

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



**Volume 4**

**December 2021**

This volume is dedicated to:

**Brother Resistance (Roy Lewis)**

1954 - 13 July 2021

Late President, Trinidad Unified Calypsonians Organisation (TUCO)  
Rapsody Icon, Musician, Rhythm Poet and Performer from Trinidad and Tobago.  
B.Sc. Social Sciences with History (UWI, 1980).

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**Colin J. N. Benjamin**

20 March 1936 - 8 November 2021

Former President of Ontario's 'Organization of Calypso Performing Artistes' and Trinidad & Tobago Legacy Association; a major contributor to the management and promotion of the Toronto Caribbean Carnival (Caribana) festival.

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**Joseph Charles**

12<sup>th</sup> June 1938 - 19<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Pioneer of Notting Hill Carnival

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**Dr Winsford "Joker" Devine**

15<sup>th</sup> August 1943 - 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021

Self-taught musician and one of Trinidad and Tobago's best and most prolific songwriters. The Trinidad Unified Calypsonians' Organisation stated he had composed more than 500 calypsos during a career that spanned over 40 years.

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**Wilbert "Junior" Gill**

1963 - 2021

Born in London and completed a combined degree at Middlesex University (formerly Middlesex Polytechnic) with Music as his major and Quantitative Mathematics as a minor. He lived in Zürich (Switzerland) where he was director of Music Center Affoltern, Zurich. As a steelpan virtuoso and performed with well-known musicians Phil Collins, Santana, George Duke, Airta Moreira and Victor Bailey. He frequently joined Nostalgia Steelband for Notting Hill Carnival

## CONTENTS

<b>Dedication:</b> Brother Resistance (Roy Lewis), Colin J. N. Benjamin, Joseph Charles, Dr Winsford “Joker” Devine .....	I
<b>Contents</b> .....	II
<i>Scope of the ‘International Journal of Carnival Arts: Steelpan, Calypso and Mas’ (IJCA)</i> .....	III - VI
<i>Editorial Board</i> .....	VII - IX
<b>Foreword:</b> ‘ <i>A Call to British Universities to Introduce More Steelpan Music as Part of its Music and Creative Arts Programme</i> ’ .....	1 - 5
<b>1. <i>Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts</i></b> Haroun N. Shah and Laila M.N. Shah .....	6 -25
<b>2. <i>Who Going to Take Care of the Baby?” Diasporic Baby Dolls and Carnival Activism</i></b> Emily Zobel Marshall .....	26 -38
<b>3. <i>Seventy Years and TASPO’s Journey of Mythical Proportions Lives On; Intergenerational Links, Key to Preservation</i></b> Nestor Sullivan.....	39 -47
<b>4. <i>Conversations and Comments on TASPO at 70! ‘TASPO Day’ - 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951</i></b> Laila M.N. Shah and Haroun N. Shah .....	48 -59
<b>5. <i>Carnivals in the Borough of Barking and Dagenham, its impact on Youth Careers and Vision of UKON Careers Carnival Arts Academy</i></b> Ros Alexander.....	60 - 67
<b>6. <i>The History of Genesis Carnival Band.</i></b> Allyson Williams MBE .....	68 - 77
<b>7. <i>Calypso Memory: Some Observations on the Beneficial Effects of Engaging in Calypso Music for People Living with Dementia</i></b> Alexander Loewenthal aka Alexander D Great .....	78 -87
<b>8. <i>A Life in Pan: Cyril Khamai, Steelpan Icon, Turns 90! Celebrating and Capturing Oral Histories from the T&amp;T Diaspora</i></b> Louise C.F. Shah.....	88- 101

## 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:**

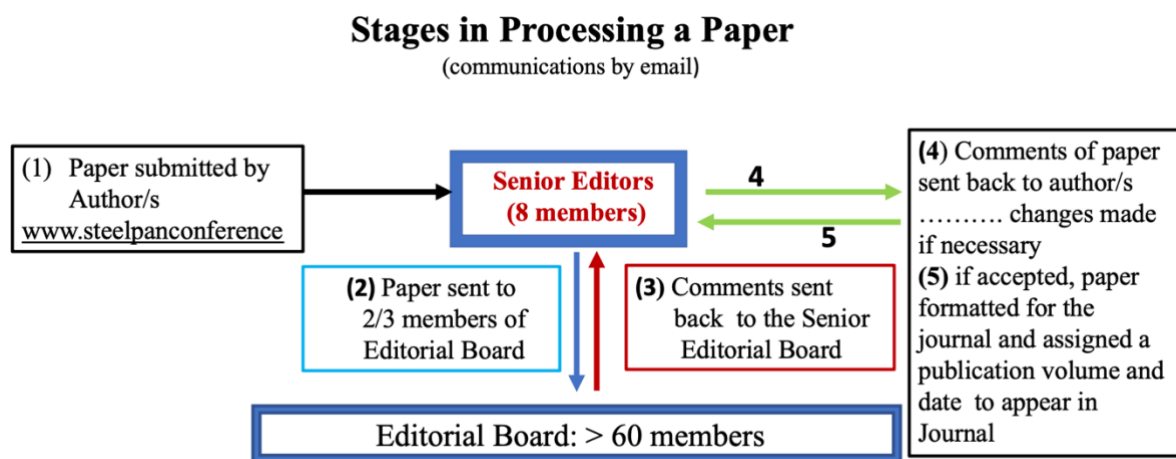
These should be designed as simple as possible. Each table should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numerals and supplied with a heading and a legend at the top of the table. Tables should be self-explanatory without reference to the text. The same data should not be presented in both table and 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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Brigitte **Bogar**, PhD. York University, Canada. Music, theatre and street theatre.

