counter misinformation. Several boroughs have opened pop-up vaccination centres in churches, mosques, Sikh gurdwaras and Hindu temples and there is clear evidence that these are proving effective among Asian communities. Thus, health workers are reporting good uptake in mosques such as London's Regent's Park Central Mosque or Al Manaar in RBKC and Hindu temples in Brent such as the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden and Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Kingsbury.

However, this still leaves Black Caribbean and Black African communities vulnerable. Several priests and church leaders are advocating the use of Christian churches in a similar manner but so far these have reported limited success (Paton, 2021). Olufemi Daramola, a local doctor and congregant at the Stratford church states that the Black community is “watching and waiting”. Scepticism about success within these groups continues to exist because the



Figure 14a. (left) Pop-up vaccination centres to improve up take in ethnic minority communities, Al Manaar Cultural Heritage Centre Mosque in RBKC. 14b (right) Walk-in-Clinic on Harrow Road in London's Notting Hill Carnival community.

its impact remains unknown. Perhaps general open appeals such as these may be less effective than those tailored to specific local communities where local leaders have been working fervently to dispel conspiracy

church-goers are mainly the elderly. Many of the <40s in this group are believed to be hesitant to immunisation but passionate about visual and performing arts and this is perhaps one reason why the current project

was well received in RBKC. More extended projects along these lines may be one way of reaching these communities and building trust and therefore reducing vaccination hesitancy as this pandemic continues to create mayhem globally.

**Conclusion**

The socio-economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic is a global phenomenon (Nicola et al. 2020). In the UK, there is unequivocal proof today those ethnic inequalities in COVID-19 cases are part of the historical trend of poorer health outcomes in marginalised ethnic groups with higher rates and earlier onset of disease, more aggressive progression of disease, and premature death (Razai, 2021). Building trust in these communities to reduce vaccine hesitancy is vital, otherwise it would allow the virus to keep circulating even after it is driven out of more affluent areas. If allowed to endure, this would leave Black and Asian communities at risk of infection longer than the rest of Britain as new and potentially dangerous variants emerge and prolong the agony. Furthermore, it would them leave prone to more abuse by residents who have been vaccinated and consider them irresponsible.

The project undertaken here is unique for carnival arts and early indications from the two hospitals involved, St Charles, in heart of the Notting Hill Carnival and Northwick Park, Harrow (Figure 1) which is accessed by a large number of Black, Asian and ethnic minorities and also staffed by such workers, are reassuring and optimistic. The outcome of the intense campaign and vaccination programmes in RBKC has been exemplary, not only in achieving equivalence among its diverse racial groups but with Black, Asian and minority groups even surpassing their white counterparts (Figure 9c).

Steelman players are often seen busking in London, but calypsonians are restricted to more formal stages where they are

Table 1. Major reviews conducted in response to a specific racial outburst.

Review	Comment
Scarman Report into the Brixton Riots of April 1981.	“unquestionable evidence of the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of 'stop and search' powers by the police against black people”...
Macpherson Report (1999), prompted by the by Stephen Lawrence's racially motivated death	“marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership”
Prime Minister Theresa May initiated ‘The Race Disparity Audit’ in 2017.	Revealed inequalities between ethnicities in educational attainment, health, employment and treatment by police and the courts
Lammy Review 2017	Uncovered evidence of bias and discrimination against people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the justice system in England and Wales
McGregor-Smith Review (2017/18).	Found people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were still disadvantaged at work and faced lower employment rates than their white counterparts
Independent review of the Windrush scandal	Reported: Home Office showed "institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness towards the issue of race"
‘The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities’ - 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021	The Sewell Report identifies differences in health outcomes experienced by minority ethnic groups as an area of concern but dismisses many of the socioeconomic elements as the root cause of the problems. Remains highly controversial.

accompanied by brass and percussion. Both these artforms originated in Trinidad and the Eastern Caribbean, (see e.g. Cowley, 1996) and being able to bring them together for these performances have had the dual effect of promoting them as a natural synergy for performing arts while also stimulating interest and promoting more tranquillity in those awaiting vaccination at hospitals/vaccination centres, particularly in areas with large Black and Asian communities. Social media indicate that such interactions are welcomed and likely to increase in the foreseeable future.

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England & NHS Improvement, St. Quintin Health Centre, NHS England & NHS Improvement, North West London Collaboration of Clinical Commissioning Groups, The Ridgeway Surgery, NHS West London CCG, NHS Central London (Westminster) CCG, CWHHE Clinical Commissioning Groups Collaborative, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, NHS Hillingdon CCG and University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust who supported the CarniVAX events at St Charles Hospital and Northwick Park Hospital.

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## Lincoln Rahamut - The Legend of Notting Hill Carnival

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### Abstract

Lincoln Rahamut was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1946 and grew up on Coffee Street, San Fernando, Trinidad. Born into a vibrant community of developing carnival arts of steelpan, mas and calypso, he was an avid advocate of calypso and steelband music but his interest was clearly in mas. From his early adolescences he began developing a very strong passion for designing and creating mas costumes and began gaining recognition in Trinidad in the late 1960s. However, a tragic fatal accident that saw the loss of his inseparable brother in 1969 left him traumatised and bewildered. He sought escape by travelling to London in 1970. There, after some trepidation he found the developing Notting Hill Carnival a fertile ground for exploring his ideas and skills of his early life in carnival in Trinidad. London was kind to him, and it became his new home. Lincoln soon established himself as a carnival designer extraordinaire. Over the years he became the legend that revolutionised costume designs at Notting Hill Carnival. His legacy and the vibrancy that he brought to London carnival helped to raise the standard of carnival at Notting Hill and other carnivals throughout Britain. Lincoln ensured that the younger generation was in tuned with carnival arts and its history. His finesse and tenacity for pageantry re-ignited the spirit of the Caribbean at Notting Hill Carnival with his artistic creativity. Lincoln will always be fondly regarded as the ‘King of Carnival’ and a legend of Notting Hill Carnival.

*“You don’t retire from carnival; you die in it.”* Lincoln Rahamut.

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**Key Words:** Lincoln Rahamut, Coffee Street, Notting Hill Carnival, Carnival costumes, Mas, Perpetual Beauty Mas Band, Masquerade 2000, Carnival Educator.

### Introduction

Lincoln Rahamut, Early Life in San Fernando, Trinidad (Part 1- Haroun N. Shah).

Lincoln Rahamut was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1946 and grew up on Coffee Street, San Fernando. His home was located at the base of the picturesque Naparima Hill, a historical site of worship for a South American Amerindian tribe (see Shah, 2020). One of Lincoln’s frequent childhood pursuits was to climb this 600-foot Hill and

fly his colourful mad-bull kites for hours. After this he would bask in the cool breeze of the summit and wallow in its spectacular panoramic view, particularly the south western shores of the Gulf of Paria where he often went out to swim.

Coffee Street west bridges San Fernando’s busiest thoroughfare, that of High Street, linked together by one of the city’s most iconic landmark’s, Carnegie Free Library (Figure 1). Built in 1919, this library was popular with teenagers as it was often used by youngsters as an excuse to escape

domestic duties at home and inevitably led to a lime on High Street.

Lincoln was among the many youths who spent Saturday mornings with his friends browsing through its bookshelves. However, unlike them who opted for fiction, he ploughed through books on paintings, sculpture, architecture, art and artists. Leaving the library always prompted the inevitable stroll and lime on the spirited High Street where one of his



Figure 1. Carnegie Free Library, where the teenage Lincoln Rahamut spent most Saturday mornings perusing books on art, painting, sculpture and artists.

father's family owned a clothing shop. Apart from Sundays, High Street witnessed a continuous torrent of disorderly cars coming up the one-way street which itself was always packed with punters and window shoppers.



Figure 2. Indian Centenary Day 1945 marked by a procession on Coffee Street. The cosmopolitan nature of San Fernando and the strong presence of East Indian culture is evident. (see "East Indians in a West Indian Town, San Fernando, Trinidad, 1930 -70"; Clark, 1986). Lincoln's parents had just moved to Coffee Street where he was born a year later.

Lincoln enjoyed the hustle and bustle of this densely packed street which comprised a variety of stores, banks, supermarkets, restaurants, hard-wares, jewellery, toy and shoe-shops and shopping arcades. He paid close attention to the advertisements and the signs posted on commercial outlets. He would later try to start his career as a painter with the aim to improve the quality and visibility of the insignia of some shops. High Street surged into Coffee Street west via the vivacious street life of the library corner. For about the first quarter of the street, buildings were as cramped as High Street but possessed more bars and gambling yards. However, as it passed Ciperio Street towards Coffee Street East that met Royal and Navet Roads, it became more residential. This section was interspersed with churches, bars, roads that led to schools, Chinese, Indian and African shops and supermarkets and populated by a rich collection of cosmopolitan residents of African, Indian, Portuguese, Chinese, Syrian, Dutch and Venezuelans ancestry (see e.g. East Indian celebrations Figure 2).

In the back yard of many houses and buildings there was a flourishing trail of burgeoning mas camps, pan yards and tables for paying cards and other games. Here, near Melody Makers Steelband and Free French Steel Orchestra, Lincoln was born and grew up. In his recent narrative, Frank Sears reminiscing on 'The Coffee - Circa 1950' described it as "*an oasis for the aspiring country folk, a melting pot of people seeking to simply establish themselves in life*" (Sears, 2021). Lincoln was just four years then and growing up into this natural theatre of carnival arts was San Fernando's epochal cinema, 'Rivoli'. This cinema, he referred to as his second home, was located about ten properties away from his family's home. Rivoli Cinema was not just for going to the pictures, it was a sanctuary, a creative and inspirational centre for him and his friends while growing up. His close friends from Coffee Street, (Larry Hewitt, Noble Phillip,

Ernest Pereira, Haroun Shah, Salim Mohammed and on the adjacent streets, Learie Newallo, Gene Balbosa, Kelvin Najab, Russell Mohammed, Chung Foo and Gerald Motto), formed themselves into a group they called '*Coffee Street Youth Club*' (CYC). This was a very close-knit group, most of whom in later life emigrated to various corners of the world but remained in contact to the present time.

Lincoln was an avid filmgoer and like his friends rarely had the cash to pay and enter at the front entrance. Instead, weekly entry necessitated climbing over a six-foot brick wall at the back of the cinema where their



Figure 3. 1965 Guinness Cavaliers Steel Orchestra led by Lennox 'Bobby' Mohammed (middle front row with white top). The steelband that Lincoln and his friends listened to daily leading up to carnival.

friend, 'Big Fred', the ticket collector for the cheaper front seats (designated 'Pit'), sneaked them all inside. His favourite pictures were epic Hollywood Western films, also a fertile ground for his 'Red Indian' carnival costumes that caught his attention very early in life. Rivoli also doubled up as a concert hall for children's shows, sports, musical concerts, gymnastics or dancing. The greatest excitement for him outside cinema was when it featured calypsonians and hosted huge international performers such as Ben E. King in 1966. Post Xmas, his group made nightly trips to Mon Repos to listen to his legend, Bobby Mohammed, taking Guinness Cavaliers Steel Orchestra through its paces for panorama competitions (Figure 3).

Later in his mid-teens, his cousin, Carl Datterdeen (from Carib Street) and his younger brother Cornell would join the group who met daily at 117 Coffee Street (Haroun Shah's family home). The backyard of this house had a large playing area which the group used daily for playing cricket, football, table tennis, three-hole marble pitching and even starting their 'CYC Steelband'. Unlike his friends, Lincoln was uninterested in most sports except for table tennis. The back of this house rose about seven foot off the ground, and it was here that Lincoln made a makeshift mas camp where he experimented with wire bending, fastening feathers and beads for his early Red Indian costumes while his friends went on playing cricket or football.

Lincoln's parents struggled to subsist; his father was a self-employed tailor who worked in a room under their home on Coffee Street. His mother also sewed but to supplement their income, they were continuously preparing sweets, condiments, fried peanuts, and knick-knacks for sale to small retail shops in San Fernando. To avoid being drawn into these hectic mundane duties, Lincoln stayed away from home as much as possible. To his friends, he became the frequent source of copious amounts of savoury sweets and nuts that were unscrupulously removed from his parents' reserves.

Along with several of his friends, Lincoln attended Coffee E.C. Boys school on Drayton Street, just five minutes' walk from his home. Apart from arts and drawing periods, he was not a keen pupil and often bunked off school to cinemas near Mucurapo Street's market such as Gaiety, Strand, New and Globe for the daily ritual dotingly designated '10am' (ie the 10:00 o'clock films) and sometimes hung around for the afternoon films at 1.30pm. His absence from school was repeatedly reported to his parents and he was often reprimanded but it had little impact, his Western films were his school. However, these were curtailed when he entered ASJA

Secondary Boy's College in 1960. The school's proximity to Skinner Park attracted many boys because all the major sporting activities and carnival shows took place at Skinner Park. But like his primary school, college didn't attract his attention, perhaps exacerbated by the lack of any creative arts in the curriculum at that time. Lincoln's most visible presence of contentment at college was at the annual college sports day held at Skinner Park. The College operated a system in which all their students were arbitrarily assigned to four 'houses', designated 'A' to 'D' each represented by a colour. Lincoln showed some interest in cycling events, largely because two his friends from Coffee Street, Larry Hewitt and Salim Mohammed were professional cyclists with the team 'Southampton Wheelers' and competed fiercely against each on Sport's Day. Lincoln was mostly interested in the pageantry and celebrations that went on during the events. His 'House C' designated colour was yellow, and he arrived at every sport's day with a bountiful of yellow ribbons, garlands, embellishments and various percussion devices that enabled him to create a mini carnival. The principal events of sport's day was the track and field events and its highlight was seeing Hasely Crawford sprint in the 100 and 200 meter events; which he won by ~10 meters ahead of his closest rivals. Fifteen years later (1976), Crawford would become Trinidad & Tobago's first Olympic champion and the first Olympic 100m champion from a Caribbean. Lincoln and some of his friends in London would later gather at Shah's flat in London to see the BBC's live commentary of the event at the Montreal Olympics in 1967. When their hero won the gold medal the house erupted into screams of jubilation, toasted Crawford's success and celebrated it with an all-night party.

With Lincoln's parents struggling to pay his tuition fees and his passive academic interest, he was taken out of ASJA College in third form, two years away from taking

his GCSE. His parents may have anticipated his assistance in their business; however, Lincoln strenuously avoided the flurry of the daily chores at his home and instead spent his days walking along the main streets of San Fernando and nearby Marabella seeking painting jobs at various businesses. He quickly realised he had a natural flair for sign painting and began creating vivid advertisements of old adverts for various businesses. He was soon in demand and could make a living from painting. Much of his savings began going into mas costumes during the carnival period. This provided a rare opportunity for Lincoln and his parents to work together.

The author recalls experimenting with Lincoln to make their first 'Apache' costume to play with the steelband Teenage Symphony in 1965 (Figure 4). This was the launchpad for Lincoln who then began to combine the expert cutting and sewing skills of his parents with his developing ability to 'bend' wire into large elegant 'Red Indian' figures, stitch intricate silver bead patterns and fasten in his favourite blue and white feathers to the wire frames. Interestingly, this preference for blue and white was retained in some of his costumes in later years (see Figure 5). Lincoln's ability to learn quickly and unselfishly pass his skills to others was noticeable when young and was a hallmark of his entire life in carnival. His younger brother, Connell also began to support him and gradually they became inseparable, and the entire family got more involved in carnival. A year later Lincoln brought out his own band of about 20 masqueraders for carnival in San Fernando. To those who knew him, the band was predictably Red Indians but his preference for the use of blue and white feathers/decorations made his band unique at carnival. The band was created to be as authentic as he saw in his many Western films and were well versed in the 'Wild Indian language' of the time in Trinidad. Loud yells could be heard of Lincoln's refrain "Gan failure catumama", "Faibona

figi rah - faibona figi rah” or “Arama didkey dey, arama didkay” while the rest of his troops repeated the chorus. The ecstasy of Lincoln was vividly expressed in his face and body language. He was in a world of his own, transformed by the aurora that only playing mas could bring.



Figure 4. 1965 Haroun N. Shah ‘Apache’ costume built with supervision of Lincoln Rahamut for Carnival with ‘Teenage Symphony Steel Orchestra’; San Fernando, Trinidad.

Between 1967 to 1969 the size and grandeur of his costumes became apparent while mas bands grew significantly. In San Fernando, if one wanted to play in a ‘Wild Indian band’ for carnival, Lincoln’s was one of the most popular choices. He was now fully supported by his family and particularly his younger brother, Connell. Now ascending to the peak of his carnival endeavours, sadly, tragedy struck in 1969 and would change Lincoln’s life irrevocably. His brother Connell, who worked for Nestle, was hit by an oncoming

vehicle and lost his life while off-loading milk cartons off his delivery truck in La Romaine. The funeral took place at the Jami Mosque, San Fernando and burial was at Paradise cemetery in the presence of thousands of mourners. This devastating news took its toll on the family but for Lincoln in particular, his life came to an abrupt finale and no matter how hard he tried, he could not move on.

He was eventually persuaded to leave Trinidad and a year later arrived very unprepared for a new life in London. A few of his friends from Coffee Street were already in London and rallied to his support. The author recalls meeting him in a pub on Edgware Road in 1970 and Lincoln talking for hours; a rare outburst for a typically quiet man of few words. He outlined his plans to continue as he did in Trinidad and walk the streets looking for signs to paint. He soon realised he could not sustain himself this way and turned toward what he knew best and which was his life long passion - Mas. With mas in its infancy at Notting Hill Carnival he found this a fertile ground to launch a new career outside Trinidad.

### **Lincoln Rahamut; A Carnival Artist in London (Part 2 - David Kalloo, 2020).**

There are many aspects to the rich tapestry of Lincoln Rahamut’s life in London, this section of this paper focuses on his professional life as a carnival designer and the way he transformed costume designs at Notting Hill carnival. The author regards him as the King of Notting Hill Carnival whose talents was an inspiration to many young carnival designers and costume creators, not only at Notting Hill, but across the UK and Europe.

The author first met Lincoln at his home in Walthamstow in 1989. He had just arrived from Trinidad and wanted to pursue a career in signwriting in London, but up to this point was disillusioned. One of the

conspicuous recollections of this first visit was the carnival figurines and a miniature steelpan on a little table near the front window. The second was his certificate as a 'Master Signwriter' from London's Hammersmith College, these two memoirs left a lasting impression on me. These objects were significant because the author loved carnival, and was aspiring to go to Hammersmith College to study signwriting as it was the only college across London offering this facility. As Lincoln perused my portfolio, he was narrating his life to me and his involvement with Notting Hill Carnival. Carnival was his love and signwriting, which was grafted in Trinidad, his income. He had owned and managed a few furniture shops in London. It was through Lincoln that the author was indoctrinated into the Notting Hill Carnival arena.

As noted earlier, Lincoln came to London in 1970 and he embraced his carnival roots from Trinidad almost immediately. He began to weave his brand of carnival costume, designing culture into the fabric of British society, from his back yard.

Carnival had already impregnated British culture and was now an indelible part of British cultural society. In 1976 Lincoln started Perpetual Beauty Mas Band, which won him accolades across Britain and Europe.

Lincoln was a visionary, and he was always aspiring for something bigger, something outstanding, something that would change the direction of carnival and costume designs at Notting Hill Carnival. In 1992, he found that niche and launched Masquerade 2000 (Lincoln Rahamut, Facebook:2020, Josph, 2020).

This love for carnival and costume designing was not born in England as noted earlier, the carnival blood had been flowing through his veins from a young age in his hometown in San Fernando, Trinidad. So, when Lincoln arrived in England, he already possessed the prerequisites needed to rubber stamp his credentials in the London carnival arena.



Figure 5. Costumes of Lincoln Rahamut at Notting Hill Carnival including his blue and white mas that date back to Trinidad. In the bottom right photo, Lincoln is putting the finishing touches for carnival. See link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/lincoln-rahamut/OgFJEBiBE2m-eg?hl=en>

Lincoln spoke about the fascination he had watching his parents working on carnival costumes in the late 1960s. In the months leading up to carnival, the entire family worked and supported the carnival industry in South Trinidad. Lincoln had a natural ability to create. It was amazing to watch him quickly construct a prototype with the concept in his head. He did this while imparting invaluable sign writing skills to the author in a freezing cold Hackney mas camp.

Speaking to Lincoln in casual conversation as the author hand rendered signs in his workshop, the author learnt that he was in his first carnival costume at the age of two. In his late teens he was competing with some of the renowned costume designers in San Fernando's carnival. Lincoln was always humble, and his quiet way of imparting knowledge was extraordinary. It was easy to learn from him. He never had complicated instructions in his teachings, whether he was showing you how to stitch, glue, frame making or simply instructing on how to correctly load brush bristles with paint for maximum effect.

Lincoln was keen to impart the knowledge of carnival arts to the younger generation. He believed the future of carnival arts and its history was embedded in the young and he sought to nurture this. He said. "I want to teach the knowledge of carnival arts to the young people and young designers." This was reflected in the structure of Masquerade 2000. The band was made up of almost 50% of young people that not only included masqueraders, but those involved in the administration of the band. Steve Pascal joined Masquerade 2000 as one of its administrative staff. Pascal went on to become the Chief Executive Officer of London Notting Hill Carnival Enterprise Trust. He serves as a perfect example of Lincoln's nurturing through the corridors of carnival arts. Through nurturing by the band members and Lincoln, Pascal rose to

hold the highest office in the carnival realm, a testament to the tenacity and guidance of Lincoln Rahamut. Pascal said. "Lincoln's contribution and impact on the UK, Europe, Caribbean and the Notting Hill Carnival artistic life cannot be evaluated."

David Brown, another of Lincoln's protégé is testimony to the leadership and commitment of Lincoln's vision. David spoke vividly about his tutorship with Lincoln. "Lincoln was extremely resourceful and innovative. He would utilise anything in order to create a design feature. Anything from home ware, floristry, and plumbing materials to a MacDonald's straw would be fair game. My background was in sculpture and as such my greatest appreciation of Lincoln's talent was in his structural designs, his use of fibre glass, metal and aluminium was beyond extraordinary. His ability to solve problems, and mentally multitask all those structural elements was essential for creating those large-scale pieces. For me, the real beauty was in the structural work which was the foundation for the glitz and glamour."

### **Conclusion**

There are numerous examples from groups of people and individuals who emerged from under the guidance and nurturing of Lincoln Rahamut who are not mentioned here. For example, he also tutored Ed Gray who posted up his experience of Lincoln as an artist (Gray, 2020) and also incorporated him in his panting of him in 2008 'I am Bacchanal Notting Hill Carnival 2008'. Lincoln extended his passion to educate people about carnival and costume designing through schools across Waltham Forest and other London boroughs and universities. His costumes were also a major feature in the Queen's Jubilee and Millennium celebrations. Lincoln was among the last group of Caribbean immigrants to be considered part of the Windrush Generation. Being part of the Trinidad diaspora, he journeyed back to

Trinidad to once again compete in the first ever World Carnival King and Queen competition.

He displayed his prowess at the mecca of carnival in Trinidad, helping the UK to secure an overall third place at the competition. Paul Anderson, former CEO of Luton Carnival Arts said, “Lincoln’s skills continue to inform, shape and influence carnival arts and ensure the art form is recognised just as we recognise other mainstream art.” (UKCCA, 2020).

It was Lincoln’s passion to showcase the carnival artform. He engaged with the youngsters coming into carnival. He would gesture with a tilt of his head at a young group, busy gluing and sticking sequins and say: “There is the future of carnival. If we can’t harness it, we will lose it.” Many of those young people have emerged as designers and purveyors of carnival arts, some with their own carnival bands, including David Brown who runs Utopia Mas.

Lincoln’s contribution to Notting Hill Carnival was one of original creativity.

While many of the top carnival bands at London’s Notting Hill Carnival were relying on the creativity of Trinidad’s designers, Lincoln was creating original designs. His designs spawn from ideas, research and the creative capacity for which he is known. Vernon Shabaka Thompson, the former director of Yaa Assentewa Arts was keen on drawing attention to Lincoln’s creativity. “Lincoln was indeed an artist that revolutionised costume and mas presentation in London, thus ushering a new wave of costuming to Notting Hill Carnival.” Cultural entrepreneur, Ra Hendricks dubbed Lincoln, “A genuine visionary in the Notting Hill Carnival movement.” Lincoln’s extraordinary ability and his evolving creative vision of carnival arts has made him the ‘King of Notting Hill Carnival’. His brilliance and the legacy he left will no doubt be indelible in the history of carnival, not only in London but also in Trinidad. Lincoln once said. “You don’t retire from carnival; you die in it.”

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### Ed Gray’s Art: In memory of the late Lincoln Rahamut

(Part 3 – Ed Gray). See link:  
<http://www.edgrayart.com/blog/in-memory-of-the-late-lincoln-rahamut-rip/>

The first time I met the great Trinidadian Carnival designer Lincoln Rahamut I knew I was in the presence of a true artist. He worked all over the world, making and creating Carnival for everyone, regardless of ethnicity or age.

He was my teacher and my friend. Like all the best teachers he gave me confidence, telling me I could create whatever I wanted. Beneath his relaxed and cool approach was a powerful drive to create and shape ideas into costumes and props that would bring

people together and thrill crowds of revellers.

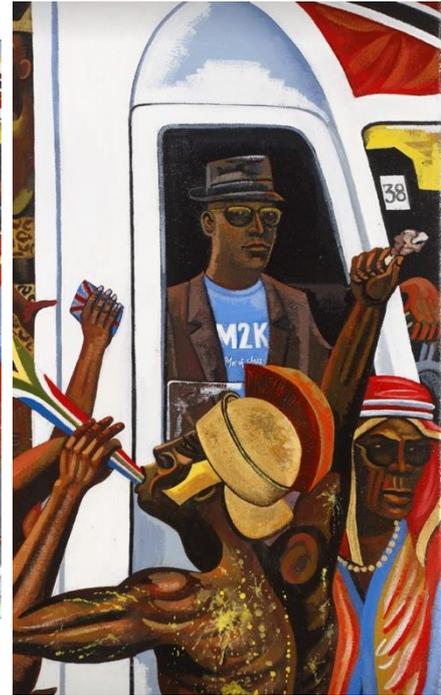
He once tried to persuade me into a giant costume to dance at the head of a carnival float, knowing full well that I’m no dancer. Fortunately for the wellbeing of the crowd I declined the offer. At this time, as a difficult year passes and so much loss hangs on so many people, we take comfort from the New Year ahead and the new green shoots to come. The roots of Carnival run deep in a continual celebration of triumph over great adversity and the search for spiritual regeneration. Lincoln nourished those roots and celebrated life every day from his workshop in Leyton.

Lincoln was the inspiration for this painting of the Notting Hill Carnival. I placed him in the driving seat, wearing his M2K Masquerade 2000 t shirt, but he was always to be found in the crowd, walking the circuit and guiding the way for the float.

I will remember him for the voodoo doll hanging from his car mirror, the glint in his eye, the smiles he made on the faces of

those he created for and the dreams he made real.

A You Tube film ‘A Tribute To A NHC Titan: Lincoln Rahamut’ made by Fiona Compton for Notting Hill Carnival Ltd is embedded. Soon after he sadly passed away.



Ed Gray (Left): ‘I am Bacchanal Notting Hill Carnival 2008’.  
Right: Enlargement of vehicle driver, Lincoln Rahamut.

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## Arthur France MBE: Providing Solace and Emancipation in Founding the Leeds (UK) West Indian Carnival in 1967

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### Abstract

This paper closely follows the chapter on carnival in a book titled *Arthur France MBE: The Life and Times of an African-Caribbean-British Man* by Max Farrar (forthcoming: Hansib Publications, later in 2021). Several quotes are from the hours of tape-recorded interviews I did with France for this book. The paper, and the book, are testimony to the extraordinary passion that Arthur France has put into the Caribbean form of Carnival that he learned about as a child in the Caribbean. Because of Arthur's roots in Nevis, the article includes material on the history of carnival in Nevis and its neighbour St Kitts. This historical context is necessary to understand France's passionately held conviction that the Caribbean Carnival arose from, and expresses to this day, African people's revolt against servitude and yearning for freedom. As a moment of pleasure and conviviality, Carnival provided solace to the enslaved. In bringing this form of art and its political messages to the UK, Arthur France has the distinction of producing the first carnival in Europe to be created and led by Caribbean people — and ensuring it has stayed on the road every year since 1967 (until Covid-19 knocked it out in 2019/20). Carnival in Leeds, he argues, provided solace for care-worn settlers, missing their homes in the Caribbean. This article explains how Arthur France has always combined the intellectual-radical with the creative-performative aspects of carnival.

**Key Words:** Arthur France, Leeds West Indian Carnival, UCA, Steelpan, Lord Silkie, Geraldine Connor, David Oluwale.

### Introduction

These days, Arthur France is best known in the city of Leeds for founding the Carnival and for keeping it going through thick and thin for over 50 years, illuminating and enlivening the streets of Chapeltown and Harehills during every August Bank Holiday. It took the city far too long to fully acknowledge the extent of this achievement, but it finally came to its senses, and Arthur received The Leeds Award on 3rd February 2015 (Figure 1). (He is in very good company. The award list includes the top poet Tony Harrison, top cyclist Beryl Burton, top piano competition organiser Dame Fanny Waterman, top writer Alan Bennett, top



Figure 1. Arthur France MBE at the Leeds Carnival, August 2015. Photo © Guy Farrar

soccer stars Leeds United (1967-74), and top of them all, Nelson Mandela.)

There's much more to Arthur France than carnival. He founded the United Caribbean Association in Leeds in 1964; he inserted Black Power ideology into Chapeltown's community politics; he co-founded the Saturday Supplementary School in the early 1970s; he was a significant member of staff at Technorth, the technology education centre serving black youth in the 1980s — but carnival is his pride and joy. And this paper shows that carnival is a summary of Arthur France himself. It embodies his absolute commitment to the emancipation of all the peoples of the African Diaspora; it expresses his creativity; it shows his commitment to the well-being of the city of Leeds as a whole; and it flows with his good-humour and multi-cultural conviviality. Arthur is a carnival man through and through and he is one of its principal leaders.

Arthur France made a key-note speech at the international conference on the Caribbean Carnival held at Leeds Beckett University (UK) in 2017 as part of the celebrations for 50 years of the Leeds West Indian Carnival. He said he was passionate about being an African. He believed that a person's race comes before their nationality. He argued that the great African continent is what drives carnival. This conference, that gathered carnival people from all over the world, was celebrating our forefathers and their emancipation, as well as the legacy of the carnival in Leeds. He pointed out that the panel (at Leeds Beckett University, UK) included some of the original committee members, emphasising that 'you need a team for carnival, just as a general needs an army'. He added, wryly, that there has been mutiny on the bounty — carnival is not plain sailing. 'But we are a people full of compassion and love.' Acknowledging the not always favourable context for black people celebrating the arts

of Carnival, he said: 'We are not too worried about receiving love, but we demand some respect' (France, 2017). Delivered with his smile and his passion, this is the thinking, and the radical social mission, that has driven the Leeds West Indian Carnival since 1967. As always with Arthur, it all starts in Nevis.

### Carnival in Nevis

Arthur France was born in Mount Lily, Nevis, in 1935. He witnessed the special form of carnival that was created in the Caribbean soon after the abolition of slavery, drawing from the European carnivals that appeared in the thirteenth century. They allowed for festivity before the abstinence imposed in Lent by the Catholic church, so carnival would take place in February or March (as it does today in Trinidad and Tobago). An example of carnival festivities was described in a Shrovetide play in 1605:

What, are there masques?  
Hear you me, Jessica:  
Lock up my doors, and when  
you hear the drum  
And the vile squealing of  
the wry-neck'd fife,  
Clamber not you up to the  
casements then,  
Nor thrust your head into  
the public street  
To gaze on Christian  
fools with varnish'd faces.

(Katritzky, 2012)

So, from the start of carnival there is masking and dancing to the sound of the drum and the fife. Right away, there are Christians who are highly critical of other Christians for making a fool of their religion by playing in the carnival. France's parents were strict Methodists, and while they were not actively hostile to Carnival, critical Christians were all around the island

of Nevis. What makes the Caribbean type of carnival so important is its addition of new masks, costumes and rhythms drawn by the emancipated Africans from their own expressive cultural heritage. However hard they tried, the colonial masters failed to stop the slaves appropriating the European carnival and shaping it for their own purposes, both before and after formal abolition in 1834.

Michael La Rose, son of British-Trinidadian John La Rose, has continued his father's analysis of the cultural significance of the Caribbean form of carnival. La Rose has linked the Egungun, Gelede and Owi masquerades from different regions of Nigeria, and the Djale masks of the Ivory Coast, to carnival troupes in the Caribbean (La Rose, 2019). Errol Hill (1997) has described the semi-military, semi-mountebank John Canoe character in the nineteenth century as 'another figure representing New World Africanism', combining this with the 'celebration of acquired elements from English mumming, morris dancing, and French carnival parades'. Hill referred also to the Moko Jumbie figure, known throughout West Africa, parading on stilts sometimes fifteen feet high, with a fabricated head concealing the actor — Moko Jumbie has visited Leeds on several occasions.

Michael La Rose (2019) also noted the infusion of South Asian culture into the Trinidad carnival, carried by the indentured labourers brought by the British from nineteenth century India, exemplified in the Hosay festivals in Trinidad. That history was carried into the Leeds carnival when Sheila Howarth was crowned Queen in 1989 in a costume titled 'Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow', designed and made by Kam Sangra and his family.

Kam, a colleague of Arthur's at Technorth, is of South Asian heritage, and quickly

understood the importance of carnival when Arthur, understanding the intermingling of cultural traditions across the Caribbean, invited Kam to take part. Sheila remembered that moment as Queen of Carnival in her interview with Colin Grant: 'Everyone was cheering me from being this ordinary woman. And I'd never seen so many black people before. You weren't as alone as you thought you were . . . for once I was important . . . You are that costume, you kind of morph into what it is' (Grant, 2019). In a paragraph, we see both Arthur's vision, and the power of carnival: his carnival crosses cultures, bridges peoples, enlightens and empowers all who want to play mas.

Arthur is steeped in carnival from his childhood. 'I'd loved carnival from seeing it in Nevis when I was a child. My parents liked it, but they wouldn't take part. I always wanted to,' he told me in interviews for his biography. On Nevis, the carnival revelries went on for eight days — troupes would parade all over the island. 'They would be on the streets and they'd visit your yard.'

In St Kitts it was called 'Sports', Arthur's close friend, comrade and brother-in-law Calvin Beech, born in the neighbouring island of St Kitts, told me. James Sutton provides this description of the Sports he knew as a child in St Kitts in the 1930s:

It was the rehearsal for 'Sports' (masquerade bands) in preparation for Christmas that was the most popular for young and old. The rehearsals brought out the big drum, and the string bands, and drew crowds not only from Greenhill and Cayon, but also from such distant places as Ottley's and Lodge villages to dance and 'wok up' behind the drums. It was these rehearsals, too, that gave us, the younger ones, the opportunity to be

out later than usual at night, to meet our friends, and engage in youthful frolic, returning home well after 10 pm without incurring the wrath of our parents. Some of the participating bands were 'David and Goliath', based on the Bible story; 'Giant Despair', taken from Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress' and others included 'Mummies', 'The Bull', 'Plait-the-Ribbon', 'Nagur Business', 'School Children', 'Clowns', 'Red Indians', called Masquerades, and others too numerous to mention.

Sutton (1987)

While the Biblical references are significant, it's the pure pleasure of carnival that is expressed in the word Sports. 'Sport' comes from the French word 'desport', meaning leisure, and its first noted use in English in 1300 is for 'anything humans find amusing or entertaining'. It's probable that the name 'Sports' and the practice of carnival in St Kitts-Nevis at Christmas derives from the traditional festivities that the white masters and servants held in mid-winter in the mid-1600s, soon after they settled (Olwig, 1993). (As so often in the Caribbean, the British and the French battled for dominance of St Kitts. The French seem to have left the word Sports.) Karen Fog Olwig further explained that Christmas folk theatre ('mumming' — could this be what Sutton meant by Mummies?) and 'mystery plays' had been established outside the alehouses that appeared in England in the sixteenth century. In Nevis, white masters and servants mixed during the Christmas period, enjoying the food, drink and pageantry they had known in England. Here was one of those moments of convivial pleasure that provided temporary balm for the daily violence of enslaved labour. It might have provided a glimpse of freedom for the Africans.

This festivity apparently offended the devout, and Olwig (1993) described a 1659 law on Nevis that banned 'loud talkeing, the singing of songs or any gaming' on Sundays. By 1675 it seemed that another law was needed to stop 'the unchristian like association of white people with negroes', with corporal punishment meted out to anyone found 'drinking, playing or conversing with negroes'; in 1697 another law was passed providing for public whipping of any whites found 'with any negroes at play' or supplying them with 'light, liquor or otherwise'. It obviously took some violence to try and stop white people and black people enjoying themselves together in Nevis.

All these fun and games were apparently taking place on Sundays and at holiday times (such as Whitsun Tide, Plough Monday, Harvest Festival, May Day), with Christmas providing an extended period of revelry. Olwig noted that:

Some of the drinking and sporting also involved the upper level of the hierarchy in the sense that masters usually donated food and drink for celebrations which occurred in connection with festivals. On Nevis it had apparently become a tradition for masters to give out special rations of fish or meat at Christmas and other festivals.

Olwig (1993)

It's easy to imagine this English habit in Nevis of 'sporting' at Christmas — involving drinking, gaming, mumming (enacting folk stories) and performing scenes from the Bible in the mystery plays — being transformed into carnival at Christmas: it proved impossible to stop the Africans from joining in, injecting their drums and flutes and their masks into the festivities.

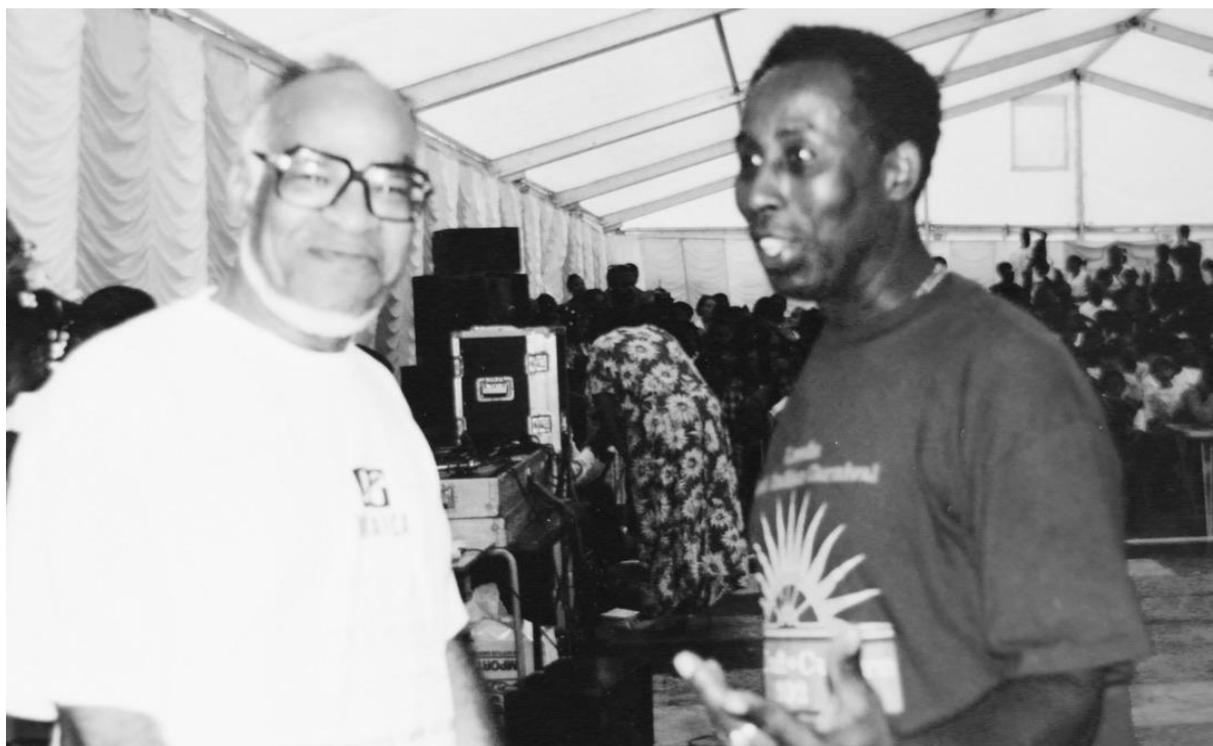


Figure 2. Ian Charles, MBE, and Arthur France, MBE, at the Leeds West Indian Carnival marquee in August 1995 © Max Farrar

A report published in 1707 described African dancers in Nevis with ‘great activity and strength of the Body’, who had ‘Rattles ty’d to their legs and wrists and in their hands’. They were ‘keeping time with one who makes a Sound answering it on the mouth of an empty Gourd or Jar with his Hand’. Dancers often had horse hairs tied to their bottoms, giving them ‘a very extraordinary appearance’ (Olwig 1993). Freedom was perhaps conjured up as the Africans transformed their bodies into something new. ‘Sports’ in Nevis and St Kitts is a term that would seem to capture the carnivalesque spirit perfectly well.