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Bowie Sonnie **Bowei**, PhD. VistaPan Africa; International Percussion Federation; International Arts Games Committee. Steelpan; African history, development, dissemination, pioneers, carnival in Nigeria.

Glenn **Charles**, Director, UK Trini & Friends. Pannist, carnival arts promoter, teacher, event organiser, performer and youth leader.

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Tola **Dabiri**, PhD. Managing Director, UK Centre for Carnival Arts. Intangible cultural heritage of carnival, orality, traditional mas and skills. Organisation of Luton Carnival.

Deborah **de Gazon**, PgDip, MA, PhD (ongoing). (Former Creative Director, Notting Hill Carnival) at Creative Learning Circuit Ltd. Work widely across the field of carnival arts; creative consultancy, researcher, lecturer, management, community worker

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Marl'ene **Edwin**, PhD. Centre for Caribbean and Diaspora Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London. Caribbean women writers, carnival, history, literature, linguistics.

Francois **Evans**, PhD. Lecturer, Middlesex University London. Steelpan: composing and arranging for ensemble, contemporary composition for steel pan ensemble, stylistic fusion/s, steel pan music and electronics.

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Max **Farrar**, PhD Sociology, Emeritus Professor, Leeds Beckett University, UK. Migration, (un)settlement, social meaning of carnival, critical multiculturalism, social movements, David Oluwale.

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Roger **Gibbs**. Shak Shak. Calypso: music history, Caribbean drumming & rhythms, fusion/s, calypso jazz, Caribbean traditional and vintage music. Non-pan instrumental. Choral/a cappella: Calypso & Soca, popular & traditional Caribbean.

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Jeffery **Hinds**, Calypso sobriquet; De Admiral. Professional Boxing Referee. Justice of the Peace. Calypso, composer, monarch, pannists, community worker, event organiser.

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Linett **Kamala**, BA MA NPQH. Associate Lecturer, University of the Arts London, BA Performance: Design and Practice team. Lin Kam Art Ltd. Director, Notting Hill Carnival. Artist, educator, facilitator, promoter, carnival, mas and sound systems. Use of art to inspire, heal, enrich and transform lives - 'freestyle calligraffiti'.

Christopher **Laird**, PhD. York University. Caribbean Culture and Society. Digital archiving of carnival arts; publishing and electronic recording. Kalenda and traditional music and dance.

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Frauke **Lühning**, BA Ethnomusicology, University of Amsterdam. School of Arts as ballet accompanist. Founder, teacher and musical director of Bijlmer Steelband, Amsterdam. Conservatory degrees in church organ and World music, Latin American and Caribbean music, piano. Steelband composition, arranging, transcription. History and development of steelpan and steelband music. Methodology for steelpan lessons.

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Jeannine **Remy**, BA, MA, PhD. Senior Lecturer in Music. Department of Creative and Festival Arts, UWI, Trinidad. Pannist, Educator, Arranger, Writer, Steelpan historian. Percussionist and Tutor.

Lynda **Rosenior-Patten**, MA. CEO Maestro7 Creative Management Consultancy. Board Member, Ebony Steel band, Former Managing Director Notting Hill Carnival Pioneers Community Festival. Origins and Genealogy of Carnival and its links to West African Mas traditions, Notting Hill Carnival, sound systems, strategic management and leadership training programmes, gender and equality issues.

Louise C.F. **Shah**, BA, University of Southampton, MA, SOAS, University of London. Pannist, Tutored by Sterling Betancourt as a youth. From aged 14, played with Nostalgia in the UK and abroad. Co-organiser and author - third steelpan conference 2010. Play piano, guitar and sing. Avid follower and performer of steelpan and carnival.

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.

Nestor **Sullivan**, B.Ed, Founder/Manager Pamberi Steel Orchestra. V.P. Pan Trinbago. Operations. Manager, T & T National Steel Orchestra. Pannist, educator, promotor and carnival arts. T & T Pan in Schools leader.

Vernon Shabaka **Thompson**, MA, PhD. Former CEO, London Notting Hill Carnival, co-founder Calypso Tent. Carnival organiser, band leader, carnival event manager and lecturer. Theatre, education and community development. Carnival specialist. Strategic planning, fundraising and costume production.

Christine **Warrington**, MA. Royal College of Art. Fine Art/Printmaking and Sculpture. ACAVA Barham Park Studios, London. Freelance artist, visual art as a critique in socio-politics. Carnival history, mas, steelpan, calypso related genres of the Caribbean.

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.

Allyson **Williams**, MBE, NHS long service. Co-founder of mas band Genesis (1980). Interim Chair, Mas Arena. Notting Hill Carnival Board member. Street theatre. Mas camp administration, mas design, costume making, mas and carnival history, teacher and educator.

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.

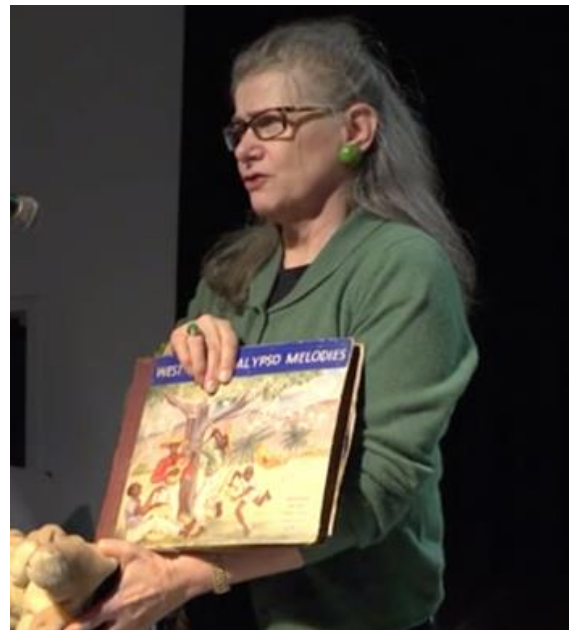
Natasha **Young**, MA, BA. Teacher of Art and Design, North London Collegiate School, Edgware. Steelpan, calypso and Carnival Arts in general.

## Foreword

### A Call to British Universities to introduce more Steelpan Music as Part of its Music and Creative Arts Programmes.

This volume of IJCA is devoted to the Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021) and includes a few selected papers that emanated from the meeting and one on the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of steelpan icon, Cyril Khamai. A recurring theme from the youth perspective, however, is now so acute that it merits further attention. Both the 7<sup>th</sup> (2018) and 8<sup>th</sup> (2021) International Biennial Carnival Arts Conferences witnessed students calling for a stronger presence of Caribbean Carnival Arts at British Universities. Two decades ago Dr Ruth Tompsett, lecturer at Middlesex University, (the former Middlesex Polytechnic) spearheaded a unique post graduate course which was disseminated to universities worldwide following her retirement. She helped create an ambience that saw carnival arts reach a zenith which stimulated students of Caribbean decent to expand their portfolios. Thus, Andrea Levy, a student in textile and design of Jamaican immigrant parentage, skilfully crafted her background into her writing, winning a host of international awards including the Orange Prize, the 'Best of the Best' Commonwealth Writers' (2005), the Man Booker Prize (2010) and the Walter Scott Prize (2011). Best known among the Caribbean community is 'Small Island' which stimulated a new generation of Caribbean artists and writers. Tompsett's student, Keith Khan also exploited his Trinidadian roots via Notting Hill Carnival to reference Caribbean folklore and Black History. He went on to lead the breath-

taking opening ceremonies at the London Millennium Dome, the Manchester Commonwealth Games (2002) and was the Artistic Director for the magnificent Queen's Jubilee Parade in central London in June 2002. With such dynamism he was selected to lead the 'Cultural Olympiad' for the London 2012 Olympics, which was eventually passed to Danny Boyle. Nevertheless, the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics included a steelband (Nostalgia) and the elegant masquerade costumes of Mahogany Mas Designs. In addition to these accolades, Caribbean artists host the world-renowned Notting Hill Carnival, one of the most



Dr. Ruth Tompsett, retired lecturer at Middlesex University and a pioneer in Carnival Arts

spectacular outdoor festivals in the world, on every August Bank Holiday weekend. Young people have asked at these conferences, "Why are British universities so reluctant to cater for this field of studies in a decisive way, when ex-students have

shone in their respective fields and still continue to perform at the highest level?