Ian Charles, originally from Trinidad, is another pillar of the Leeds carnival, central to its organisation for almost as long as Arthur (Figure 2). Charles is another of the generals in the Leeds Carnival army, and, like Arthur France, he has been honoured with an MBE for his services. Ian told me in an interview in 1988 about joining a Sailor Band when he was around 16, having

moved from Arima to Port of Spain to go to college. His ambition as a child was to join a band of robbers: ‘They would catch you in a corner and pull out their guns — you couldn’t get away until you paid them something.’ But Ian’s family, like Arthur’s only watched the Carnival, they didn’t take part, bowing to the Christian critique.

Arthur’s childhood favourite was David and Goliath, with fabulous costumes, music, and a dramatic performance of the Biblical story. The giant was played by Gerry Ward, who was already 6 feet tall — ‘He was born to do that part’ — with George Byas playing the kettle drum, Ebeneza Queerly on the fife, and a bass player called Bolton. Other masqueraders in Nevis would read and perform more parts from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Speaking to Colin Grant, Arthur puts it like this: ‘The first carnival masquerade I ever saw as a little boy in the Caribbean was David and Goliath, based on the Bible

story, and that captured me. It was magic. I can see it in front of me now. All that colour and drama is in complete contrast to what we find in the Motherland' (Grant, 2019). 'I didn't understand the politics of David and Goliath, at the time, of course, but I do now,' Arthur told me. Arthur's family was steeped in Christianity (its anti-slavery history made them Methodists) so a Bible story was bound to appeal; unconsciously, the story of the little man defeating the big man by using his intelligence and smart technology would shape Arthur's future. Just as David could defeat Goliath, so black people could overcome racism and emancipate themselves. Over the many years I have observed, photographed and participated in Carnival in Leeds, it's this interpretation that has most impressed me, distilled in an article I wrote titled 'The Caribbean Carnival: Yearning for Freedom' (Farrar, 2019). Much of what I know I have learned from Arthur France and his Black Power comrades.

James Sutton describes the David and Goliath masquerade as follows:

The dialogue of the 'Giant Despair' or 'David and Goliath' band was handed down from one generation to another; sometimes from a father who played from year to year, to his son who might carry on after his father died. So the players spoke their parts in local dialect, adding their own lines when they wished to make the dialogue more humorous and amusing.

Sutton (1987)

Again, we note the creative intelligence of the masqueraders here: building on an oral tradition, continually modifying their art to stimulate the audience. Sutton (1987) went on to link this performative pleasure to the special meals of Christmas, reminding us that, however poor were the black people of St Kitts and Nevis, their access to fertile

land and their skills as small farmers meant they could put on fine festive meals:

The provision lands were filled with food planted expressly for the Christmas feast. The pigeon-pea trees would be blooming, the sorrel plants would put out their beautiful light-pink bell-shaped flowers, which soon gave way to bright red pods of sorrel, the traditional Christmas drink in St Kitts and most of the West Indies . . . The Christmas pig, long chosen for fattening to produce the Christmas pork, was now reaching its peak condition.

Sutton (1987)

Then and now, there are Caribbean Christians who condemn carnival, regarding it as excessive and sinful, perhaps because it drew people's attention from their proper devotions at Christmas and Easter. France did drama at school, appearing in plays, but he was not allowed to play mas. He made up for lost time in Leeds. He was known to wear his Black Power beret at Roscoe Methodist Church in Leeds, and he was intent on showing his fellow Christians that, far from repudiating Christianity, Carnival showed a pathway to a future of freedom and equality that all Christians should embrace. He had experienced the sheer joy, excess, creativity and conviviality of carnival in Nevis, and he was going to make sure it warmed Leeds up, too. Just as carnival would have provided solace for poor black people in Nevis, so it would in England.

### **Starting the first Caribbean Carnival in Europe**

Arthur France co-founded the United Caribbean Association (UCA) in 1964. The founders, including George Archibald, used the term 'United Caribbean' because they approved of the effort to establish The West

Indies Federation in 1958-62. People from St Kitts and Nevis formed the numerical majority of Caribbean people in Leeds in this period, but there were Jamaicans and Bajans as well, and they were invited to join, putting aside island differences for the greater good of black people in Leeds. In 1966, France thought he would suggest to the UCA that it should make a carnival in Leeds for its growing population of West Indians. Sometimes France says his motive was to provide a cure for the homesickness that so many people were feeling. But when he talks politics, he says he thought up the idea of making a carnival to show the white people of Leeds that the Caribbeans weren't limited to political protest (which the UCA and others were engaged in) — he wanted to show that Caribbean people are artistic, playful and joyful, too.

One of the great things about carnival is that people can make of it what they like. For France, its roots are in the emancipation of the slaves in the West Indies, and he is emphatic that it must stay true to its roots. The Queen and troupe costumes he makes every year invariably express the power and beauty of his African heritage. 'A lot of people in carnival still don't understand that carnival is a mix of masquerading and the politics of emancipation,' he told me. Making mas is an intensely creative art, where new ideas, new materials, new techniques are highly prized. France has always made Queen and troupe costumes, and he's always inserted his radical, intellectual energy into the art, so that he can tell stories that will promote the never-ending struggle for real liberation.

There are carnival artists worldwide who aren't interested in the politics, but Leeds carnival attracts lots of people who, in one form or another, do see that carnival is more than just a few days of fun, food, dancing and drinking. It's that too, of course, but, for Arthur France, it carries a wider message, celebrating African history and

advocating for a new world of justice and equality; the breaking of all chains, historical and contemporary. It's this 'freedom for all people' message that drew me in as a young white postgraduate student and political activist in Chapeltown in the early 1970s.

Arthur France's first effort to get the UCA to back the carnival project fell flat. He'd done some preparation; he had spoken to people in the city council to see how they would respond to a street parade in Carnival costume. Perhaps because they were familiar with the idea of the English Carnival parade — some parts of Leeds had May Fairs and the annual Leeds Lord Mayor's parade expressed elements of the English Carnival tradition — or perhaps because they thought that a Caribbean Carnival would be a useful addition to the city, the city leaders said they'd welcome France's carnival.

He had persuaded some of the UCA leaders that it was something they should do. But, at the meeting, 'Most people thought I was mad. They said it couldn't happen here.' France was not easily deterred. He took it back to a second meeting. 'They said, OK, and a few said they would join an organising committee, but they were very half-hearted.' He set his committee members some tasks, and none of them delivered, 'So I sacked them all. I formed a new group and the same thing happened. Nothing,' he said.

While all this was going on, he went to see his sister Elaine at her house in Grange Avenue in Chapeltown. One of her friends came into the room and everyone kept quiet while she said: 'There's this crazy black man from Nevis who want a carnival. He wants to make us look like fool for the white people. But I hope the rain comes down and drown them.' No-one mentioned that this crazy man was in the room with

them. Every time he tells this story Arthur lets out his huge laugh.

In 1966 a carnival fête was staged at Kitson College of Further Education in Leeds City Centre. Tony Lewis (from Jamaica) and Frankie Davis (from Trinidad) put on an event headlined by the British Soul Band Jimmy James and the Vagabonds. Marlene Samlalsingh, also from Trinidad, created a troupe of Red Indians to perform on stage. Arthur was there — he wasn't one of the organisers — but he was inspired.

By 1967, he'd got the right people together to make the carnival happen in Leeds. They included Calvin Beech, Ervin and Veronica Samlalsingh, Rose McAlister, Vanta Pule, Willie Robinson, Anson Shepherd, Ken Thomas and Wally Thompson. Vanta Pule had been a major player in the St Kitts' carnival. Some of the others were from Trinidad so they had experience of the largest and best organised carnival in the Caribbean islands and were very keen to make one in Leeds.

All of these were reliable partners, but Arthur paid special tribute to Willie Robinson, originally from Trinidad, who backed him from the start. Willie insisted on eliminating anyone who just wanted to talk and wasn't going to do the hard work that he knew was needed. Carnival is not just feathers and fun; it's tough work back stage. In the book *Celebrate!*, chronicling in photos and text 50 years of Leeds carnival, Willie wrote:

We had the task of staging carnival without any finance. We appealed to the business community in Leeds. None was forthcoming. By our own fundraising and the generosity of many individuals from the community, the first of what is now an annual event and the forerunner of West Indian Carnivals in most of the major

cities of England, became a reality. What started as a fun event, quickly became a vehicle of co-operation between West Indian organisations from Huddersfield, Birmingham, Manchester etc.

(Farrar, Smith, Farrar, 2017)

Ruben McTair was born in Trinidad and lived in Huddersfield, but he was linked into the Leeds carnival right from the start. Remembering that first event, he told Colin Grant:

I'll be honest, right up to the night before, no, even on the morning, I thought it was going to be a disaster. I had thought it impossible to achieve. But Arthur had something. I tell you, black people are hell to move. Mr Arthur France must have had something. Must have had plenty. Still has today. Secretly, a lot of folk — and I mean black folk — had come, I'm ashamed to say, had come to jeer. But the day there was a lot of Doubting Thomas's converted. Brother, they had come to jeer but they stayed to cheer.

(Grant, 2019)

McTair added this analysis of the meaning of carnival:

What you have to remember is what Caribbean people were thinking. I'm not in Leeds. I'm in Chapelton [Jamaica], I'm in Baseterre, Castries, Port of Spain, Kingston. And before that I was in Accra, Lagos, Monrovia, Akan. My people are Yoruba, Ibo, Ashanti. I know my roots. And that is why . . . that is exactly why we need Carnival. Carnival connect up all the dots. Yes! So we don't forget our roots.

(Grant, 2019)

Arthur and Reuben think alike: Carnival is about African roots. France would add that, for the Trinis, there are roots in South Asian religious festivals, too. At the Leeds carnival, with its utterly inclusive ethos, you can sometimes also see bands of white masqueraders channeling modern English forms of carnival, like the marching bands throwing their sticks in the air and catching them.

Rashida Robinson, born in Trinidad, talking to Colin Grant, pointed to another cultural reference in carnival, and spoke eloquently of how carnival transform you:

The first costume I wore was Native American Indians with feathers and a beautiful headpiece. Putting a costume on was like dressing up as a little doll, it was something new . . . It's me in a different light, something I enjoy; and it's no fairytale, it's reality now . . . When you were in Trinidad you saw all these young people in a costume, never had the opportunity to do it although you wanted to. But now I can do it for real.

(Grant, 2019)

Angela Wenham was born in Barbados and grew up in Leeds. She remembered the first carnival like this (in conversation with Colin Grant): 'To see a group of West Indians jamming on the road, it was fantastic, it was really good fun. You dance all the way, you lead the party, you just jam. And to see all these faces looking at you in shock — the carnival is actually going ahead — and no policeman arresting, because that was one worry, it was fantastic'

(Grant, 2019).

Hughbon Condor was born in St Kitts and arrived in Leeds in the 1960s as a schoolboy. He was drawn into carnival

costume-making as a young man in the early 1970s by Arthur France. At the 2017 carnival conference at Leeds Beckett University, Hughbon, now Leeds's premiere costume designer with an international profile, made a very important point about carnival: it is the only time when black people can actually control the streets of Leeds, without any problems. Arthur's vision of making a political point without making trouble was coming to life.

### 1967: Making Carnival Work

Arthur remembered those early days of Leeds carnival as though they'd happened last week. 'None of us had actually made a Queen costume before. We'd seen them, that's all.' Cleve Watkins from Trinidad had experience of making Queen costumes, and he gave a lot of assistance. Vanta Pule had made troupes back home, but not Carnival Queens. Nevertheless, in 1967 she made 'Fantasia Britannica' (inspired by the image on the British penny coin of those days). Willie Robinson made 'Cleopatra's Fan', Wally Thompson made 'Gondola', Betty Bertie made 'The Snow Queen', Melda Adams made 'The Hawaiian Dancer', Veronica and Ervin Samlalsingh made 'The Sun Goddess'. 'It was an amazing effort by everyone,' said France. They all co-operated to make the 'Cheyanne Indians' troupe. (Ian Charles was their Chief.)

Carnival is, above all, a family affair, so a special troupe for children was made by Veronica Samlalsingh and Anson Shepherd. Mrs Pyke and her husband made a 'Sailors' troupe. 'And Mrs Pyke painted on a moustache, which made everyone laugh.' Sydney Brown produced some very authentic Mexicans with their broad hats. 'Sydney slung a guitar over his shoulder, so

we called him Que Paso.’ Another big laugh.

Ian Charles was a survey engineer building the M62 motorway, and most weeks he worked away from his home. When he got back he couldn’t get into his house: it had been turned into a mas camp with every room full of people making costumes and the doors almost blocked shut. He just laughed at the chaos in his house: it’s the carnival spirit.

‘The Gondola costume was a big problem — it was very technical. Without Cleve we wouldn’t have been able to produce it,’ France told me. Carnival might be a family affair, but it can put stress on relationships. Cleve was an expert wire-bender. He was on his way with his girlfriend to the Hyde Park Picture House near the university when Arthur asked him to help. He came over to the mas camp straight away. ‘It was amazing to see how he used the wire to create the shape of the gondola.’ He stayed there for the next two weeks, completely neglecting his girlfriend. We don’t know what the girlfriend had to say, but there is a whole category of people out there called Carnival Widows. Arthur France’s wife Tattria is probably Queen of the Carnival Widows.

‘We had some fun making the Indians’ costumes. You couldn’t buy costume feathers in those days like you can now. So we had to improvise.’ First stop was the Polish man who sold chickens on Chapeltown Road. But he wet his chickens before he plucked them and they didn’t want those feathers.

In Otley, about ten miles north of Leeds, Arthur and Willie found someone who would sell them live chickens. They bought several and took them to Leeds in the back of their car. They then took orders from anyone who wanted a fresh chicken for their Sunday lunch. Ian Charles’s girlfriend

said she wanted one but it had to be a male. Not only could Cleve bend wire, but he could also kill and pluck chickens, so he went to work. ‘Once they were plucked, no-one knew a cock from a hen. Ian’s girlfriend found herself with a chicken full of eggs.’ No matter, they had plenty of feathers for the Indians’ headpieces.

Carnival makes you laugh and it makes you expand your horizons. Mrs Gordon made the Indians’ costumes and Mrs Morton made their headdresses. Mrs Morton had a dilemma. She was an active member of her church, and the majority of her congregation strongly disapproved of carnival mayhem. But Mrs Morton loved making the costumes and didn’t condemn her friends who wanted to play mas in England. Her solution was to only attend the house where the costumes were being made at the dead of night. ‘She thought she would be thrown out of her church if anyone saw her helping with the carnival. They thought it was the devil’s work. We used to have a good laugh about this at one o’clock in the morning.’

### **The First Queen Show**

The carnival committee had booked the Jubilee Hall at the south end of Chapeltown Road for the first Queen and Calypso show. ‘We were young and radical, and no-one as taking us seriously, so we knew this had to be a big event,’ Arthur told me. They knew there was a black man presenting the news on Tyne and Tees TV, so they rang the studio and asked to speak to Clyde Alleyne. Clyde came from Trinidad, so he knew how important carnival was and he jumped at the offer to be the Master of Ceremonies at the first Leeds Queen Show.

‘Seeing Clyde Alleyne on stage lifted my heart up. His presence and his voice brought silence to that huge hall. It was the icing on the cake.’ The Queens performed the five costumes described above to the

collection of steel pan music they had on vinyl records. ‘There was a lot of drama behind stage. Mrs. Morton was sewing in

called him Lord Silkie because he wore a fancy silk shirt,’ said France. The name stuck and most people know him today



Figure 3. L-R: Calvin Beech, Arthur France, Rashida Robinson, Ian Charles, Willie Robinson at the 50th anniversary Leeds Carnival, 2017. © Max Farrar

secret. Leo Lewis (Mixie) and Wendell were a big help. Getting the Queen costumes assembled and in front of the audience made for lots of problems.’

The biggest problem was getting the giant Gondola from Ian Charles’ house in Headingley in west Leeds over to Chapeltown on the east side. Just in time, Mr Gaskin used his sand-delivery lorry to transport it to the Jubilee Hall. There’s a lot of ‘just in time’ in carnival, and there are lots and lots of people who’ve had a last-minute call from Arthur to complete some impossible task. Despite all the obstacles, that first show was a huge success, and most of the doubters were quelled. Somehow, the Queen Show is always on the road, year after year, overcoming every obstacle, and it’s always magnificent.

At that first Queen Show, Artie Davis (aka Lord Silkie) sang his first calypso. ‘We

simply as Silkie. For many years his crew, fueled by whatever beverage manufacturer he could find to sponsor them, were the highlight of the carnival parade: Tetley’s Bittermen (and women) and The Cockspur Crew were the bacchanalian spirit of carnival. You don’t have to be a Bajan to say that Cockspur is the best rum. Tetley’s was Leeds’s famous brewery; its former headquarters is now a restaurant and contemporary art and education centre which staged a memorable exhibition in 2017, organised by Susan Pitter, that celebrated 50 years of the Leeds West Indian Carnival (Figure 3).

In 2017, Silkie once again performed his first calypso live, resulting in him being crowned Calypso Monarch, not for the first time. Titled ‘St Kitts my Borning Land’, the lyrics are:

St Kitts is my borning land, I say, I say  
 England is my home in every way,  
 every way  
 No matter what people may say  
 In Englan’ I goin’ to stay  
 St Kitts is my borning lan’ I say

We came here to get work and  
 education, education  
 And now they’re trying to keep us  
 down, keep us down  
 One day we will be in power  
 But we must all unite together  
 Yes, that will be Black Power

Chorus:  
 St Kitts is my borning lan’, I say, I say  
 Englan’ is my home in every way,  
 every way  
 No matter what people may say  
 In Englan’ I bound to stay  
 St Kitts is my borning lan’ I say

Give three cheers for Arthur France  
 and Co., and Co.  
 For bringing carnival to Great  
 Britain, Great Britain  
 He has done his very best to make  
 it a big success  
 Carnival is here, let’s do the rest

[Chorus repeated with ‘West Indies  
 is our borning land’]

*Lord Silkie speaks:*  
 Yes, unity we want.  
 All the Caribbean islands.  
 You know, we have to stick  
 together.

Look what happening in the world  
 today.

We have to form a union in the  
 Caribbean.

Yes, I’m a Caribbean man.

Lord Silkie (20...)

A more recent version of this song is now available on YouTube. In the 1967 version, the words were ‘England is my home in every way, every way/No matter what Enoch Powell may say’. If Arthur France is the embodiment of carnival, calypso is its lyrical, satirical expression. Silkie’s words succinctly express the social and political themes present for all of that pioneering generation: two homes, one in the sun, one in a cold country where, whatever white people may say, they are bound to stay, where they have a right to work and to education. Note the stress on education.

Then there is the explicit commitment to full empowerment of all black people in the UK. The song includes thanks to Arthur and a commitment to the ongoing success of carnival in Great Britain — here is the sociability and creativity that characterises Carnival. It concludes with the plea, often expressed by Arthur, for unity among all the peoples of the Caribbean; implicit is the notion that unity brings strength in the face of the world’s problems. These are the building blocks of emancipation, all in one calypso.

George Hendrickson is another Leeds man who brings his talent to carnival. He told me in 1990 that when he stopped ‘jumping up’ in carnival, he joined a string band (Farrar, 1990). Nevis still has a band like this, the Sugar Hill String Band, but they are rare in England today. ‘The band had flute — which is the lead instrument — banjo, guitar, cuatro [a small, four-stringed guitar], boho [a long, pipe-like wind instrument], guiro [a bit like a steel-grater] and a triangle. Our band used to play during the Queen Show, in between the Queens

coming on. We played by ear — no sheets: if I play a chord, they all respond,’ Mr Hendrickson told me. He was a big fan of calypso, too, recalling with pleasure when the Mighty Chalkdust’s 1981 jibe at Trinidad’s President Karl Hudson Philips, ‘Ah Fraid Karl’, destroyed his credibility.

### The First Carnival Parade

Arthur described the first Leeds West Indian Carnival parade, held on the August Bank Holiday Monday. His cousin Curtland Carter was making a steel band, and so was he. ‘We were two mad enthusiasts for steel pan music — we made The Gay Carnival Steel Band with Dabbo as the leader.’ Later, this morphed into the Boscoe Steel Band, with Roy Buchanan, Rex, Curtland, Dabbo, Tuddy, Vince, Clark, Desmond and others. They brought the St Christopher Steel Band from Birmingham, one from Nottingham, one from Manchester, and the Invaders, from Leeds, with Prentice as Captain.

Then, as now, everyone assembled in Potternewton Park in the heart of Chapeltown. Each band consisted of small pans that could be strung around each musician’s neck, so they could walk and play. Small platforms were made on the grass for the larger bass drums. The Queens and troupes arrived in full costume and the public gathered all around admiring the spectacle.

In an interview for the Leeds Carnival Magazine in 1988, Arthur France remembered the feeling he had as he walked down to Potternewton Park where one of the steel bands were already playing. ‘I could hear the St Christopher Steel Band in the air and as I came round the corner I could see them playing . . . I couldn’t believe it. It was a dream come true. I saw this old lady walking in front of me and she put her hands in the air and said “Lord it’s been 15 years since I heard this”. People are

thrilled to see this culture in Britain. It brings them together.’ (Farrar, 1988). Here is the comfort, the soothing of racism’s wound, that carnival provides for people drawn to chilly England from the sunny Caribbean.

With Inspector Exley of the Leeds Police in overall charge, the 1967 parade left the park and processed down Chapeltown Road, entered the Headrow in the city centre via Regent Street, before finishing at the Town Hall where the Last Lap Dance was held until 2am, with two steel bands playing for the whole night, competing for the ‘best band’ title.

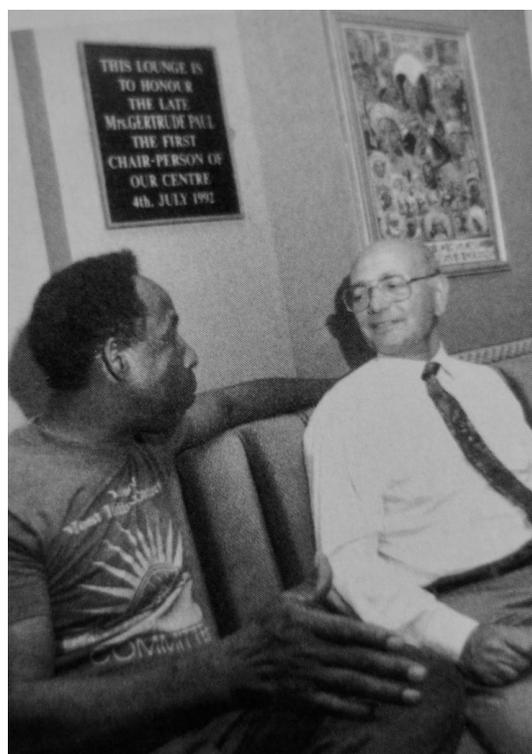


Figure 4. Arthur France and Inspector Roy Exley at Leeds West Indian Centre, 1992. © Max Farrar

Arthur paid tribute to Inspector Roy Exley, an unsung hero of Leeds carnival, in an interview I did with them both in 1992 (Figure 4). Roy went to Arthur’s bed-sitting room at 15 Grange Avenue and Arthur’s people-skills kicked in again. ‘I tell you what, we didn’t know what we were getting

into there,' Inspector Exley told me. 'I didn't know what to expect — the only

carnivals I'd heard of were in Rio.' Arthur's enthusiasm took him along: 'It was clear that this was going to be something, this carnival.' He could see that there was a traffic control headache ahead, but he immediately gave his permission for the street parade. It might have helped that Roy had only just transferred to Leeds from Barnsley, so he had no prior assumptions about the Caribbeans of Leeds. 'The only black people I'd ever seen were the men coming up from the coal pit.'

Inspector Exley's comments, after witnessing carnival for 25 years, show that by the early 1990s, some white people in Leeds were beginning to appreciate what carnival achieves:

It's a binding of the community together — you get young people and old people working together . . . [At the first carnival] everyone carried on with the liveliness, the spirit, it was 'over the top' if you like, people were intoxicated, but not with drink. The English don't let themselves go like that with their summer fairs and trades . . . Leeds is a cosmopolitan place and the carnival helps bind all the communities together. It was a good way of black people meeting the police but not in a confrontational situation.

(Farrar, 1992)

He was proud to have been part of the team that launched carnival, and he set a pattern that has never faltered: the police officers at the carnival have always had good relationships with the masqueraders and the public (sometimes 100,000 people) who throng the streets and the park.

It's this impressive spectacle that attracts so many visitors, as the quality of the costumes has improved year upon year, and expert designers bring their Queens and Kings from as far away as Luton. Nowadays, the park has a stage and an arena, and the grassland is covered with stalls selling food, drink and merchandise. There are tents for the sound systems, and a small fairground for the children, so carnival provides something for everyone who wants to enjoy carnival's cosmopolitan, convivial creativity.

In that first year, however, much depended on people like Inspector Exley and the manager of the majestic Leeds Town Hall. Warmed up with a discussion of test-match cricket, the manager was very happy to let out the Town Hall for the Last Lap dance. Ever mindful of the budget, the carnival committee had arranged to buy drinks at wholesale prices, and John Hawley was put in charge of the bar. (John, from St Kitts, became an active trade unionist who ended up as a legal advice worker, specialising in employment issues, at the Harehills and Chapeltown Law Centre in the 1980s.) They made quite a bit on the bar, subsidising their costs.

By the early 1970s, Arthur had a committed committee that included people who had supported the first carnivals and whom he could see had the creative talent and personal character needed to steer the good ship carnival. Women have been absolutely central to the making and delivering of the Leeds Carnival, but in my 1974 photo of some of the carnival committee members, there is only one woman, Kathleen Brown (Figure 5). She is the sister of Martin Brown, born in St Kitts, father of Spice Girl Mel B. Perhaps Melanie Brown's enthusiasm for the performing arts was carried from Aunty Kathleen's engagement with carnival? When, at the invitation of

Dawn Cameron, Melanie Brown opened the Leeds Media Centre –close to the

there was going to be a carnival in Leeds, so he came to have a look.



Figure 5. 1974 Leeds West Indian Carnival committee members outside Cowper Street School in Chapeltown, Leeds, L-R: Vince Wilkinson, Hughbon Condor, Hebrew Rawlings, Arthur France, Kathleen Brown, George Archibald. © Max Farrar

Mandela Centre which was the Leeds West Indian Centre and the Carnival HQ – Melanie’s and her father Martin’s delight at the presentation of the photo of the 1974 committee, that included Kathleen, was immense.

### Supporting the Development of Carnival

The message that Leeds had held a successful carnival got back to London via several channels. Lord Montagu (1926-2015), also known as Edward Douglas-Scott-Montagu, Third Baron of Beaulieu, was the owner of a stately home in Beaulieu, Hampshire, where he created the National Motor Museum. Arthur recalled that Lord Montagu had suggested that there should be a Caribbean carnival in the Midlands, and somehow, he heard that

He was impressed by what he saw. He asked Arthur if George Lascelles (1923-2011), the Earl of Harewood – one of his pals with a stately home and a ‘Capability Brown’-designed estate between Leeds and Harrogate – had given some funding to the carnival. Arthur said he hadn’t been asked. Lord Montagu said the Lascelles family had made its fortune from slavery, so they would probably want to assist Leeds Caribbeans in any way they could, and he promised to ask his friend to help out. Shortly afterwards, the Lascelles family did support carnival, and have done so ever since, publicly acknowledging the nefarious source of their wealth, and helping to explain colonial history.

Lord Montagu told the carnival people he knew in Notting Hill, London, about the spectacle in Leeds. Junior Telford, a

Trinidadian pioneer of steel pan music in London, had been invited to judge the pan competition at the Last Lap dance at Leeds Town Hall, and he reported back to the group of West Indians that had performed in the 1965 street festival in Notting Hill.

The street festival in Notting Hill had been initiated by Rhaune Laslett, of Russian and Native American heritage, because she wanted to bring different cultures together to create warmth and happiness in that multi-ethnic part of London. Russ Henderson, a founder of the Caribbean style of carnival in London that emerged from Mrs Laslett's multicultural festival, explained her significance to Colin Grant:

There's a woman called Mrs Laslett, I used to live in the Grove, you see, and she used to do community work and put on things for the kids, you know, fêtes. And she, knowing that I had this steel band, which was a real novelty then, and saying, 'Could I come and play for the kids in a street carnival?'

So they put up some buntings and they block off the street, you see. They had a donkey ride . . . [and] a clown. So after half an hour playing this and, I found it was getting boring. So I turned to the boys in the band, all of us were used to Carnival back home like we was taking a march. So I went to the chap with the donkey and I say, 'Look, follow us, because we taking a march and we making a block out of the streets' . . . The crowds just started gathering the streets, you know. This was a novelty to them — 1965 — a steel band on the road . . . The police were just helping us with the traffic . . . There was no route, really — if you saw a bus coming, you just went another way. Rhaune Laslett

was a good woman. I'd hate to think people left her out of the history because of her colour. I never went on the streets for anyone before I did it for her.

(Grant, 2019)

Clyde Alleyne and Allan Charles (Ian Charles's cousin, who worked at the Trinidad and Tobago Embassy), who also had first-hand experience of this momentous development in Leeds, took the Leeds message back to England's capital city. So an Irish lady who ran the Back-yard club and youth project in Notting Hill invited Leeds carnival to perform at a special event in Notting Hill on a Sunday in September in 1967.

Two coach loads containing the core of the Leeds carnival duly arrived in London. It poured with rain the whole time. Ian Charles told me in an interview twenty-one years later that the rain didn't stop them. They couldn't play pan because of the deluge — 'We just played iron,' beating car hubs with metal bars. 'I remember that iron so clearly, it reminded me of home.' Arthur remembered dancing with bare feet and getting terrible cramp (Farrar, 1988). No-one ever pretends that making a carnival is perpetual joy.

By 1969, the Notting Hill carnival included an Afro-Cuban band, the London Irish Girl Pipers, Russ Henderson's West Indian three man band, the Asian Music Circle, the Gordon Bulgarians, a Turkish-Cypriot Band, the British Tzchekoslovak Friendship Band, a New Orleans Marching Band, the Concord Multi-racial group, and the Trinidad Folk singers. In every sense, Rhaune Laslett's fête embodied carnival's boundary-breaking powers. It wasn't until the early 1970s that the Notting Hill carnival took on its special flavour of Trinidad. Thus, the Leeds West Indian Carnival, founded in 1967 by Arthur France, has the distinction of being the first

specifically Caribbean-style street carnival in Europe, created and led by black people.

### **Developing Steelpan Education**

Leeds carnival has made a point of ensuring that steelbands are central to its Queen and King shows and, until recently, the street parade. Arthur France's decision in 1984 to create the New World Steel Orchestra in Leeds has been recorded as follows:

After waiting to see if the [Leeds city council] Music Service, or any other establishment would come up with a School of Steel Pan, by which I mean a 'proper Symphony Steel Orchestra', I decided to take the bull by the horns, get my own money and seek out a very dear friend, Raymond Joseph — one of the best Steel Pan player/arrangers and tutors around.

Sat at home with his wife and four children, I went over to his house and in his living room managed to persuade him to come out and let his light shine for us. I decided to buy a set of second-hand Steel Pans from Ebony Steel Band in London. Raymond and I travelled to London to purchase the Steel Pans from Pepe Francis, manager of, and Earl Lewis, captain of Ebony Steel Band.

At this time Gloria Fredericks was living in Francis Street [in Leeds] and as she had a huge cellar, she gave us our first place to practice in. We started in February 1984 and I wanted to prove what could be achieved, so, in the same year, at the end of November we came out of the cellar and staged the first Steel Orchestra concert at the Leeds West-Indian Centre.

In attendance were Colin Brackley Jones, the then Head of Music for Leeds Education, along

with Roy Walmsley, the Deputy Head of the Leeds College of Music. There were also a few councilors in attendance representing Leeds City Council. It was interesting to see how shocked and amazed they were at the sight of the youngsters, led by Raymond Joseph, commanding such a performance. News of New World's achievements grew quickly, as did our skill, repertoire and reputation.

In 1986, Dudley Nesbitt was invited to Britain to arrange the Panorama tune for North Stars Steel Band, who were based in Huddersfield [about 20 miles from Leeds], (and also happened to include his cousins), for the London Panorama competition. While visiting Leeds, Dudley fell in love with what New World were doing.

He used to regularly tune our Pans for us, and it was in doing this he realised that our second-hand pans would no longer do for such an Orchestra. On returning to Trinidad he vowed that he would locate a Pan tuner who would travel to Britain to tune our Pans for us. Dudley kept his promise and the New World Steel Orchestra's instruments and sound were transformed. We now had the instruments that we deserved. From then on it was all uphill.

(Connor, 2011)

1986, the year of Caribbean Focus across the UK — a national celebration of Caribbean culture, supported by each of the English speaking countries' embassies — was pivotal for the development of Pan in Britain. Arthur was the chair of the Leeds Caribbean Focus committee which showcased, amongst other activities, two of the world's most acclaimed steel bands,

Catelli All Stars (with 55 playing members) and Casablanca (with 60), at a groundbreaking performance in the magnificent St Aidan’s Church on Roundhay Road. In Geraldine Connor’s book, Arthur continued:

The following year, in 1987, we were invited to London to perform at the Lancaster Hotel for the celebrations marking the election of the first four Black Members of Parliament. Whilst touring Carnivals worldwide, we also became the only steel band to win three Championship competitions in that one year! Then, in 1989, we were chosen by Leeds City Council to represent the City of Leeds, on an eight-day concert tour of Dortmund, its twin city [in Germany].

(Connor, 2011)



Figure 7. Geraldine Connor, PhD, MMus, LRSM, DipEd, was ethnomusicologist, theatre director, composer, performer, pannist, steelpan arranger, Carnivalist. Prominent part in the Leeds W.I. Carnival and music of Trinidad and Tobago, From Geraldine Connor Foundation

music teacher within the Leeds City Council Music Service until 2010 (Figure 6). Influenced by Arthur France, in 1990 Geraldine Connor, a world renowned ethnomusicologist, took up a post at the Leeds College of Music, where she promoted steel pan music and assisted with



Figure 6. L-R: Susan Pitter, Cllr Bernard Atha (Lord Mayor of Leeds), Dudley Nesbitt,

In 1989, Dudley Nesbitt moved to Leeds where he tutored and led New World for many years thereafter, while working as a

New World’s development (Figure 7). Geraldine Connor’s parents, Pearl and Edric, were themselves notable performers;

Edric directed the first celebration of Carnival in England, the 1959 concert in London organised by Claudia Jones in response to the violent attacks by white racists on the new Caribbean settlers in Notting Hill. Geraldine was steeped in Carnival and wrote about her early memory of Carnival on the Savannah in Port of Spain in a chapter in a book edited by Carnival scholar Milla C. Riggio (Connor and Farrar, 2004.) Geraldine Connor taught at Bretton Hall, University of Leeds until 2004. Her work on Carnival Messiah earned her a PhD from Leeds University in 2005. She died, aged 59, in 2011, leaving a huge hole in carnival culture. The Geraldine Connor Foundation, with support from the Lascelles family, continues to develop art and culture, rooted in the African diaspora, in her name. (David Lascelles, the Earl of Harewood, is one of the few among the English aristocracy who acknowledges that his family fortune is based in slavery.) Generations of young people in Leeds and beyond are in debt to Arthur France, Dudley Nesbitt and Geraldine Connor for the development of their musical skills and appreciation of the art of pan.

By 2011, New World was fully established. It set out its multicultural mission as follows:

- to encourage the participation of local young people to come together to enjoy the indigenous music of Caribbean culture
- to express themselves through sound
- to be creative
- to allow young people of Caribbean heritage to stand proud and to learn, understand and appreciate their Caribbean heritage
- to allow young people of British heritage to learn, embrace, adopt and enjoy a cultural product not belonging to them that draws them together in a common pursuit.

(Connor, 2011)

Again, we note the seamless merger of the creative arts with a transformative social and political mission that embraces active multiculturalism. Arthur France, Geraldine Connor, and others who did this intellectual, artistic and political work shaped this steel band, developing a new form of music that could only have been made in Trinidad. New World Steel Orchestra's members were tutored by Geraldine Connor and played at all three British performances of her 'Carnival Messiah', in 1999 and 2002 at West Yorkshire Playhouse and in 2007 at Harewood House, the Lascelles' family seat. Just as Leeds West Indian Carnival is led by people of African descent, so is New World. Both organisations have always welcomed people from every other ethnic group into their midst, as New World's aims show.

### **Leeds West Indian Carnival: 50 Years and Counting**

For most of its life, the Leeds was called Leeds West Indian Carnival because Arthur and his team wanted to place the positive mark of West Indian life and culture on the city of Leeds. Despite changes in terminology in the 1980s, it did not call itself an 'African-Caribbean' carnival. 'West Indian' embraces many heritages, and Carnival is inclusive. It is fitting that in recent years it has embraced the title The Leeds Carnival: this reflects its place as a central part of the city's cultural programme. The full year-by-year story is told, mainly in photographs, in a book titled *Celebrate! 50 Years of Leeds West Indian Carnival* (Farrar, Smith, Farrar, 2017).

Arthur was quite properly at the centre of the celebratory events in 2017. Susan Pitter, a member of the Carnival committee from the mid-1970s, was highly instrumental in raising its profile in the city. The first stage in its ascent in recent years was to move the

Queen Show from the Leeds West Indian Centre in Chapeltown into the city centre, first to Millennium Square and Leeds Town Hall, and then to West Yorkshire Playhouse (now Leeds Playhouse). The latter provided both the back-stage facilities and the auditorium — with its professional sound and lighting — to showcase the costumes properly, as well as a proper stage for the supporting acts.

Susan Pitter's presence and skill as emcee, and her relationship with the comedians Robbie Gee and Eddie Nestor, along with the development of King costumes and performances, meant that each show got better and better. By 2017, the presentation was at its peak. Arthur's speech, in the presence of Vicky Cielto, the 1967 carnival queen, and carnival pioneers such as Mr and Mrs Samlalsingh, Willie and Rashida Robinson, and Calvin Beech provided a fitting showcase for the Leeds Carnival. The Carnival parade was the largest and most spectacular in all its 50 years.

Susan Pitter also fund-raised and co-ordinated a huge exhibition of carnival photographs and artefacts, curated by Sonya Dyer, beautifully exhibited at a premiere location in the city centre – The Tetley Centre for Contemporary Art and Education – from 12th August to 5th November 2017. The Tetley had the space to display costumes made by Arthur and others, including Hughbon Condor's magnificent 'Man on Hos' Back' that won the competition in 2007.

Another of Pitter's projects celebrating 50 years of carnival was the commissioning of four new headpieces for carnival masqueraders, exhibited at Leeds City Museum, including the beautiful work of up-and-coming young carnival designers Renata Gordon and Lorina Gumbs. In the same year, Dr Emily Zobel Marshall organised a major international carnival conference at Leeds Beckett University.