Citing steelpan as an example, young people continue to voice their dismay at the lack of foresight within British universities regarding this genre, despite it being so firmly part of the current musical landscape of Britain. As early as the 1960s, Gerald Forsyth steadfastly embedded steelpan in London schools and so successful were these programmes that they were copied all over the world. However, while North America continues to expand its university steelpan programmes (see e.g. *‘Steelpan in Education, A History of the Northern Illinois University Steelband’* (2017). Andrew Martin, Ray Funk und Jeannine Remy.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501757617>;

ISBN: 9780875807782), British universities severely lag behind and it is estimated today that over 70% of youths who play steelpan at the highest level, lose their skills when they go to university and never play again. Students have aired their dismay at these conferences and even as recently as the 8<sup>th</sup> conference in October this year, two youth panel discussions continued to highlight the absence of any significant progress. Perhaps because of the foundation laid down by Dr. Ruth Tompett, Middlesex University is witnessing a resurgence of steelpan activities through its willingness to cater for such students. At the conference in 2018, Middlesex University student, Euan Lloyd-Taylor presented a paper titled *“A Call to British Universities to Introduce Steelpan Music as Part of the Music and Arts Programme.”* Prior to his entry there, he applied to several universities in the UK to read music with a focus on steelpan and, apart from Middlesex, he was universally rejected. The university ought to be commended for

its ability to tailor make courses to meet the needs of such students. Thus, Miranda Hohenkirk (Nostalgia Steelband) was able to complete her BA in music and major in steelpan by virtue of the university’s willingness to introduce outside tutors to assist her where needed. Two other Middlesex University students, Marlon Hibbert and Delphina James presented their work at the 8<sup>th</sup> conference. Through a panel interview with Debi Gardner and Haroun Shah, Marlon narrated his experiences, including the establishment of his own steelband, ‘Endurance Steel Orchestra’, his BBC interview on the programme ‘Descendants’, his graduation and his scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama to continue his studies at post-graduate level. Delphina James, a steelpan virtuoso, went on to teach clarinet, saxophone and bassoon in schools but used the basic teaching books and skills she developed to produce an equivalent programme for steelpan. Her presentation entitled *‘Learn Music On ... A Steelpan Music Tuition Series’* was presented at the conference and should help to stimulate steelpan activities both at schools and universities. Her presentation is expanded into a full paper herein.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference (19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> October 2018), Anna Lawrence, (Cambridge University Steel Pan Society [CUSPS]) bandleader and arranger presented a paper *“Out of Pain this Culture was Born (Rudder, 1987); Appropriation vs Appreciation in the Steelband Movement”* on the complex dynamics of culture and music and questions about how it is perceived. CUSPS was initiated by Juliet Sharpe in 2009 with arranger Trinidadian and Notting Hill pannist/arranger Debra

Romain in response to a young Trinidadian student's request at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge to introduce a steelband. Under Anna Lawrence's leadership CUSPS has been working to integrate the band's activities into the UK's timetable of Caribbean events. Consequently, the band came to London to play at the evening concert on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2018 while Anna presented her paper the following day. In her presentation she stated that *"most students interact with CUSPS on a very superficial level, enjoying our steelpan music at garden parties and events such as 'May Balls' which cost up to £200 per ticket without engaging with the history or culture of the music."* This is a complex issue, possibly eliciting several viewpoints and the audience felt that the university should be applauded for taking this gallant step. However, they were uncomfortable with the fact that there were no accompanying programmes in Carnival Arts which could help to resolve some of the very issues Anna raised. But after such a successful period, the very College that initiated this project is now calling on CUSPS to move and to date Anna has not had any other colleges of the university responding to her pleas for space elsewhere (per comm. Anna Lawrence, Dec. 2021). Paradoxically, this is happening at a time when CUSPS' membership is growing with new students who has had previous experience of steelpan training which bodes well for the future of steelpan at Cambridge University.

In a panel discussion, three students from St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra, Candice Falconer, Dylan Mitchell and Laila Shah suggested that the most critical issue facing a young pannist who plans to go to university is how to simultaneously play steelpan during their

studies. What are their chances of being able to do so at university and, if not, what are their chances of realistically returning to a steelband to continue playing following their degree some three or four later? Louise Shah, who co-chaired the discussion with Patrick McKay, leader and arranger of St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra, noted in her opening lines that she was tutored by Sterling Betancourt and played from adolescence with Nostalgia Steelband, but was forced to give up when she went to the University of Southampton for her first degree, after which she was never able to find a way back to continue. It was suggested that this might be exacerbated if the student pursues a non-music or arts degree, but this may only be conjecture. Dylan Mitchell is in his final year of his Music Production degree at the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance in London, but his thesis work does not incorporate any steelband music. Both Candice and Laila are science students, who both dealt with the problem in different ways. Candice knew from a previous band member that the city of Leicester had a steelband (Contrast Steel Orchestra) and so opted to pursue her degree at the University of Leicester. As soon as she completed her studies, she returned to London and re-joined 'St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra'. Although there were better opportunities for study for Laila outside of London, she opted to see through her undergraduate studies in London (King's College, University of London), solely for the purpose of being able to continue playing pan with various steelbands in London. In the panel discussion she was asked about her attempts to introduce steelpan to the university. She recalled making numerous attempts to do so through several of the

university's societies but was met with considerable opposition and all attempts to do so were futile. She then tried to initiate a '*British University Students Steelpan Society*' with the aim of helping prospective students to locate a resident steelband or provide advice and support on how to establish a steelband at their current university. She was met with silence and even her own university not only showed no interest in supporting her, but was actively disparaging. Undaunted by this, Laila then focused her attention on retrieving and archiving all conference proceedings from the first conference in 2006, establishing a new Website to access these and co-led the blue print for IJCA – all linked through <https://www.steelpanconference.com/>.