Emily, who is a member of the Harrison Bunday Mama Dread Masqueraders and a leading academic, was generously supported by the Research Centre in Cultural Studies and Humanities at the university (Marshall et al. 2017).

The conference provided a rare opportunity for academics and carnival practitioners to share their knowledge, and for the carnival founders — Arthur France, Calvin Beech, Rashida and Willie Robinson — to tell their stories and answer questions. Dr Marshall also raised funds for me to make a pop-up carnival exhibition of my carnival photos, stretching back almost 50 years, which has toured the city. A lasting tribute to the work of Arthur and his team is the *Celebrate!* book. My brother Guy raised sufficient funds for this to be sold at a reasonable price and to be provided free to every school and library in Leeds, ensuring that resources are available to subsequent generations who want to find out about the history, the art and the politics of Caribbean carnival culture.

### **Arthur Reflects on His Life in Carnival**

As you would expect from his overall philosophy of Carnival, Arthur France's carnival costumes always have a political story attached to them. In his Foreword to the *Celebrate!* book he said:

My whole feeling with carnival is that it's the only way to remember who we are and where we came from. Long ago I realised that carnival was something you could use to show the story of our history. You cannot tell people too much — you might switch them off if you're always giving them lectures. But carnival is a more entertaining way of capturing some of the stories people need to know, always connecting them to Africa . . . [In 2016] my costume for the King and

Queen Show was Ashanti, and it included all Ghanaian features . . . One year I did King Jaja. Some youngsters were in [Leeds Carnival] HQ where I was constructing it and they asked what was going on. I explained, and they went on their smart phones to get the history in Nigeria. And then they gave me new information, things I didn't know. This is the fourth generation of British-Caribbeans, doing their research on the web, and they are genuinely interested in this history.

(Farrar, Smith, Farrar, 2017)

For Arthur (as for Lord Silkie, Figure 8, right), the key issue is education. Carnival is another mode in which people can learn important things that are so neglected in the British National Curriculum.

In one of our interviews for his biography, Arthur France said this: 'It's quite a queer thing. For most people, it's either politics OR carnival, but for me, they're inseparable. I'm very passionate about my roots. I am fortunate to have been brought up in the Caribbean so I could see what the celebration of emancipation was all about.' When the pioneers — Arthur, Calvin Beech, George Archibald and their exuberant Jamaican friend from the university, Tony Lewis — travelled across England to go to a carnival function in another city, they would talk politics and argue fiercely with each other all the way there and back. 'But when we got there, we just dropped all that and concentrated on being polite to everyone. They weren't very interested in our politics.'

Darcus Howe was a notable exception to this 'apolitical' rule, and the magazine he edited, *Race Today*, wrote extensively about the Notting Hill carnival in radical terms. In Leeds, the Harrison Bunday Mama Dread Masqueraders have, for more



Figure 8. Lord Silkie, renowned Leeds Calypsonian during a performance.

each year's troupe. In 2017, their theme was All Ah We Ah Migrants, and they created King David Oluwale and his one hundred migrant masqueraders, handing out postcards and leaflets telling the Oluwale story and calling for everyone to support the migrants of the world as they paraded around Harehills and Chapeltown (Marshall, Farrar and Farrar, 2017). Arthur France was one of those who organised a picket of Leeds Crown Court in November 1971, when the two Leeds policemen accused of the manslaughter and assault of David Oluwale, who had stowed away from Lagos and arrived in Leeds in 1949, were on trial. but acquitted, at the Judge's much-contested direction, of manslaughter). France was joined by his brothers and sisters in the United Caribbean Association, and his friend the British-Nigerian James Aboaba, as well as a delegation organised by the Black Panthers in London. James Aboaba was instrumental in bringing members of the Nigerian Community in Leeds into Carnival in the 1990s. Ruth Bunday, who started the HB Mama Dread troupe with the late Athaliah Durrant (Mama Dread) and Guy Farrar, had been invited into carnival by her Kittitian neighbour, the late Edris Browne, in 1970, and has participated every year since then. Yet again, carnival includes everyone, whatever their backgrounds.



Figure 9. Arthur France and Calvin Beech, 2017, in front of my touring exhibition. © Christian

Over the years, Arthur has come to the conclusion that 'You can't move forward unless you work with people in the council and the police, whether you like them or not.' He has special praise for George Mudie. 'When he was leader of Leeds city council, he [Mudie] understood the importance of carnival.' They went for years with no financial support from council. At first, sometime in the mid-1980s, George made a small grant of £5000. 'I went on the radio and said it was rubbish, France told me. Then he bumped into George Mudie in Morrisons supermarket. 'He pulled me up and complained about what I'd said. I replied, "It's true, £5,000 is nowhere near enough'.' Mudie appreciated plain speaking and he knew he had to keep France on board. 'Things started to improve from then on. If it wasn't for that support, we wouldn't have got where we are.'

When Brian Walker was Labour leader of the council, he allocated the carnival building they now use as their HQ at the south end of Chapeltown, near the West Indian Centre. Keith Wakefield, when he was leader of the Labour group, made sure that the Conservatives continued to fund carnival while they were in charge of the council. That's how they were able to put the marquee into Millennium Square for the Queen Show. Another Labour leader, Judith Blake, now Baroness Blake of Leeds, was equally supportive. It's Arthur's charisma, powers of persuasion, and people-skills that have brought about these changes.

There was important support from other white people, too. Dave Williams was Arthur France's boss at Technorth education centre. At the same time as he was forging his relationship with George Mudie, meeting Dave was something of an

eye-opener. He still marvels at how much he could have had in common with a white man. 'We had no place to make costumes. Dave said use a vacant unit at the back of Technorth. If anything goes wrong, I don't want to know.' This provision of space for a mas camp was a turning point for Leeds West Indian Carnival.

Calvin told Arthur that someone had come up to him and said 'I don't understand Arthur (Figure 9). He preaching Black Power to us and I see him down the road with this white man, hugging up.' Relating this story to me, Beech said he told the man: 'I don't think you understand the system'. In discussion this with me, Arthur France turned to Malcolm X's final years as an example. 'Malcolm recognise this as well.' Like Malcolm X, Arthur France can combine his religious belief with his advocacy for radical social and political change. He said that back in day when he went to church in his Afro and badges, 'Some people think I'm with the devil'; the memory still makes him laugh.

'I have pride and pleasure in what we have achieved but I'm worried about the long-term future of carnival in Leeds. I'm not confident that enough people understand the way that politics, race and culture work together,' he said as we wound up our interview. A clear knowledge of that complex interface is the key to driving carnival forward. He says that the Notting Hill carnival is now more of a jamboree than a proper carnival, with all the different camps fighting each other for a slice of the grant income. In Leeds, he fears that 'the main ethos of carnival, a celebration of

emancipation' might be compromised. 'You have to have the right balance of people with the passion and knowledge of what carnival is and how it must continue.'

Over the years he's found that some people want to join the carnival committee without any knowledge of how hard the struggle has been over the years, so they have no clear vision of what carnival actually represents. That's why carnivals in some other cities have collapsed. On the other hand, 'We've got more costume designers in Leeds than anywhere else in the country, and we have the momentum.' The big challenge is to ensure that Leeds does not become a jamboree. France describes Trinidad's carnival nowadays as a bikini thing' introduced by the mas camp called Poison. Lots of people there are fed up with this 'pretty mas' carnival, and France was pleased to see that St Kitts-Nevis carnival won the Carifesta prize because it has stuck to its traditional roots. With so much still to do, and now in his mid-80s, Arthur France should be relaxing more, but he's finding it's hard to take a back seat in the Leeds carnival. 'You've got to bring everyone with you, not leave anyone behind,' is his mantra, and he looks like he will be developing the art, the thinking and the emancipatory politics of carnival for quite some time, pandemic permitting.

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## The Spirit of Bacchanal: A Comparative Approach to Traditional and Contemporary Mas in Trinidad and Tobago

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### Abstract

In the social discourse on carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a tendency to associate contemporary ‘pretty mas’ with loss of tradition and superficiality. This paper argues that the evolution of mas has featured more retention and affinity than it is typically credited with. Combining theories in performance studies with analysis of images, soca music lyrics, archives, autoethnographic writing and interviews with traditional practitioners, it is proposed that while the extrinsic features of carnival performance may differ, its essence remains constant. This essence is a ‘spirit of bacchanal’ which channels the performance of identities through character portrayals or the unmasking of the everyday self. This study challenges the question of authenticity in modern day carnival purist sentiments by identifying a long history of negative perceptions about the ‘profane’ revelry of mas. Through this work, traditional and contemporary portrayals are put in conversation with each other to examine the parallels and points of intersection in the experience and perception of the different genres of mas.

**Key Words:** Performance studies, traditional carnival, pretty mas, soca music, communitas, affect theory, masquerade

### Introduction

*Of all possible sociocultural practices, the carnival...is the one that best expresses the strategies that the people of the Caribbean have for speaking at once of themselves and their relation with the world, with history, with tradition, with nature, with God.* (Antonio Benitez-Rojo, 1997)

Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter referred to as T&T) is a twin-island Caribbean state that has widespread cultural influences through the invention of: calypso music, limbo dancing, the steel pan, and, most prominently, the carnival popularly marketed as the ‘greatest show on earth’ (Hill, 1972; Juneja, 1988 Mason, 1998; Nurse, 1999). The masquerades held in the

Trinidad’s capital, Port of Spain, have attracted the most global attention, and inspired dozens of similar carnivals around the world (Cohen, 2007, p 898). My research focuses on this locale for the relevance of its historical context to the research question. The different points on its evolutionary timeline- the French masquerade, the jamette carnival, the middle class resurgence, the omnipresence of women, the mass produced mas and so on- all speak to respective shifts in the politics of performance and spectatorship. As what has now become one of the most commercialized carnivals, the comparisons and contrasts between its roots and its present-day format are a rich point of analysis.

Pearse explains (1985, p.184) that it is difficult to pin down the details of the evolution of carnival during the time when 'pretty mas' became dormant. However, the circumstances of its re-emergence and consequent transformation are key to the argument of this paper. Harris (1998, p.111) considers this to be a result of the joint effort by the colonial government and aristocracy to 'tame' the celebration. The government created competitions that would award the types of portrayals that they wished to encourage. These would focus on interpretations of romantic themes, rather than the politically-charged depiction of devils, animals, folklore characters and satiric figures in the lower class mas. Ho (2000, p.7) states this subdued masquerade gave the middle and upper classes a space in mas bands. once again.

Previously, mas was dominated by men. As women gained economic and social independence, there was a change in their perceptions of self, and greater emphasis on the female body (Noel, 2010). This paradigm shift which began around the 1960s and into the 70s, was where the 'bikini and beads' costumes emerged. There appeared a Trinidadian market that wanted costumes that granted more freedom through exposure of the body. Bandleaders then began incorporating these desires into their designs.

Since the 1980s, carnival has become more and more elaborate and commercialized, consequently overshadowing traditional practices. (Kerrigan, 2018, p.266). Schechner (2004, p.8) notes that this has resulted in fervent efforts by institutions to preserve and restore the traditional art form through museums, curriculum and media representation. The debate between

traditionalists and advocates of cultural change is marked by a hierarchy whereby the traditional is upheld as 'real' culture, while the contemporary is seen as a depreciated form. Juneja (1988, p.96) aptly sums this up:

*For many critics of the present day carnival, this is too much spectacle, too much like showbiz and not the cathartic and celebratory ritual it once was. They lament the loss of the communal element characteristic of a folk festival. Domination by big bands has reduced the level of individual participation. Costumes are mass produced for mere consumers. Preference for glitter and fantasy, for pretty mas, has eclipsed elements of satire characteristic of traditional mas.*

This illustrates the fear of loss that is associated with the cultural change toward pretty mas. This also implicates the emergence of soca music, which has risen to prominence in contemporary carnival and is commonly seen as a corruption of calypso tradition. Guilbault (2004) summarises soca as being primarily focused on 'pleasure, dance, and sexualized bodies' (p.228). This perceived shift from political content to pure entertainment is seen as another dilution of value in carnival.

Noel (2010) cites detractors who identify 'nudity', 'vulgarity' and 'immorality' as 'plaguing' factors of the contemporary carnival, particularly through winin'. This is despite the fact that these elements have been characteristic of carnival since its inception among the *jamettes*<sup>1</sup>. (Scott, 2002, p. 299). This 19<sup>th</sup> century masquerade of the urban subaltern class was notoriously ribald, and often deliberately so. According to King, "jamettes in particular were known for

<sup>1</sup> From the French word 'diametre', referring to those beneath the imaginary line that separated 'civil society' from the underclass. The ex-enclaved African who moved to the city after emancipation were concentrated into slums where their alienation

from society was reflected in artistic inventions including calypso, steelpan, and jamette mas (precursor to many of the now traditional carnival characters). (Scher, 2020, p. 57)

wreaking havoc upon Victorian morals, particularly with their sexualized carnival performances” (2011, p. 214). Winin’ was a major part of their movement vocabulary, and revealing clothing was the order of their dress code- both of which were part of their natural ways of expression, as well as their deliberate transgression to hegemonic European codes of conduct. Though the authorities tried to rid the carnival of its *jametteness*, there was something to be admired about the uninhibited performance that the *jamettes* took liberty to practice publicly (Dikobe, 2004). As such, the essence of the jamette culture as well as its associated behaviours have been retained in some ways- consciously and unconsciously- in the contemporary carnival.

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### The Bacchanal In Both

Though traditional and contemporary carnival have developed along disparate lines, I will look at the common characteristic between them- that is, the *spirit of bacchanal*. While the etymology is linked to the celebrations of the Greek god, Dionysus, ‘bachannal’ has evolved in the Trinbagonian Creole to refer to anything involving confusion or excitement. This is exemplified in the title of Peter Mason’s book, *Bacchanal! The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (1998). This word has become ingrained in Trinidadian speech, as is evident in the nation’s music, where ‘carnival’ and ‘bacchanal’ invariably go hand in hand.

I contend that the leading influence in mas is a ‘spirit’ of carnival culture in two senses of the word. Firstly, it is the *dominating ambience*, and also *something out of the ordinary, inexplicable and deeply moving* for those affected by its presence. In the second sense, I approach this topic from the viewpoint that mas is a performance of the *carnival spirit*- that is, the ‘spirit of

resistance and rebellion’ (Scher, 2007, p.108) and ‘a spirit of raw freedom’ (Alfonso, 2019). The concept of carnival as a (secular, celebratory) ritual is also at the foundation of my writing, and has been widely discussed (Juneja, 1988; Liverpool, 1993; Roehlehr, 2004). I perceive a ritual as an event that takes its participants out of the everyday through symbolic, repeated actions in keeping with a *spirit*. This article deals with the retention of ‘spirit’, despite the different ways that the ‘ritual’ is performed.

### Methodology

This article explores the ways in which performances of the carnival spirit might contrast or coincide in traditional vis-à-vis contemporary carnival masquerade. While the extant debates concentrate on the divergent elements of the two masquerade forms, I will focus on their similarities by proffering the alternative argument that the subversive aspects have been retained and repurposed in the contemporary performance. My hypothesis is that they share a core set of sentiments for their respective masqueraders, though the politics and presentations are different.

The exploration of both forms of mas will include thick description based on first hand experiences. This is a method from the position of what Patricia De Freitas (2007) calls the ‘masquerader-anthropologist’ whose work must articulate the festival atmosphere from the ‘inside-out’ (p.61). The text will be accompanied by images- many of which have been supplied by interviewees- which aid in depicting a celebration of dynamism and spectacle that words can only do so much to capture in its fullness. For the sake of retaining focus within the specified word count, these photos will not be analysed directly, but will complement the happenings that are covered in text.

Two primary data sources support my exploration of performance in mas: semi-structured interviews with traditional practitioners and content analysis of soca music lyrics. The interviewees were accessed by means of opportunity sampling (Bryman, 2016, p.21), for which the inclusion criteria was for contributors to have been directly involved in traditional mas. They were referred to me by friends with whom I had discussed the project. The interview questions looked into the experience of preparing and performing different traditional characters, and elicited the respondents' opinions on the evolution of mas. This enquiry was derived from my preconceived hypothesis, and, as such, might have incurred the effects of bias.

Nonetheless, all efforts were made to limit this by phrasing questions in ways that would not be leading, and analysing all perspectives regardless of whether they correspond with the hypothesis. I consulted the university's ethics self-assessment form before conducting interviews.

The primary research on contemporary mas was conducted through an analysis of soca lyrics in order to extract recurring themes that corresponded with extant theories. This is not a strictly defined research technique, but is closely related to qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis as defined by Bryman (2016). Writers such as Ho (2000), Browne (2009), McNeal (2013) and Tull (2017) engage in a similar exercise of using soca or calypso lyrics to illustrate culturally upheld sentiments. I soca this as a fitting point of reference, as the movement and mood of contemporary mas is highly determined by that of the music. My sense is that soca music is considered the 'voice' of the modern day masquerader, while the voice of the traditional masquerader is infused in

their craft- a craft which must be spoken for by its practitioners, above the ubiquity of the contemporary. In *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Bagele Chilisa (2012, p.198) states that songs are vital to the oral literature that illustrates public experiences of a community with a sense of nuance that cannot be captured in other art forms. Chilisa further makes a case for the importance of using indigenous knowledge in forming theories about a culture, from the perspective of said culture in its own unique context. Along these lines, I will analyse soca lyrics as communication of shared meaning among the community of contemporary masqueraders.

I wish to highlight a gap in the scholarship, whereby writers have not adequately endeavoured to inspect traditional and contemporary mas side-by-side. This body of literature can be expanded by my argument against the false assumptions that the present-day carnival is totally detached from its roots. Hence, I propose to fill the lacuna that has emphasised change as a factor of loss and distancing, without due consideration for cultural retention.

## Interview Findings

The interviewees have each played different traditional characters, but identify with one primary portrayal. Roxanne Kalicharan-Figueroa (2019) identified herself as a Babydoll<sup>2</sup>, Charlton Alfonso is an experienced Moko Jumbie<sup>3</sup> and Ronnie Joseph focuses mainly on Indian mas<sup>4</sup>. All three participants were of different age groups, with Alfonso being in his early twenties, Kalicharan-Figueroa in her early thirties and Joseph in his seventies. Their perspectives will be summarised in this

<sup>2</sup> A woman (or cross-dressed man) dressed as a child, who confronts unsuspecting men, accusing them of being the negligent father of the doll that she carries.

<sup>3</sup> A stilt-walker who dances and parades in costume

<sup>4</sup> Comprises several portrayals, including the Fancy Indian- inspired by Hollywood movies- and the Red Indian -linked to the ceremonies of indigenous Trinidadians

section, and linked to theoretical considerations later in the body of the paper.

The respondents shared the sentiment that pretty mas has diluted the real essence of carnival. The word ‘superficial’ was commonly used to describe it, while they referred to traditional mas in terms of ‘ritual’. They attributed this to the commercialisation of large bands that detaches the masquerader from the creative process. Joseph (2019) remarked that in these bands, ‘all they [masqueraders] have to do is get drunk and cross the stage...nothing artistic about it’. Alfonso similarly commented,

*this community effect that we [traditional masqueraders] have is something you’re not gonna find in pretty mas bands. It’s just about money. It is a business, and people will just pay because they want to look good, and this is the most popular fad right now and everybody’s doing it.’ (2019)*

Kalicharan-Figueroa also remarked that the only active role that the contemporary masquerader takes is in choosing and paying for a costume that appeals to their style. She suggests that the ‘minute elements’ that they might individualize would be through styling their own makeup, shoes or hair, yet the bulk of the costume is designed for them.

As such, the interviewees all conveyed a perceived artistic superiority of traditional mas based on the preparation process, the involvement of the individual and the commitment that is required. Alfonso (2019) gave a vivid account of the years of practice that he underwent, and the importance of this being situated in a community setting. He used terms such as ‘the Moko world’ and ‘Moko culture’ to describe shared understandings and practices of the community. In these



Figure 1: Roxanne Kalicharan- Figueroa in a street performance of the BabyDoll character. Undated photo provided from her personal collection



Figure 2: Charlton Alfonso in practise as a Moko Jumbie. Undated photo provided from his personal collection

groups, the members are involved in each step of the creative process, by conceptualising, designing and making costumes.