Her experience was supported by other students and it was suggested that efforts in the future might be coordinated through the British Association of Steelbands (BAS). An agreement was reached at the meeting to hold the next conference at a university town/city outside of London where there is an existing carnival but not an existing steelband. Consensus was reached for this to be held under the auspices of Oxford Brookes University and timed to precede the Oxford (Cowley Road) Carnival on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022. This may be one approach to help bolster the efforts of the youths and stimulate activities at universities.

A student's life at university is always very demanding, especially when living away from home. The establishment of a new steelband, as Marlon discussed, is a major undertaking and colossal task for an individual. It may be time to re-examine Laila's proposal to establish a '*British University Students Steelpan Society*' to

facilitate students who wish to retain steelpan practice during their studies. There may be several solutions and different approaches may be needed at different universities. However, what is clearly evident is that students cannot continue to remain complacent while such large numbers of enthusiastic and highly skilled players need to cease steelband music during their studies at universities.

Some universities should be applauded for their concerted efforts to expand their portfolio of Carnival Arts. The Music and Arts Departments at Middlesex University are continuing to seek support from local authorities for collaborative programmes. One such project was led by music professor François Evans, who was taken by a student to the 7<sup>th</sup> biennial conference in 2018 and was inspired by the sound of the steelband. He started to work more closely with local students and began writing music for steelpan. Just prior to the current viral pandemic he put on a concert on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2019 at the university's Quadrangle (an indoor makeshift open-air theatre) themed around the much-loved Hans Christian Andersen story, 'The Little Match Girl'. This was an outstanding and delightful show that featured a 100-piece choir, the university's philharmonic orchestra and the local BEAT Steel Pan Ensemble (from Barnet, led by Trinidad's former Desperados Steel Orchestra panner, Abdul Williams) working together. This attracted much interest from the local community to participate and meet university staff and students. Perhaps collaborative community-university-based projects might be one way to stimulate interest in carnival arts at British universities.



Middlesex University and Barnet Education Arts Trust performance of “Hans Christian Andersen story “The Little Match Girl” - a unique experience in Steelpan, Choral and Orchestral harmony for a Christmas Concert in 2019.

**8th International Biennial  
Conference in Carnival Arts;  
Steelpan, Calypso and Mas**



**The Transformative Power of Carnival Arts,  
Rebounding from the COVID-19 Pandemic;**

*Celebrating 70 years of TASPO's Arrival*

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Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference  
in Carnival Arts.



## Proceedings of the 8th International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts.

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### Abstract

Unlike previous symposia (2006 - 2018) in which the conference programme, concerts and workshops were distinct entities, the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts deviated somewhat by presenting the meeting as a coherent series of highly integrated presentations and performances. Caribbean Folk music for example had never occupied a sessional paper previously but on this occasion was led by Anne Fridal in song and narrative accompanied by a steelband and guitar. Similarly, TASPO's monumental presence at the Festival of Britain (1951) was re-enacted in concert by a TASPO Ensemble while a PowerPoint presentation was used to document their history. Likewise, St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra's Silver Jubilee was celebrated in concert while members also participated in panel discussions during the steelpan conference in Sessions 3 and 4. Session 1 (Calypso Rhythms) and Session 2 (No Mas Here in Great Britain) were bridged by a Plenary Lecture by Prof. Tina Ramnarine entitled 'Steel Orchestras and Legacies of Indenture'. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Lecture by Dr Bowie Sonnie Bowei entitled 'The Rise of Steelbands Across Africa' was delivered online due to COVID-19 international flight restrictions. In keeping with the theme of the conference '*The Transformative Power of Carnival Arts (Steelpan, Calypso and Mas), Rebounding from the COVID-19 Pandemic*' some twenty novel projects were presented that demonstrated resilience in Carnival Arts despite the barriers to working and delivering during the pandemic. To emphasise their determination to remain solvent, participants agreed to change from biennial to annual conferences going forward and agreed the dates (1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022) for a joint, co-produced conference between Oxford Brookes University and the Oxford (Cowley Road) Carnival.

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**Key Words:** Steelpan, Steel Orchestra, Carnival Arts, Calypso, Rhythm, Sound Systems, Mas, TASPO, Festival of Britain, Silver Jubilee.

### Introduction

World-renowned dramatic soprano, Anne Fridal, who has performed with several steel orchestras in homeland Trinidad and Tobago, opened the evening with a host of

popular Caribbean Folk songs such as Yellow Bird, Day-O, Jamaica Farewell, Linstead Market, Chi Chi Bud Oh and



Figure 1 Anne Fridal getting the conference off the ground on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 with a host of folk songs backed by Alexander D Great and St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra

Coconut Woman backed this time by St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra (SMA<sup>3</sup>SO) (see Figure 1). With little prior rehearsal, the rapport between singer and steelband was impeccable and scintillating, with Anne frequently teasing the audience to indulge by interchanging parts of these euphonious melodies into brief operatic rhetoric. Allyson Williams, CEO of Genesis Mas Band delivered an excellent brief history of the band, from its origin when it was founded by her late husband, Vernon Fellows Williams in 1964. This was the year that Russell Henderson stepped outside of Rhaune Laslett's Notting Hill Fayre and took his steelband onto the streets of Notting Hill; Vernon was part of this group who inadvertently founded the now well-known Notting Hill Carnival (see this volume). This (Allyson's presentation) was followed by dazzling performances by calypsonians from the Association of Calypsonians and Soca Artistes (ACASA) including Lord Cloak, G-String, Helena B and D'Admiral along with D'Alberto. Calypsonian Alexander D Great (London) and Roger Gibbs (Toronto), are two of the leading calypsonians in the diaspora who are working tirelessly to motivate more

steelbands to play local calypsos and also to stimulate more live steelband performances with calypsonians. Roger captivated the audience with many oldies and screaming for 'more' after he sang 'The Purse'. Alexander D Great's "Unsung Heroes" and "Russell Henderson", his memorable tribute to the legend were both played with SMA<sup>3</sup>SO as the backing steelband to end an unforgettable and glorious opening night's concert.

The following morning, Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October the conference proper commenced.

Day 1 of the conference consisted of a morning session (10am to 1.00pm) entitled '*Calypso Rhythms*' after the title of invited speaker, Roger Gibbs's presentation. Roger was the only one of the five expected overseas speakers to have travelled successfully during this period, but he too faced several hurdles in each leg of his journey.



Figure 2. Linett Kamala's presentation; '*The Sound System Culture and Carnival.*'

The session commenced with the first ever presentation on Sound Systems at these conferences, emphasising it as a cornerstone of the modern carnival. Entitled '*The Sound System Culture and Carnival*', the speaker, Linett Kamala, herself a devout exponent and the first

female DJ to perform at Notting Hill Carnival (NHC) from the 1980s, covered much ground (Figure 2). Introduced into NHC in 1973 by Leslie Palmer, Linett traced its evolution from Kingston, Jamaica and its strong link with calypso music and therefore its natural progression into NHC. As a lecturer herself at the University of the Arts London (UAL), she succeeded in introducing components of Sound System culture and Carnival at UAL at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. The author took the audience through NHC and her experience with her own Disya Jeneration Sound System. Much goes into transporting these heavy speakers, equipment, wiring and building the sizeable systems on display. Her last slide featured an immense Sound System of multiple towering speakers, stacked up against a beautiful white/cream and blue Victorian House that drew various remarks from the audience. Concerns about the local residents' views from the static systems or the impact of the mobile systems on performing steelbands elicited comments, but no answers.

The following three presentations covered various aspects of calypso in a year that the Trinidad and Tobago's Calypso Tent celebrated its centenary (see 'Trinidad and Tobago's Calypso Tent Celebrates 100 Years; The Mighty Sparrow, Calypso's enduring Prodigy and Master of the Tent' IJCA Vol. 3 May 2021, pp 1-5). The calypso artform goes back to the earliest days of carnival and continues to *transfigure into various genres but its core purpose as a spirit of defiance, commentary and confrontation remains unchanged*. Clarence Charles (Leiden University-<http://hdl.handle.net/1887/45260>) states that "The multi-faceted functions which it (calypso) once served, celebration, blame,

ridicule, humour, entertainment, disseminator of news and gossip, form of livelihood, and festivity have remained intact". "It's bouncy beats and tuneful melodies often serve up serious, even subversive, messages. The music demands more careful listening" (Ramm, B., October 2017). It was against this backdrop that university lecturer, Kela Francis's video recorded presentation incorporated a corresponding PowerPoint to emphasise the development of her argument. Kela (lecturer, University of Trinidad and Tobago) positions the artform in perspective, lifting its vibrant claim that "*calypso is poetry - lyrical and narrative poetry.*" Her presentation 'Calypso Poetics' began by questioning the subjectivity on which various aficionados may judge the standing of a calypso. Choices fluctuate and "*offer no common agreement of criteria to begin unbiased analysis*", thus a more objective yardstick is required to enable more robust discussion. This in turn will raise "*the level of discussion in such a way as to match the vibrancy of the art form.*" Kela developed the case that because the calypsonian's predecessor is the griot (djale), a product of the West African travelling poet, by inference Calypso is poetry; lyrical and narrative poetry and consequently can be evaluated using the rigor of poetic analysis. Because calypso is sung, it also invokes musical scrutiny. However, there is additionally a plethora of rhetorical forms that befits the attributes of this multifaceted artform. These include the performer's ability to communicate with his/her audience, attire, stage performance and dynamism, all of which combine to maximise the singer's output, intended meaning and audience appraisal. The author adds "*it is equally important to examine the interplay of these different artistic disciplines to reveal the calypso's intended meaning, impact on the audience, and the gap between*

*intent and impact.*” The presentation examined the various rhetorical devices used in Calypso that enables one to separate its individual elements whilst viewing the calypso as a whole as a means of enabling academics to gain deeper insight into the complex and rich fabric of this artform.