Alfonso (2019) recounted the history of the West African deity (Moko) who acted as the protector of villages, and whose height gave him the perspective to warn his soldiers of impending danger. He says that this understanding is crucial to the mas, and that the experienced Moko

Jumbies are particularly dedicated to personifying this custom by guiding and protecting their band members.

Alfonso says that this character exemplifies his personal characteristics, which resonates with Kalicharan-Figueroa's statement that

*you can choose pretty mas, but traditional mas chooses you. It must fit with the individual and his/her personality, as well as [their] respect, admiration, appreciation for the masquerade.* (2019)

She mentions how masqueraders naturally choose the portrayal that is most relevant to their personal nature and ancestry. Furthermore, she gives examples of cases where people have stopped playing mas when their lives changed in ways that detached them from the character's motivations. For instance 'some of the girls who used to play gorilla, after they got married-perhaps because they're no longer 'monkeying around'- they just stopped'. She emphasised that this personal commitment to the sentiment of the mas is central to the tradition. Like Alfonso, she affirms 'you must be instrumental in the creation of your own costume because you're embodying this entity. With it you're taking on a whole ancestry, so it's a ritual of preparation.'



Figure 3: A small band of Fancy Indian masqueraders crossing the stage at carnival. Photo taken and provided by Ronnie Joseph

Joseph (2019) also identified his ancestry as a motivating factor in his choice of character, and likens the traditional preparation process to the rigour of theatre. He mentions how traditional masqueraders must exercise 'a lot of dedication to the character' in rehearsing their speeches, dances and songs. He also attested that the mas is 'very personal', and spoke of someone who is claimed to have grown to physically resemble the character of the that he played all throughout his life. At the time of the interview, Joseph showed me a costume that was in the process of being made at home, which underscored his philosophy that 'mas and art are the same thing'.

The respondents further mentioned the qualities of performativity as reason for the greatness of traditional mas. Alfonso (2019) remarked that 'for me, being on stilts is no different from being onstage'. He frequently mentioned the gaze of the onlooker, and the Moko Jumbie's motivation to inspire awe. In some cases, they would use movements that complement the costume- for instance, if the costume represented a bird, they might mimic the flying movement. In cases where they were out of costume, Moko Jumbies would exploit the full range of tricks to impress the audience and present whatever performance they envisioned. In a similar way, Joseph (2019) insists in stating that masqueraders must 'dance' the costume, and not just wear it. This suggests a strong element of interpretation and presentation that would be devised in the rehearsal process. Kalicharan-Figueroa (2019) and Joseph (2019) both speak of performances that are strategically scripted for particular audiences. This links to the idea of the importance of the individual and their understanding of the meaning behind the mas. All respondents spoke of presentations that were oriented to the spectator's reception, but were also for the personal enjoyment of the masquerader.

We also discussed the loss of meaning in traditional mas that is performed in the contemporary era, considering the difference in general social context. Kalicharan-Figueroa (2019) says that some of these portrayals lack authenticity and are not true to the original conventions. Alfonso (2019) suggested that the initial Moko Jumbies performed as a symbolic celebration of release from slavery, while the modern-day walker is more likely to do it 'just for fun'. This opened up a discussion of the main research question for this paper, that is, the degree to which the same sentiments have been or can be retained in the contemporary pretty mas.

Kalicharan-Figueroa (2019) presented an informed perspective, as the only respondent who played both traditional and contemporary mas. She admits that contemporary masqueraders might also find their preparation process ritualistic and absorbing. However, she concludes that the meaningfulness is only to self, and that the pretty mas performance will always be comparatively superficial due to the detachment from the creation process. Alfonso (2019) said that 'the same essence of freedom that is carnival comes through all portrayals- whether it be traditional or pretty mas'. He maintains that while some people embody the 'true carnival spirit' by 'letting loose' in contemporary mas, others only participate for social inclusion or as a show of affluence.

When asked if they view the practice of traditional mas as symbol of defiance to the mass consumption of pretty mas, the respondents agreed with this to a certain extent. Joseph (2019) responded that while this is a factor in the motivation of some traditional masqueraders, the aspect of personal enjoyment and aesthetic pleasure is more important to many, including himself. Similarly, Alfonso (2019) expresses that they play mas simply because they are passionate about it, however they are simultaneously fighting

against the forces of the commercial mas. He states that this is not a battle where they seek to conquer, but to gain the respect that has been lost in the evolution of carnival.

Altogether, these interviews have introduced a host of reflections that will be compared and contrasted with the experience of contemporary masqueraders in the following sections.

## Analysis

### The Question of Authenticity vs Superficiality

*"To me, she was one of the most fun characters, yet she said nothing. The Dame Lorraine was unmistakable. Her chest and buttocks were stuffed with massive pillows, and she held a small Venetian-styled parasol in her gloved hands. This particular masquerader also held a fan in the other hand, and wore a gold half-mask. She was cloaked in an ankle-length dress with long sleeves. My eyes followed her around the space as she moved between people. Her gait was not particularly exaggerated, but the sheer size of her costume made each step very animated, as the protruding body parts moved on their own. A few times, she caused her cushioned buttocks to collide with people as she moved through the crowd. At one point, she spotted a man who was scrolling on his mobile phone, momentarily unengaged with the action. She started wining in figures of 8, while stepping toward the chair where the man sat. She reversed into him, until he had no choice but to notice the massive bottom gyrating in front of him. He started to laugh, and so did the people around. She was taken by the calypso music in the background, dancing blissfully, pretending not to know that her choreography had taken up his personal space. He locked his phone and stuck it into his pocket- all while*

*chuckling at the spectacle that was being presented in his eyeline. He surrendered to the wine. When the song switched, the Dame Lorraine turned around and gave a 'high five' to her newfound friend, before going about her business again."*

This observation was made in the context of an exhibition called *The Old Yard* that features portrayals of *jamette mas* in a space that is recreated to resemble the setting where it was originated. This and other preservation spaces pay homage to traditional mas as Scher describes, being 'the prime



Figure 4: A student in costume as Mme. Gros Derriere (French Creole for 'Miss Big Bottom'), performing at the Old Yard exhibition on February 11, 2015  
Photography by Kwame Boatswain of K. Frotophraphy

example of the creativity, wit and resourcefulness of a unique Trinidadian people' (2007, p.63).

Contrastingly, detractors such as Holder (2013, para.1) use the word 'jamette' contemptuously to refer to 'vulgar' present-day masquerades. While a 2015 newspaper letter (*Carnival and Social Decay*, para.5) refers to the contemporary festivity as 'corrosive cultural debasement', (Pearse (1956) cites



Figure 5: A backline masquerader in a costume from Bliss' 2019 portrayal of 'Muse', taken on Carnival Tuesday (5<sup>th</sup> March , 2019)  
Photography by Sophia Mikhailov of TriniJungleJuice

articles from a 19<sup>th</sup> century newspaper that describe mas as a ‘shameless celebration of heathenish and vicious rites’ (p.189) and ‘thoroughly contemptible’ (p.188). This highlights the irony that traditional mas faced similar criticism, before it became hailed by authorities as a relic of national culture. Contrastingly, Scher (2007) describes the present circumstances under which traditional mas is valorized to the point where it is neither questioned nor condemned. He further suggests that

*the selective amnesia of certain aspects helps cement a national memory that is acceptable, proud and in keeping with the current agenda of the state and affiliated social classes in the construction of ‘authentic carnival’ by state institutions’* (p.108).

This ‘amnesia’ has erased carnival behaviours that were akin to those of contemporary masqueraders who are criticized for similar (if not identical) portrayals. As seminal scholar, Errol Hill, (1972, p.40) proclaimed, ‘the notion of a clean carnival is an absurd one’. Hill argued this, not to consider ‘uncleanness’ as a depreciating factor, but rather as the very essence of the celebration, and the characteristic that drives its potency as a cultural symbol.

This highlights a second irony of the debate; that critics urge for a ‘bringing back’ of ‘old time’ carnival as an ideal substitute when, in reality, it often appears similar, if not identical to pretty mas. Had the Dame Lorraine in the thick description been put in a ‘bikini and beads’ costume, her act of *wining* would be labeled by traditionalists as a ‘lewd’ display. In the context of jamette mas, however, it is seen as a show of artistry and cultural richness.

The T&T Darul Uloom (2011, para.5) claims that carnival celebrations ‘in our time have taken a new dimension. It is filled with indecency, immorality and immodesty’. They suggest that this was absent in ‘old time’ carnival, yet archives

from as far as 1722 (Labat, cited in Besson, 1985) describe celebrations of the time as an immodest reproduction of the masquerade balls that preceded it. This further illustrates the irony and ‘amnesia’ of a narrative that paints ‘bikini and beads’ mas as an affront to ‘pure’ traditional culture.

I will challenge this dichotomy by looking into the overlapping meanings that can be found between the ‘authentic’ mas and the ‘corrupted’ product of its evolution. One of these overlaps is that both have gained support of the powers that be. Sampath (1997) argues that pretty mas has been affirmed as a representation of national culture, primarily through marketing for tourism. Likewise, Campbell (2017, p.84) says that traditional mas has been elevated to the status of a historical artifact due to the preservation strategies of Trinidadian institutions. This goes to say that both forms of mas no longer hold significance as acts of defiance against political structures, and take on a form of play above protest. However, I will later discuss how the *act* of performance might facilitate individual defiance.

### **Celebration As Performance: Self-Presentation and The Defiant Public Image**

*“When I pictured a scene out of hell, I would’ve never envisioned it coated in bright blue. But this scene was certainly hellish- with jarring screams being belted out from mouths dripping with a blood-like liquid that contrasted strongly with the wet blue paint that covered them. The whole presentation was very dissonant, and yet very steady. Their movements were beastly, crawling, messy and unnatural - yet they were in sync with the live percussion rhythms that came from biscuit tins and whistles. They were frightful, and their screams were painful, yet they were dancing and reveling- sometimes with sinister smirks. I wondered if their*

*throats did not hurt from producing the high-pitched cries, or if their bodies wouldn't be susceptible to abrasions after dragging along the concrete and grass with barely anything but paint to protect their skin.*

*One of the Devils approached me with intent to intimidate- and indeed, he was successful. His eyes opened wide as he looked directly into mine, and his bright red tongue hung down onto his chin. Part of me knew (or hoped) that he would not touch me. The other part of me knew that the Devils were untamed & did not care about one onlooker's cardigan & jeans. He came closer and closer to my face, and I laughed nervously as I leant away. Someone behind me yelled "Pay de devil! Give him a dollar!" And so I reached into my pocket and presented him with a single dollar bill- as was customary. In true devilish fashion, he yanked it with his teeth, growled at me and then retreated again into the pack of screaming monsters.*

*If that hadn't made me feel like I came face to face with hell, then what happened next would've surely done the job. Some of the devils picked up their torches, and with a heave of breath, blew out a massive cloud of fire. The audience gasped and cheered. I soon began to sweat, as each fiery bellow increased the temperature in the space more and more. At this point, I was watching, feeling and hearing hell. The devils roamed free amongst themselves like beasts in a zoo. It was as though I was just behind the fence of their enclosure."*

This thick description illustrates my encounter with the Blue Devil, a traditional character that is famed and feared for its performance. Max Harris' (1998) treatise focuses on this masquerade as a 'creation of potent theatrical symbols' (p.122) through their threatening gestures. He posits that there is a sense of 'decorum', in Schechner's words, maintained throughout this masquerade, as 'although they enact danger, they themselves are not dangerous'

(p.109). Harris uses the Blue Devil as a metaphor for mas in general - a performance that appears totally unfettered, but is still set within, and respectful of boundaries. In this sense, mas is employed for its visibility, and not anarchy.



Figure 6: A Blue Devil taunts a spectator at the 2015 Old Yard, with a dollar bill clenched between his teeth  
Photography by Kwame Boatswain of K. Frotophography

Accordingly, Joseph (2019) says that while traditional masqueraders internalize themes in their portrayal that are potentially antagonistic, their motivations are not to disrupt, but to parade. This can be identified in the thick description, where the Blue Devil did not make physical contact so as to soil my clothing, which would have become a transgressive act rather than a performative one. It is my belief that this 'decorum' is also intrinsic in pretty mas performances that subvert the 'everyday'.

As previously mentioned, mas itself is no longer a recalcitrant force, considering that it is supported, legitimized

and controlled by Trinidadian institutions.

Aching states (2010) that while carnival behaviours would have ‘sufficed to threaten the peace several decades ago, today they form part of a call and response pattern between singers and dancing revelers.’ (p. 421). In this realm, masqueraders are motivated to expand their personal autonomy to the threshold level of the festive space. The codes of conduct (or lack thereof) in pretty mas sanction this through dancing (*wining*) as a display of departure from behaviours that are expected in spaces outside of the carnival setting. Gamal ‘Skinny Fabulous’ Doyle (2014) urges the crowd to

*Show me your worst behaviour!  
Jump up with your worst behaviour!  
Wine down with your worst  
behaviour...  
Start the bacchanal!*

I posit that inclination to behaviours of excess can be seen as the retention of an essence that was present in carnival even before it was appropriated by the Caribbean underclass. Riggio (2004, p.15) gives a historical account of the festival’s initial purpose as a feast where Catholics indulged in copious amounts of meat, alcohol and hedonistic revelry in preparation for the period of abstinence during Lent. The intensification of behaviours into the out-of-the-ordinary that is ushered by the call the ‘start the bacchanal!’ (Doyle, 2014) reflects this acceptance of excessiveness in pretty mas.

Masqueraders are encouraged to ‘misbehave’ in defiance to what would normally be acceptable. These behaviours are not abnormal, simply because they are condoned and expected in this space and time. Aching (2010, p. 424) posits that, in the festive context, *wining* and other

*openly subversive activities in  
public spaces are not ‘excessive’*

*from the perspective of those who  
carry them out but entirely  
appropriate for the social visibility  
that they wish to acquire.*

This links to my earlier question of whether the aestheticization of the pretty mas performance dilutes its potency to convey defiance. To this, I propose that the answer is no. Pretty mas behaviours are no longer culturally subversive on a structural level, as old-time mas originated to be. This is not because it is focused on aesthetics, but because it is condoned. In the festival space, its significance is as a medium of expressing individual freedom through relative excesses that are otherwise restricted. This is, in itself, a performative act that is reminiscent of the roots of carnival as a feast. The everyday behaviours might be considered those of ‘fasting’, while mas is the modern day ‘feast’.

This deviation from the everyday is captured in Dexter ‘Blaxx’ Stewart’s 2012 song *Leh Go*, where he juxtaposes the expectations of the worker with the personal freedom that is allowed to ‘throw your stress away’ through mas:

*We hustling on the grind,  
Working a 9 to 5,  
Trying to stay alive.  
Come Monday and Tuesday,  
It’s we time to break ‘way.  
If you wait whole year to mash up  
the place,  
Spread your hands and let go...  
Do your thing! Spread your wings!*

This act of ‘letting go’ and throwing hands up can be interpreted as a performance of resignation to the rigours of modern workaday life. This type of performance is perhaps more hedonistic than the masquerades that celebrated emancipation from slavery. It responds to modern tensions, but is also considered by

traditionalists to be associated with modern values of conspicuous consumption, public displays of sexuality and loss of tradition. As Joseph (2019) says:

*Carnival is really now a 'young people thing'. People want a different kind of thing... They want to go by Tribe [a pretty mas band] and they want to have a skimpy bikini showing off all parts of their body. They want to go in an air conditioned place when they feeling tired and that is not the [real] carnival. But this is what these people want.*

Therefore we might trace the tension in the overarching debate to a clash of generations. By this, carnival has become 'juxtaposed between old and new ideologies' (Copeland and Hodges, 2014, p.13). The old ideologies are inclined toward nationalist, postcolonial narratives. The new ideologies are inclined toward 'freeing up' from the everyday in a celebration of youth, which is commonly considered trivial in comparison to the realities captured in traditional mas.

Nonetheless, I contend that the 'misbehaviour' in pretty mas is an essence that has been retained from the traditional mas performances, that, according to Franco, (2007, p.29), opposed Victorian codes of civility that were imposed in colonialism. As Alfonso (2019) says, the factors that modern-day masqueraders seek to escape may not be as dire as in post-slavery society, but the intrinsic merrymaking of mas permits an escape from banality on different levels. Dieffenthaler and Du Bois (2017) illustrate this festive space that departs from responsibilities:

*Nobody cares if they have plenty bills to pay*

*Cause now is not the time for that,  
it's not the place for that.  
Let we take a wine to that...  
Nobody cares if my life is a  
misery...  
Welcome to the feteland!*

Jamille Broome's (2018) article- inspired by and entitled after this song- elaborates on the carnival atmosphere that provides relief from 'the regular scheduled programme of being frustrated citizens' (para.4). This takes into account the corruption, crime and economic downturn that the country has experienced. Kerrigan (2008) similarly historicizes this as a motivating factor of the *jamette mas* that was born out of oppression and poverty that lingered after enslavement. We might consider, therefore, that as long as oppressive factors exist, carnival will exist as a means of temporary departure.

Altogether I would agree with Shereen Ali's (2019) proposition that despite the transformations that carnival has taken in response to social, economic and cultural circumstances, 'one thing has remained consistent: the Trinidad Carnival continues to channel and express people's energies in ways that can be sacred, secular or profane' (para. 20). While religious followers seek this relief through their observances, the 'ritual' of mas invokes *sans souci*<sup>5</sup> for its masqueraders.

## Mas And Affect

*Front and centre, I stood among the  
sea of beads, feathers and rhinestones.  
Our section was so large that it  
required two human walls to  
barricade us until it was time to  
proceed across the stage. About two  
dozen security officers locked elbows  
and stood firm across the width of the  
ramp leading up to the stage. Mania  
was brewing behind them, and I was  
part of it. The anticipation built, and*

<sup>5</sup> French Creole for 'without worries' or 'carefree'.

*the section buzzed as the introduction of the crowd's favourite song of the year played from our music truck. Some people had the full regalia- huge feathers spanning several feet above their heads and beyond their shoulders, but I was able to maneuver myself between the crowd of plumes very easily. My costume was beautifully embellished, but it was just a top and bottom piece. I even left the leg pieces at home as I didn't want to risk them obstructing my movement. The chorus was approaching, and just as the beat dropped, the security guards released their grip and frenzy ensued on the stage. The floodgates broke open. Hundreds, if not thousands of masqueraders like wild ants, jumping, waving and wining. I felt renewed. Confetti rained down, and I soon found that I was crying tears of bliss. Though I had been on the road all morning and the day before, something about crossing the stage on Tuesday made me feel like a different person. Not even the burning of my pinky toe or the blazing Port of Spain sun could kill my joy. I did not care who was looking, who came to dance or how I looked. I released every ounce of energy on that stage. When the bridge of the song said 'Stamp my name on the stage', I obeyed without hesitation; taking my right palm and slamming it to the floor among the dancing feet. As the song wound down to the end, the security officers began ushering our section off the stage, but I wasn't ready for it to be over. I squeezed my way through them and ran back to the entrance to do it all again with the upcoming section. I waited for their turn, and repeated the whole thing. A second baptism.*

This thick description details my experience of crossing the stage on carnival Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2018. This performance is self-directed and self-indulgent, with no particular audience. From the outsider's perspective, this might

not be identified with any profound meaning or purpose. However, this does not discount the fact that it is a moving experience for the performer. As such, I want to turn the focus away from the viewer's reception of mas, and toward the performer's experience.

This deals less with a question of what it *means*, but rather what it *does* for the masquerader.

In looking at this, I employ what might be called a reverse-Deleuzian philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of 'affect', as proposed in *In A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), has been used to identify how audiences are *moved* by viewing a performance. Cull (2005, p.8) says that this approach offers 'an alternative to the over-emphasis on interpretation and the construction of meaning'. While this theory identifies 'affect' as being produced by the performing body and received by the viewing body, I wish to adapt this principle by looking at the masquerading body as the *affected* entity.