Calypso, like other performing arts, is



Figure 3 Alexander Loewenthal (aka Alexander D Great, calypsonian and educator presenting his paper; 'Calypso Memory')

increasingly being used in health and wellbeing projects. It is generally believed that people who had engaged in music, drama or dance for ten years or more showed improved mental health. The next speaker, Alexander Loewenthal (aka Alexander D Great, calypsonian and educator, Figure 3) shared some of his observations dating back to 1998 when he began running his 'Memory Café' sessions. Some have been senior groups whose challenges have included memory difficulties at various stages of dementia. His presentation focused on several different elders' groups based in West London, Watford and four venues in Kent. These vary from "friends lunch clubs" to specific organisations that provide support for people with early-stage dementia. Methods of engagement comprised singing and moving to well-known calypso and soca tunes, e.g. *Matilda*, *Rum and Coca Cola* and *Hot Hot*

*Hot*. Leaving the Caribbean had added to many participants' anxieties and concerns over racism and marginalisation and music was used to help overcome some of their negative emotions. The sessions involved the creation of group compositions with simple lyrics on a chosen theme or topic. They were usually short and would often only consist of a single verse, but their sense of achievement was perceptible. Participants composed lyrics based on suggestions by the group. Using a single refrain line lasting four beats, (e.g. the well-known "No, don't stop the carnival") rhyming couplets were written, which alternated around the response line. Group members discussed the subject and content of the song, which often revolved around their shared experiences and then constructed the lyrics line by line. They also sung familiar pieces such as 'Banana Boat Song' (Day-O) with enormous enjoyment.

They found both approaches enjoyable, accessible and stimulating. The example below is one such 'Call and Response' song from the Nubian Life Resource Centre in West London. Jenny and Admira, whose names appear in the song, run the centre and the members' lyrics provide evidence of the affection in which they are held.

(Excerpt)

**We are members of Nubian Life** (Nubian Life Caribbean Elders' Club)

Jenny has to go and make the tea  
 We are members of Nubian life  
 But even if there's biscuits she'll get no fee  
 We are members of Nubian life

Everyone's feeling a little bit tired  
 We are members of Nubian life  
 But our friend Admira is really admired  
 We are members of Nubian life  
 We are ladies who enjoy dancing  
 We are members of Nubian life

In the gardens where I'm prancing  
 We are members of Nubian Life  
 When we come here, we all make friends  
 We are members of Nubian life  
 We hope the friendship never ends.



Figure 4. Roger Gibbs presenting and simultaneously demonstrating and defining the multifaceted rhythms of calypso that remain poorly defined up today.



The final speaker of the session, Roger Gibbs (international performer, speaker, musician, and arts organiser) delved deep into the 'Rhythm in Calypso' (Figure 4). With decades of experience, including performing with his own band the 'Sand Pebbles Groove' (Barbados), backing the

Mighty Sparrow, Calypso Rose and performing across North America and the Caribbean, his analysis of calypso through its rhythms kept the audience spellbound for an hour; speaking and demonstrating different rhythms using both guitar and drums (see Spark, 2021). He began by singing and playing the Mighty Sparrow's 'Jean and Dinah' but using a different rhythm (in this case  $\frac{3}{4}$  time). Although this is one of the best known calypsos, it was barely recognisable; analogous to Eliza Carthy and Jim Moray's version of Sparrow's 'MrWalker' (<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=XRmyyfvh9fM>).

He then played the rhythm on the guitar without singing the lyrics and the tune simply sprung to life.

Rhythm therefore gives calypso its essential character he declared. It is the dominant element in how we dance to the music; using  $\frac{2}{2}$  time rather than the more common  $\frac{4}{4}$  beat to synchronise the dance moves to calypso. The drum remains the signature voice of the rhythm and drives the guitar strums. By temporarily subtracting the lyrics of a calypso, it enables analysis through its rhythm. It then becomes evident that there is rhythmic genealogical connectivity across the Caribbean and specific African cadences from where they arose. There is a musical thread that runs through the artform, thus when musicians from various parts of the Caribbean perform, the connection becomes evident.