This is to say that rather than being expected to manifest/affect a particular meaning that is scripted in the portrayal, (as traditional masqueraders are), the pretty mas performance is directed *by* the self and *for* the self. Perhaps this is what leads Riggio (2004, p.25) to comment that 'while this massive street festival is boring to watch, it is a mesmerizingly heady experience to play'. The 'affect' is inverted to the masquerader through the level of autonomy that is permitted for them to give a performance of freedom. This cathartic experience is reflected in several soca songs, including Kerwin Dubois' 2013 release, *Forget About It*:

*If you see me out on the road,  
holding drinks in my hand,  
And if you find I getting on bad,  
that's part of the plan.*

*Don't question me,  
This is my therapy!*

Through this, Dubois prioritises the personal benefit of his festival experience over the potential reaction of the onlooker. This echoes Riggio's work (2004, p.21) that cites the virtues of carnival as encompassing the 'healing power of laughter, play, and fantasy.' The phrase 'get on bad'<sup>6</sup> is central to this experience, and appears in numerous songs to suggest the carefree and unrepressed performance that is sanctioned in mas. Machel Montano (2014) blazons:

*Every time we hear soca music  
We getting on bad, bad, bad.  
Everybody misbehaving...  
Every year around this time, this is  
the place to be;  
To unwind  
Just set your spirit free, let go!  
Be what you feel to be!  
Just let the music take control!*

While this focus on self is considered by many to be the undoing of carnival, Scott (2002, p. 299) explores the inclination to 'get on bad' in its original context of the post-emancipation *jamette* mas. As such, we can consider these doings to have been inherited by contemporary mas. Alfonso (2019) connects the 'true essence' of carnival to irrepressibility, 'raw freedom', a

These are all associated with the purgative effect (or affect) that was facilitated by traditional masquerade in its original context, and, as such, are retained in pretty mas.

In terms of self-presentation, 'play yourself' is another phrase that is central to the Trinidadian carnival idiom. It urges the masquerader to realize the height of bliss, and also, as Munro (2016, p.31) elaborates, 'it suggests that the enjoyment and abandon expressed during Carnival represent the real self...that is, being the person you really feel yourself to be outside of normalizing institutions'. In *Like Ah Boss* (2015) Machel Montano begs the onlooker not to deprive him of his chance to experience this euphoria:

*I just want to play myself  
Leave me, let meh play a mas...  
Meh pride in de lost and found!  
Watch meh how ah winin' down...  
Is whole year I live for de Carnival  
And I know, that it will be magical  
Misbehavin'!  
And I don't care at all*



Figure 6. Security team for the mas band 'Bliss' exercising crowd control on Carnival Tuesday (5<sup>th</sup> March) 2019. Photography by Damia

This would indicate that the affects produced and received by the contemporary masquerader are sourced within the self- a self that is otherwise restrained by societal expectations.

### Implications of Costuming

The modern masquerader's individualist inclination might be linked to the literal stripping down of costumes into designs that reveal more of the body. We might consider this to be less of a 'mask' and more of an exhibition. Clare Lewis' (1996, p.42) study on the performance of women in Brazil's carnival highlights the politics associated with 'wearing the body-as-costume'. She links this to the autonomous control of one's public image. Similarly Copeland and Hodges (2014) historicize the emergence of *bikini and beads* as a signifier of new social identity for Trinidadian women who experienced socioeconomic mobility. We might consider further, how 'self' and 'body' are linked in performance. Masqueraders, then, can be thought of as 'playing themselves' in a corporeal sense.

This is unlike traditional mas, where Liverpool cites that 'people use clothing and masks to make serious political protests.' (1993, p.478). These meanings are always overt, if not assumed. Kalicharan-Figueroa (2019) gives a testimony of how she fashions her Babydoll performance to address 'relevant social issues that are timeless- illegitimate babies, abandonment, rape and prostitution'. In *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, Liverpool (1993, p.409) discusses how the Jab Molassie and Blue Devil were employed as iconoclasm to Christian teachings, and the association of blackness with savagery. These examples highlight a subculture where performances are used as what

Kerrigan (2018, p.263) terms an 'indigenous intellectual device' through which protest can be enacted in sociopolitical commentary. Hence, their affects were produced through character and costume that were 'built up' to reflect otherness. In a reverse manner, contemporary mas is 'stripped down' to expose the self.

However, in both forms of mas, the visibility is employed as a communication of social identities. Kerrigan (2005, p.3) remarks that the wild and bawdy dances of the participants, in conjunction with portrayals of devils, dragons and beasts, were strategies through which 'they attempted to offend polite society, which they blamed for decades of suffering.' This might be compared to pretty mas' emphasis on 'getting on bad' and 'stripping down' the expected, decorous ways of presenting the body. There is a common construction of performance to cause 'bacchanal', that is, to disrupt everyday perceptions that frame the self according to socially upheld notions of behaviour and dress. In this sense, both contemporary and traditional masqueraders can be seen as (re)claiming their visibility in antagonism to external perceptions of self.

### Music and Communal Affect

In terms of the affect that is received and internalised by the masquerader(s) in response to music, Dubois and Montano echo the same reflect in *Possessed* (2013):

*Something about this music...  
Taking over me, taking over my  
soul,  
It's the kind of feeling that I cannot  
control,  
Messing with my body messing with  
my mind,  
Every time it hit me, man I does start  
to wine!*

Coupling these depictions with the piece of thick description that opened this section, it

can be seen that music has a principal influence over the movement and performance of pretty mas. It is affective in its power to transform the performing body. This understanding is closer to Deleuze and Guattari's intended use of affect, 'not as something which is simply 'internal' ...but which, in effect, allows that person to perceive their self' (Cull, 2005, p.62).

There is a dialogic relationship between the people and the party music. The soca artiste internalises the ethos of the masqueraders, and the masqueraders, in turn, responds to the lyrics and rhythm, depending on the effectiveness and relevance of such. As Darryl 'Farmer Nappy' Henry expresses in *My House* (2014):

*You not movin' your waist by  
chance, no.  
It's the rhythm!  
I bring music to make you dance,  
yes,  
Don't refuse it, it's like walking  
footsteps,  
It's natural!*

The DJ's role is then to compile the songs that have proven to be 'crowd-movers' throughout the carnival season. In his blog, 'D Soca Analyst' (2016) urges DJs to quickly change a song once they notice that the crowd is not receptive to it. This motivation to *affect* revelers through rhythm is comparable to the traditional masqueraders' motivations to make an impression on their audience- through awe, disgust or humour, as the case may be.

Because the movement of mas is that of the crowd, one can say that soca's affect is communal. Hence, the *mas movement* is *mass movement*. For each soca song that focuses on *I, the masquerader*, there is another that emphasises *we, the people*- 'Jumping up together, waving up together, winin' up together' (Alvarez et al, 2019). Though the affect is located within a realm of shared interest that evokes what Turner (1982) defines as 'communitas'.

This concept, like the affect theory, has been used to examine audience experiences. Turner's work, however, is rooted in anthropology, and is useful in

looking at the dynamics of cultural groups. He suggests that *communitas* is the sense of togetherness that is felt among a group of people who participate in the shared experience of a cultural phenomenon.

Alfonso's (2019) experience demonstrates *communitas* in the process of creating costumes and training for traditional mas. He suggests that the common passion for the mas, and the sense of purpose in fashioning its technical elements is unmatched by the large pretty mas groups. In his writing, Minshall (1999, p.33) also considers the foundations of mas-making as a community based practice, and laments the decline as people in modern communities grow more distant and costume creation becomes a moneymaking venture.

However, one might consider the sense of *communitas* that is felt by contemporary masqueraders through their mas(s) movement. Guilbault (2004) proffers that the emphasis on movement instructions in soca music serves to 'make physical participation and acting together central to creating a sense of community' (p.235). This can be interpreted as a shared experience that engenders feelings of oneness among the crowd of masqueraders following the same affective music and movement. This is exemplified in Destra Garcia's (2001) lyrics 'marinating under the sun, this is how we does all become one and jump up in the air!'. Though the interactions of the pretty mas crowd are not as intimate, it can be considered that their collective consciousness engenders a sense of cohesion comparable to that of traditional masquerade. Riggio (2004, p.13) affirms that urbanness is central to carnival, considering that it is originated in the move from plantation to city. If we regard the distancing of communal relations to be a

feature of urbanisation, we can consider that mas, therefore, has evolved to incorporate the modern sense of community in its festive atmosphere.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have presented theoretical evidence alongside accounts from *old time mas* and *pretty mas* in order to dismantle the false distinction between the two. This is implicated with cultural change whereby the practices currently regarded as sacred, were once considered profane. The present-day 'profane' has faced similar criticism as the historical profane-turned-sacred. This common point of contention- that is, the *bacchanal*, is a fruitful intersection at which I have been able to explore the parallels between the two types of mas.

One of these parallels was identified in the ways that both forms of mas allow participants to depart from the everyday, within a space that is regulated by its own standards of normality. In this sense, I discovered that the inclination toward behaviours of excess is an aspect that has been retained from the initial purpose of carnival. I found that no matter the nature of the celebration (aesthetically versus politically oriented), the festive space allows masqueraders the autonomy to direct their public image in a performance that subverts ordinary expectations.

The following section looked deeper into the function of mas as an affective experience for those involved. I advanced the claim that the source of affect in contemporary mas can be located in freedom to 'unmask' the self, as well as the music that validates this. This connection to the 'spirit' of freedom was likened to the traditional masqueraders' personal connections with the narratives that propel

their performances. Though the affect of pretty mas is personal and individualistic, its ethos is shared among the group of masqueraders, therefore stimulating a sense of *communitas* that is comparable to that of the community-based traditional predecessor.

Altogether, this investigation revealed that mas is polysemous- taking on different purposes for its participants, based on their circumstances. At heart, however, all of these purposes are propelled by the motivation toward expression of personal and communal conditions through social engagement. These motivating factors are nonetheless intuitive for the masqueraders whose experiences this analysis was based on. As such, the ideas emerged from this paper are indeed the subtext of the performances of masqueraders who, in Harris' words, 'live rather than analyse their art'.

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## ‘Pretty Mas’, Bikini and Beads in Trinidad and Tobago; Visitors and its Transnational Effects

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### Abstract

This article discusses the globalised commodification of Pretty Mas’ carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on the Bikini and Beads Mas’ form. It explains its links with the West Indian diaspora, since almost half the players in the carnival large bands are islanders who reside permanently in the country, and the other half are visitors mainly coming from the diaspora. The corpus shows that tourism became an impactful target for the organisation of this category of Pretty Mas’ while explaining the discrepancies between the national and global debate regarding the Bikini and Beads form of masquerade through an ethnographic analysis. It also presents the different social and symbolic meanings perceived by local players and visitors or “travelling players” while playing in the same Bikini and Beads Mas’ bands. The article goes on to consider the economic capital imposed by the Bikini and Beads management and its different implications for local players. It also shows how the marketing law of supply and demand allows the Bikini and Beads all-inclusive bands to increase the price of their costumes, basing them on the purchasing power of foreign tourists’ currencies, rather than that of the local residents.

**Key Words:** Trinidad and Tobago, Carnival, Bikini and Beads Mas’, Tourism, West Indian diaspora.

### Introduction

“Sweetie?!” a woman at the 2009 Notting Hill carnival said to me: “If you do want to understand this [indicating the parade] you have to go to Trinidad. You have to see the mother of all carnivals!” She referred to the Trinidad carnival as the mother of the West Indian festivals that take place all over the world. According to her, I would never understand “the children of carnival” of the West Indian diaspora, as she called them, if I had not experienced their “mother”. This was the starting point for my interest in the carnival event on the island of Trinidad and its relations with those of the West Indian diaspora ones all over the world<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 6 Bikini and Beads, Pretty Mas’, players at the end of the parade, Caribana Toronto, 2014, ©Maica Gugolati.

The material here described is taken from my doctoral research, 2013-2018, based on multi-situated fieldwork in Pretty Mas’

<sup>7</sup> There have been several academic studies of the globalized flux of industrial culture as it manifests in West Indian festivals all over the world, and the virtual and digital participation in Mas’ of the

diaspora and locally based Trinidadians (Riggio (2004), Green and Scher (2007), Scher (2003), Browne (2013), Capelleveen (1992) and Manning (1983).

mascams and performance on the island of Trinidad, both in the capital Port of Spain and in the regional carnivals of the center of the island. I supported my investigation with in-depth qualitative interviews to carnival organisers and players; I continued using participant observation methodology while creating carnival costumes with some carnival masmen in Toronto, Canada, and Trinidad, TT, and as a visual anthropologist while making photographic portfolios for some of the carnivals bands I collaborated with.

The large carnival bands in Trinidad and in the diaspora offer a specific carnival aesthetic called by their managers Pretty Mas', Bikini and Beads, because their players wear beaded bikinis. The formal category of Mas' named Pretty Mas' appeared after the country's independence (1962) (Gugolati 2018 a). Nowadays Pretty Mas' refers mainly to one of its aesthetics: the Bikini and Beads subgenre. This style of Pretty Mas' played in the carnival of Trinidad's capital Port of Spain is mainly practiced by the younger generation of carnival players, usually between the end of teenagerhood to the end of the thirties; most of them are women. However, this generational phenomenon is peculiar to the contest in the capital: in Trinidad's other cities Pretty Mas', Bikini and Beads bands are followed by both genders, men and women, and all ages. Bikini and Beads is the most popular form of masquerade in Trinidad's parade, and is also seen and played on the streets of diaspora carnivals, as well as on the web and on television.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I discovered that the Bikini and Beads environment is very much a transnational

one: many of their masmen, and King and Queen big costume<sup>8</sup> performers live and work between Trinidad and the diaspora cities all over the world, creating and performing carnival costumes seasonally. In addition, almost half the players of the Trinidadian large bands come from the diaspora and travel to Trinidad every year, visiting their families and attending carnival, usually in the capital.

The Bikini and Beads Mas' style is one of the most recent and globalised genres of carnival masquerade that follow a colorful and sexy global aesthetic similar to that found in Rio and Las Vegas. In Trinidad there is a general tendency by local intellectuals and carnival practitioners to separate it from the other aesthetics of Mas' while usually criticising it due to its commodification. The most frequently heard expression during my fieldwork in Trinidad was the lament of non-Bikini and Beads masmen<sup>9</sup> who described Mas' as "dead" or killed by the Bikini and Beads style.

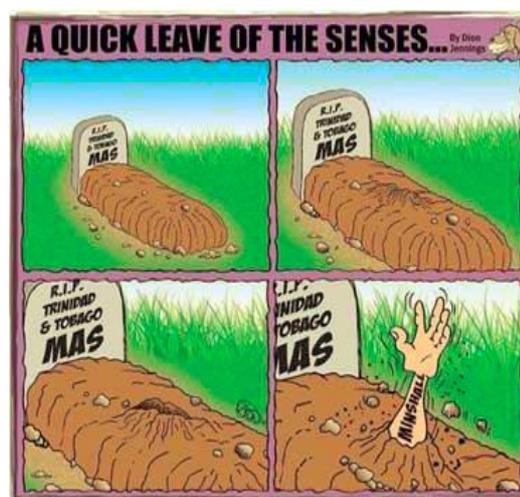


Figure 2: Peter Minshall Mas' Fans Facebook page, February 6th 2016<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> In technical Mas' design jargon, big costumes are giant carnival costumes, usually set on wheels due to their size and weight. They are the King and Queen of each carnival band; they compete at the

King and Queen competition each year before the parade.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Peter-Minshall-Mas-Fans-477738325205/>

The cartoon above (Figure 2) was posted on the Peter Minshall Mas' Fans Facebook page. It criticises the Bikini and Beads Mas' as the death of creativity, and imagines hopefully that Masman Minshall will rise again, from his temporal creative retreat, to make reborn Mas'. However, in the past the aesthetic of Peter Minshall was not always appreciated since it differs from the other Mas' bands in its artistic costuming style and theatrical performance: "That ain't mas, that's theater" was one opinion reported in 1983 (Anthony 1989: 436). In fact, even during my fieldwork masmen remembered that many players preferred to play Mas' with other bands, and to watch Minshall's band on television afterwards. Nowadays, the historical question about "what is Mas'", whether as a form of choreographic street theater (a pro-Minshall style) or as a free form of improvisation, is still debated by players and masmen who are for or against the dominating Bikini and Beads form.

### Pretty Mas', Bikini and Beads, and tourism



Figure 3: Screenshot: Discover Trinidad and Tobago online magazine, MEP Caribbean Publishers 2019.

Today's organisation of Bikini and Beads Pretty Mas' large bands in Trinidad is

discussed in tandem with the production of soca music, both of which have created important income source for Trinidad (Grant 2008; SCBD 2006). Soca is nowadays the most-heard musical and rhythmic base of carnival and is broadcast by mobile sound systems placed on the trucks which parade alongside the masqueraders.

Over time soca started to focus more on the melodies instead of the lyrics in order to democratise enjoyment of the genre, and to facilitate its commercialisation worldwide: "music is an international language, people, they don't need to understand yuh" (Ras Shorty I's statement in G.B.T.V. Archives 1997). The soca genre had evolved into carnival party songs and was intended to make people dance to celebrate unity. This sense of festive national and regional unity (Tony Hall et al. 1999 DOC) ended up expanding into a global reach: "We try to re-package it for everyone. It has to be listened everywhere. The goal is to get the international appeal that crosses all cultures!" observed Marc (2014), a music promoter who works between Europe and Trinidad. Drunkenness, euphoria at life, and the sensual dance of winin' started to monopolise the carnival musical scene, creating the feeling of a party on the street (Punch et al. 1986 DOC). These last characteristics are performed in Bikini and Beads Mas', especially by women players who, wearing beaded bikinis and winin' to soca rhythms, add the claim of sexual agency (Carey 2011 and interviewed in 2013, Noel 2010) to the traditional emancipated freedom historically related to Mas' (Mason 1998). This unchoreographed way of performing a shareable sense of happiness wearing similar costumes allows participants to feel a sense of oneness, but also to transcend national borders while at the same time appealing to the international audience.

The transnational Bikini and Beads masmen I met echo Marc's aim in relation to soca: they do not think of Mas' just as a seasonal and local phenomenon but wish to reproduce it all over the world throughout the entire year. This type of Mas' is viewed by the private carnival enterprises and the Trinidadian government as an economic opportunity and "viable business" (TT Guardian 7 03 2011). Pan-Caribbean, West Indian diasporic and foreign, pan-African contingents have increased their participation in recent years (Douglas, Newsday TT 7 02 2014). Trinidad is defined as the "Mecca" of West Indian Carnivals (Riggio 2004: 22; Ho and Nurse 2005). Its carnival is now the reference point for West Indian festivals in the Caribbean diaspora, particularly in Anglophone areas such as Canada, the USA and the UK. However, this form of Mas' has also spread in recent years to non-English-speaking European countries such as the Netherlands and Germany, and has been the model for new projects in Africa and Asia. Three of the masmen I met during my fieldwork in Trinidad and Canada have participated in new carnival performances in the Nigerian city of Port Harcourt, (Abu, Leadership. Nigeria's Newspaper 25 01 2014), in South Korea and in Hong Kong (Gugolati 2018b).

Even before independence (1962), Trinidad's carnival was marketed as an international tourist destination. The visual archives of the 1950s show carnival as a spectacular attraction for locals and tourists, mainly from the US and the UK (British Pathé 1957 a, b). During one of my periods of field research in 2014 the Trinbagonian<sup>4</sup> government started to advertise carnival as a tourist package where Trinidad (regarded as the non-touristic island of the Republic) was promoted for its carnival and Tobago (considered a national and international

tourist destination) was presented as a relaxing location to "recover" in after taking part in the intense and exhausting carnival activities. In sum, national and private tourist advertising and the carnival promotions tend to focus on "tropical paradise" (Thompson K. 2007: 4) imagery, omitting to mention the problematic crime rates in the country.

However, many Trinidadians criticise the marketing of carnival, stating that the national discourse about carnival is an economic strategy designed to market the island state on an international platform.

In 2014, Alpharita, a Trinidadian individual costume designer and player, explained to me that:

"The TVs want to market Trinidad as a tourist attraction, but we don't care about tourists! We have oil and energy; we don't need tourism! Tobago needs it. We are lucky people: no natural disasters, no hurricanes and we don't protest!"

Her statement emphasised the discrepancy between the government's marketing of carnival as a tourist attraction and the feelings of the Trinidadians, who are aware of their economic independence which does not involve wealthy first-world tourism (Association of Caribbean States 2014), as happens in other Caribbean countries.

Other Trinidadian nationals I met who share Alpharita's opinion, assert that the data provided by the Ministry of Tourism is uncertain and usually exaggerated; in fact, tourism constitutes only about 3% of GDP, and the island of Tobago is the main attraction (Puar 2005). The main income of Trinidad and Tobago is from the petrochemical industry, even if it provides

<sup>4</sup> This term refers to the whole population of the two-island state.

just 4% of local employment (Government Republic of Trinidad & Tobago 2015: 80). It seems, in contrast, that 10% of the local population is engaged in disparate carnival-season activities (Cunningham 2008). It is always difficult to estimate the seasonal employment provided by carnival, as there is no official estimate and most of the collaborators are not declared workers. During my field research I asked for official data from the government, but I did not receive a clear response. While it is possible to count the number of participants based on the registration records of the bands when they compete for the masquerade contests, an estimate that includes the participants of unregistered bands and the audience, it is counted as an average.

Playing carnival, especially the Bikini and Beads style, requires considerable investment. A player has to buy a carnival costume that, if offered by a large carnival band in Port of Spain, requires the outlay of a specific economic capital (Bourdieu 1980). One female Bikini and Beads costume can cost up to TT\$ 15,000 (US\$ 2,400) (The New Local Mag 2015); some masqueraders add to the cost of the costume with extra services, such as makeup artists, professional photographers or decorated accessories to personalise their costume (Gordon, Trinidad Guardian 2 04 2013; Kerrigan, Trinidad Guardian 2 04 2013). For visitors, the cost is around US\$ 4,000 for men and US\$ 4,900 for women (along with flights, car rental, food and drink outside Mas' and a hotel) (The New Local Mag 2015). Large Bikini and Beads carnival bands usually organise an all-inclusive service, similar to a hotel package, which the player can pay for when they book the costume: "When you buy a costume you don't really pay for the costume" (2014) a Maswoman told me, describing the service her large band provides annually. The goal of the all-inclusive management is to provide an "experience of Mas", as the masmen told

me. The costume, therefore, is just one part of the entire package the players buy in order to have the "experience" of Mas'.

"What you know abroad about Trinidad is Pretty Mas', women and bikinis! That's what Mas' is for people abroad!" Dea, a black American player who comes to Trinidad for a week every year to play carnival with her West Indian boyfriend, told me (2014). What she meant by "people abroad" is a specific category of the population from the young West Indies diaspora and their friends and partners. According to Dea, as soon as they have the means, they travel to Trinidad to experience the "mother" of the carnivals they frequent in the diasporas.

## Traveling players

Foreigner tourism and local tourism welcome in Trinidad.

Calypso Rose, introducing her concert in *One Hand Don't Clap* DOC (1991) USA by Kavery Dutta



Figure 4: Bikini and Beads player, improvising playing Pan, Caribana Toronto 2013, ©Maica Gugolati.

"Do you play Mas'?" I asked Victoria and Anaya, two Trinidadian-Canadian players from Toronto in their thirties, in 2014. "At least once a year!" they replied. Victoria and Anaya are players of large Bikini and Bead carnival bands who belong to the first-generation children of West Indians, with

middle-higher incomes, and travel to Trinidad with the security and privilege of an unrestricted passage to the country (Clifford 1992). They usually frequent more than one carnival festival per year, participating in the one that takes place near the cities where they live, and traveling to carnivals around the world that take place at different times. This category of diaspora players has a transnational interdependence where short-term visits replace the permanent historical displacement of the diaspora (Conway 2009). Players who travel to Trinidad from the diaspora translate the emigrant's attachment to their family's home country and customs into a yearly vacation to Trinidad, and to other West Indian carnivals around the world.

I call this category of diasporic players "traveling players", using the term "traveling" in order to evoke Clifford's notion of traveling cultures (1992). For Clifford, the term "travel" carries two opposing values: one acts as a superficial synonym for tourism, and the other refers to exploration, research and the transformative power of encounters. Clifford stresses the intersections of race, gender and class in the concept of "traveling", noting that much travel literature is a bourgeois activity, usually monopolised by a white male traveler. Diasporic displacement, for Clifford, is not the same as traveling, because it is not temporary (Clifford 1994). A diaspora is formed of displaced people who feel, maintain, revive, and invent a connection with a prior home (ibid); it is defined by the recognition of their heterogeneity and diversity (S. Hall 1990).

Many calypso singers refer to traveling players as "local tourists" (Henry and Nurse 1996, quoted in Guilbault 2007). The epigraph at the top of this section is a quote by Calypso Rose, who in the 1990s was already welcoming both local and foreign tourists to her concerts. Von

Koningsbruggen defines Trinidad Mas' tourism as "tourism without tourists" (1997: 208). In line with this definition, while staying in Trinidad I often heard the term "tourist" used to refer to the category of overseas tourists who are visibly foreign, in terms of their behavior and appearance. However, I noticed that this definition tout court is given mainly to white tourists, whereas black American tourists, for example, are categorised at times as tourists because of their foreignness, and at other times as "visitors" because of their skin color.

Trinidadian migrant communities worldwide maintain contact with their home country (Scher 2007, Burke 2008) and visit Trinidad usually at Christmas or for carnival (Miller 1994). Masman A, a traveling Trinidadian masman, stated: "Most of my friends, I would say 80%, live abroad, we meet once a year for carnival here in Trinidad" (2014). For him, as a Trinidadian emigrant, carnival is the moment when his family and friends, who migrated all over the world, can meet in person.

Masman A's story is not unusual; in fact 70% of the visitors to carnival in Trinidad are from the diaspora; they make up almost half the players in the large bands of Port of Spain (Nurse 2004a and 2004b). The other 30% of visitors are non-diasporic tourists, who are usually invited by the traveling players.

In the following sections I will show, however, how local attitudes towards the organisation of Bikini and Beads Pretty Mas' maintain a dualistic position towards visitors and tourists, creating a mix of local performative meanings with economic profits and the expectations of traveling players.

## A dual attitude towards visitors



Figure 5: Trinidad and Tobago Guardian’s screenshot, 21st 2020.

Carnival is an activity that is at times endogamous, as a show of national and cultural unity, while simultaneously acting as an exogamous advertisement for international investment and tourism (Aching 2002). Each year in Trinidad, during the carnival period, private and governmental associations organise public debates about the history of Mas’, in which subjects as diverse as gender, community participation and traditional masquerade are discussed. I noted during my time in Trinidad that a dichotomy usually emerges when current carnival management is discussed: at times the discussion displays neoliberal tendencies, while at others it takes a protectionist tone.

The first view is based on the commercial opportunities presented by carnival, and on strategies to export this element of Trinidad, as a kind of “copy paste” (Barrat 2017) carnival all over the world. In contrast, the second perspective is based on a patriotic and nationalistic approach that perceives tourism as a continuation of Trinidad’s post-colonial or neocolonial servitude, and a new face on the island’s historical enslavement by a foreign power (Koningsbruggen 1997). As a result of

these opposing opinions, a common debate in Trinidad is about how to build an export strategy that protects Trinidadian ownership of carnival, but also profits from it (Nurse 1996).

This mix between local and global appeal, and the traditional meanings embedded in Mas’, creates tension around the phenomenon of Bikini and Beads style.

## “Trinidad is nice, is a paradise” Pretty Mas’ Bikini and Beads, and the consumption of a Tropical paradise



Figure 6: Bikini and Beads, Pretty Mas’ players, Port of Spain 2012, ©Maica Gugolati.

The title of this section is taken from the refrain of a Brother Valentino calypso, “Dis Place Nice” (1975):

You talk 'bout a place  
 Where the people are carefree  
 living  
 It is such a place  
 Of fun loving, spreeing and feting  
 Tis the land where people  
 Don't care if Ash Wednesday fall  
 on Good Friday  
 Man they love to struggle  
 In this happy, go-lucky way  
 [...] So the foreigner come for  
 Carnival  
 And he telling heself after he had a  
 ball

Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a  
paradise...

To live now is high  
Cost of living these days is the real  
thing  
The clothes that they buy  
To expensive parties they going  
They would leave their belly  
And buy clothes to go and waste  
down their body  
[...] Down town Frederick Street on  
Friday evening  
Is mas' and fashion parade you  
seeing  
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a  
paradise

In the song, and particularly in the verses I have quoted here, two reasons are given why Trinidad may be viewed as “a paradise”. First, Brother Valentino describes the “foreigner” enjoying carnival, where he “had a ball” and felt freed from the cares of life. The Calypso singer recounts the common historical description of the Caribbean region as a tropical paradise fulfilled by imperialistic fantasies (Sheller 2003). During the final colonial period too, Trinidad was advertised by the British empire as “a paradise” embodying a co-lived racially diverse space, where luxury and simplicity were described as points of attraction and appreciation for British tourism (British Pathé 1954: 0:34 min).

In this section, I analyse the local construction of a paradise designed to give players “a ball”. This imagery of the tropical paradise has been adopted by the Bikini and Beads management. Brother Valentino’s expression, “to have a ball”, was repeated many times by the leaders of the large bands.

“With Bikini and Beads Mas’ we are re-appropriating our own exoticism,” Tina, a Trinidadian woman in her twenties,

affirmed (2016). She explained how the typical Caribbean construction of paradise for tourists had been re-appropriated by local Trinidadians. If “appropriation” is evocative of the exploitative acts which result from the dualistic relationship of the colonised and coloniser, of dominated and dominant groups (Ashley and Plesh 2002; Young 2000), then the act of “re-appropriation” Tina describes, suggests agency and reverses colonial power relations. Local Trinidadian players represent themselves as they wish to be seen, continuing an adversarial postcolonial discussion against colonial appropriation, exploitation and misrepresentation of themselves (Dawes 1997; Pearce 2008 DOC). But which image are these players re-appropriating? This is a common and serious topic of debate at the meetings of the carnival associations in Trinidad. In Tina’s discourse, the Bikini and Beads form and carnival in general, from its post-independence expression, should represent a re-appropriation of a self-representation of a paradise where, instead of catering to tourists, Trinidadian players who live in the country “had a ball”.

This expression reflects the oneiric imagery that is represented and advertised nationally and internationally, and the fantastical version of Trinidad which is embodied by both local and traveling players. In one example, Lionel, a diasporic Trinidadian who lives in New York, posted on my Facebook wall in winter 2015 with attached the image below (Photo 7): “Two days of carnival is a mini utopia for me... an escape in my wonderland, no worries just pure fun and nuff wine with my crew”.



Figure 7 Post on Facebook, on a personal wall, December 2015.

Lionel experiences Trinidad’s carnival as a wonderland, another kind of paradise, reflecting a common feeling among traveling players who add to the ritualistic celebration of carnival a feeling of vacation release. Photo 7 is an example of the representation of carnival, and Pretty Mas’, nationally and internationally, as offering happiness, eternal youth and non-stop partying, which it portrays as part of the daily life of Trinidad. Contemporary Pretty Mas’ Bikini and Beads large bands capitalise on this desire to “have a ball”, in a wonderland or paradise, and focus their entertainments on players.

In Trinidad, Bikini and Beads Pretty Mas’ large bands providing an all-inclusive package offer players joining the carnival the experience of a sense of exclusivity. These large bands introduced the standards of services and amenities of all-inclusive holiday resorts into the carnival experience. This evokes what George Gmelch (2003) describes as the relationship of exclusivism and exclusion in Barbados’s all-inclusive hotels. According to the author, the all-inclusive hotels create a separate sphere, in which tourists do not need to have contact with locals or local production. Similarly in Trinidad, large carnival bands annually

privatise the streets of Port of Spain with their security systems, and players can enjoy their exclusive experience without the need to know other forms of Mas’ that are more locally focused.

This form of Mas’ promotes exoticism and exclusivity for its players. However, since the players are both locals and visitors, the meaning of “exoticism” as the quality of seeming unusual, generally associated with a distant location, sometimes does not match up. Locally the carnival marketing in Trinidad responds to the maxim, which I heard several times while I was in the field, that “foreign is better”. This leads to the provision of extra-territory foods and international drinks as delicacies: for example, strawberries and champagne are included in the all-inclusive services. However, for the traveling players I met, exoticism means a condition of “authenticity” and locality. Anaya, another second-generation Trinidadian, stated that “when we go by our family’s homes, we are looking for roti<sup>5</sup> and doubles, and not for sushi fetes!” (2014). These traveling players were referencing, complainingly, what seems to be exotic for local players as attempts to accommodate and appeal to international visitors. Even though in these conversations I always mentioned to Anaya and her peers the existence of other, smaller fetes and Mas’ styles in the capital and in the regional carnivals that could provide different experiences of carnival, they replied that in the end their visit is a vacation where time is limited, and the experience has to be concentrated. “You know, it’s a vacation! You will meet people that you know; they haven’t seen you for a long time. And of course, you drink more and party longer, because it is a vacation!” (Victoria 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Roti, a Hindi word that means bread in Trinidad, is an East Indian dish (Fung 2012 DOC) that became one of the main national dishes in Trinidad. It is

made by wrapping flat bread around chicken or channa (chickpeas) curry and aloo (potatoes).

The Bikini and Beads Mas' offers a series of benefits for these traveling players: a festive environment that does not require previous attendance or knowledge, added to the possibility of sharing it with friends and family members. The act of traveling for these "traveling players" is therefore a mixture of a vacation and the diasporic reconnection with the family roots. It combines the general experience of tourism that seeks an extraordinary experience provided by the displacement of the vacation, while reassuringly maintaining some familiar elements of their expectations and imaginations (Borghi and Celata 2009).

The Bikini and Beads Mas' is sold as the possibility of feeling and living the "experience" of carnival as a "tropical" (Thompson 2007) "paradise" (Nixon 2015) for both local and traveling players, who add to it the value of their family's "home" (Kakali 2017). Playing Mas' therefore assumes an important symbolic identity value that is stronger than the economic constraints imposed by the Bikini and Beads form.

"The price of the costumes has increased, but I don't mind paying it. This is unique, we are part of all of this. This is who we are, so why not?", Sofia, a Canadian woman with Trinidadian roots, told me while having a break from the parade on Carnival Monday in Port of Spain (2015). Many players from the diaspora are prepared to spend any amount of money in order to experience a kind of ethnoscape (Appadurai [1996] 2005) that offers a sense of belonging.

However, the Bikini and Beads style of the large bands is viewed differently by Trinidadians who live in Trinidad. In fact, they usually join these large bands to exhibit their social position as part of an economic elite, where prestige is obtained thanks to the media present at the parade

who immortalise their presence into the social and economic capital of these collective groups; or, since a lot of the players are from the diasporas, it allows locals to achieve anonymity by providing a shield against local gossip.

Playing in Bikini and Beads large bands therefore provides two main values: for the traveling players, it is a liberating vacation moment where they reconnect with family members and their roots, while for Trinidadian islanders it is a demonstration and a stage for the display of social and economic capital. However, "having a ball" in these large all-inclusive bands implies a considerable financial

outlay where, as Brother Valentino said in an ironic tone: local Trinidadians while portraying themselves as "carefree" and "happy, go-lucky", can hyperbolically be ready to "leave their belly" (to starve) to pursue and keep affirming that lifestyle appropriation.

### **The impact of economic capital in Bikini and Beads Mas' and the "Jean and Dinah" local perception.**



Figure 8 A Pretty Mas' band crossing Piccadilly street, Port of Spain 2015, ©Maica Gugolati.

With a new economic recession in Trinidad (Singh, TT Guardian 5 12 2015; Stabroeknews 2015) starting during the last year of my field research in 2015, some of the local players could not afford to pay

carnival or to attend some of the elite fetes. Advertisements for bank loans to fund carnival expenses can usually be heard on the radio stations from the beginning of the carnival season. Moreover, most of the Trinidadian carnival players I met told me that they have to choose their vacations based on their participation in Mas' each year: most could not afford to play Mas' and travel abroad during the rest of the year. Every carnival season, they have to make a choice in line with their annual budget.

Some local players found several clever ways to take part in some of the large bands even when the economic capacity to join them is lacking. The models for the costumes, who are immortalised in the bands' portfolios for example, could be given a carnival costume as a form of payment. I have met pairs of identical twins, both male and female, who share their costumes in order to play one day each at the parade, attaching their badges to their arms in order to be able to swap them and join the parade. I have also met young men who faked their costumes by wearing swimming trunks of a similar color to the section they wished to play and at the moment of the parade attached pieces of other players' costumes that had fallen onto the streets.

Kevin, a Trinidadian man in his forties, told me: "Having a Yankee accent shows you have escaped the plantation! Attending an all-inclusive fete – shows yuh reach, yuh on de upward mobility path!" (2015). Kevin identifies a kind of players' postcolonial neurosis<sup>6</sup> where a person from the Majority World<sup>7</sup> (Alam 2008) adopts a "Yankee accent" to feel an internal sense of success that shows they have left the historical colonised birthplace: "escaped the

plantation", for the First World. This same category of players Kevin thinks would be ready to "leave their belly" (in Brother Valentino's words) in order to obtain the social recognition of belonging to these imaginary communities (Anderson [1991] 2009) provided by expensive fetes organised by all-inclusive bands.

However, not everybody agrees on finding informal ways to take part in these carnival bands, expressing a feeling of exploitation by this local-gone-global cultural industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972).

Jean and Dinah, Rosita and  
Clementina  
Round the corner posing,  
Bet yuh life something they selling  
And if yuh ketch dem broken  
Yuh could get them for nuttin  
Don't make a row The Yankees  
gone and Sparrow take over now  
[...]

Mighty Sparrow, "Jean and Dinah" (1956)

Sparrow's song was quoted several times by players and masmen. It literally refers to female prostitution around the American military base in Chaguaramas, in the west of Trinidad, during the Second World War (Koningsbruggen 1997). In the verse quoted above, "yuh ketch dem broken / yuh could get dem all for nuttin" refers to male Trinidadians' revenge on the prostitutes, who had preferred the richer Americans to locals, but after the war and the departure of "the Yankees" were obliged to accept the lower rates paid by the locals. This verse has been interpreted by scholars as reflecting the installation of a patriarchal order where black manhood retakes control

<sup>6</sup> The postcolonial neurosis is defined as a common sense of anxiety where the person feels subalternised, in existential alienation and deterritorialisation due to the historical colonial past of their countries (McCusker 2018).

<sup>7</sup> I personally prefer the term 'Majority world' coined by Shahidul Alam (2008) instead of Global South since it highlights the fact that the majority of the world's population lives in the parts of the world traditionally referred to as 'developing'.

over local female sexuality (Rohler 1996; Birth 2008).

During my time in the field, Mighty Sparrow's lyrics were used in relation to the local production and management of Bikini and Beads bands who target traveling players, who, like the Yankees in the song, use higher value foreign currency to p(l)ay carnival. The exploited "Jean and Dinah" in this scenario are the Trinidadian islanders who feel that in order to show themselves playing in those bands they have to pay international rates, even if they might not be able to afford to do so. This scenario was described to me as a repetition of the exploitation of the plantation system translated into cultural commodification (Sheller 2003) in which private management of all-inclusive fetes and Bikini and Beads large bands keep increasing the prices in the name of economic demand, without considering the social impacts both locally and transnationally.

## Conclusion

Bikini and Beads Mas' is disregarded by creative communities due to its commercial nature. Despite the local complaints and frustration of many masmen, carnival creatives and passionate players, who feel the Bikini and Beads bands are flattening the artistic variety of other forms of carnival, it is impossible not to note its impact on the younger generation of worldwide players. The Carnival Bikini and Beads style of Mas' adopts the traditional meaning of national unity, while seeking economic profitability and recognition. It entangles the sense of secular rituality of carnival (Schechner 2002) with an economic sense of elitism and a need for

participation that creates a set of systemic and marketable tools that are successful both nationally and internationally.

In this article I showed how Bikini and Beads represents a festive paradise that appeals both to local players, who look for escape and economic prestige, and traveling players, who see it as a way of maintaining or creating connections to their roots. I continued by explaining some of the complexities that are situated within the Bikini and Beads Mas' where overlapping values including economic capital, elitist performance, diasporic "homes" and the easy feeling of escape through the festivity cause significant changes to the act of playing Mas' locally and transnationally.

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