The feeling of calypso cannot be decreed on paper and, as an oral tradition, its survival poses a formidable challenge. Younger musicians generally tend to 'soca-ise' their performances, but this does little justice to the uniqueness of the traditional calypso. Roger noted, the torchbearers such as

Sparrow, Kitchener or Shadow for example have an eclectic trademark that sounds very different from each other but we are currently unable to describe it. Beginning with the default calypso strum, Banana, the author demonstrated eight strums underlying calypso rhythm and set out to delineate this heterogeneous mixture of rhythms in calypso using the following terminology: Banana (Tin-ni-neh), Postman (or Old Man), Temne, Kalenda, Conga, Latin, Cowbell and American (or Universal) strums. In a more detailed paper on the subject, the author added two other strums. Guyanese and Creole (Gibbs, R.P., 2020). Rhythm in Calypso – then calypso guitar strums. This ground-breaking paper which lays down a new pedagogical vocabulary for calypso was highly appreciated by the audience and ended the session with a resounding ovation.

Sessions 1 and 2 were bridged by a Plenary Lecture entitled “Steel Orchestras and Legacies of Indenture” by Professor Tina K. Ramnarine (Figure 5). Tina (musician, Music researcher, anthropologist and global cultural explorer, Royal Holloway University of London) was herself introduced to steelpan in the 1980s while at school and was tutored by a pannist whose interests spanned both Afro- and Indo-Caribbean music. She has a long interest in creative processes of decolonisation with reference to dance and music in the Indian diaspora including the Caribbean (see e.g. Ramnarine, 2001; 2007, 2019). She intended to have her PhD student demonstrate aspects of her presentation, but COVID-19 restrictions in Trinidad prevented his timely return. Her presentation examined the way in which music might have transitioned on these long arduous transatlantic voyages from India



Figure 5 Professor Tina K. Ramnarine delivery the first Plenary Lecture titled ‘Steel Orchestras and Legacies of Indenture’

that carried indentured Indians to work across the globe, including the plantations of the Caribbean in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their migrations, which resulted from British imperial policies on trade in sugar, tea, spices and other commodities, had an indelible impact on musical expressions during and after indenture. In Calcutta, the Nawab established a music school near the port,



Figure 6. Statue of Sundar Popo in Trinidad to denote the prominence given to the development of this genre in the cultural arts of Trinidad and Tobago. From National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago.

which was important in creating the historic soundscape of Calcutta in the years that indentured labourers left the city for the Caribbean islands. Indians brought their drums such as the tabla, dholak etc. and joined the sailors singing ‘sea shanties’. Once in Trinidad they would be used in religious litanies and a variety of other ways. Sullivan (2020) reported their use at Hosay festivals and their impact on the development of the steelpan.

Many of the local vocalists were trained in Indian sacred, classical or folk music and skilfully weaved between Trinidadian Hindi with Trinidadian vernacular to create various narratives. This is vividly manifested in the popular genre ‘chutney’, formalised by the legendary Sundar Popo.

He alone recorded more than 15 albums and is immortalised in the densely populated Indian town of Debe (Figure 6). Chutney became widespread by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, circulating in transnational spaces through diasporic networks, film markets and digital technologies (Ramnarine 2001, 2011). Tina went on to sketch musical practices from the histories of patronage in Indian court life to the preservation of Indian musical heritages in contemporary Caribbean creative musical exchanges. The lecture highlighted the complex transborder flows that work toward the unfolding of global histories and drew attention to how legacies of indenture are played out in the lives of individual musicians across the generations of a family in Trinidad.

Session 2 of the conference titled ‘*No Mas Here in Great Britain*’, (commandeered from the Mighty Terror’s iconic calypso that lamented the absence of a Caribbean carnival in post-war Britain) testifies to the absence of live carnivals due to the pandemic. While Notting Hill Carnival dominates the landscape of Caribbean Carnival in the UK and Europe because of



Figure 7. Ros Alexander (Founder, CEO, and Managing Director, UKON Careers C.I.C) opening Session 2 titled ‘*No Mas Here in Great Britain*’

its magnitude, grandeur, iconic pioneers, location and its history in the capital, numerous carnivals take place annually in Britain. Ros Alexander (Founder, CEO, and Managing Director, UKON Careers C.I.C) opened the session by describing one such carnival in the Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Essex where UKON Careers has thrived since 2014 (Figure 7). UKON engages >12,000 patrons during Barking and Dagenham carnival. In addition to hosting it, they support people via employment, education, and training and nurture a greater understanding of carnival, its history, heritage, and its importance to communities today. With negligible live activities permitted during the pandemic, UKON has developed its online activities significantly (website and YouTube channels) and where permitted, hosted a mixture of live and virtual events. A highlight of 2021 was the event in Barking Town Square where audiences from East London to East Anglia participated and, even though socially distanced, thoroughly enjoyed the event. The workshops included face to face carnival mask making, live and online soca dance, and online traditional Carnival characters’ workshops. Ros stated the project was their first tangible engagement

of students in further and higher education and also reinforced their commitment to online and hybrid models of carnival. The project provided them with a valuable professional development opportunity, better equipping them to deliver and support high quality carnival arts in the future.

There is a resurgence of interest in the Baby Doll mas in Trinidad and Tobago and diasporic carnivals. The presentation by Emily Zobel Marshall (Leeds Beckett



Figure 8. Dr Emily Zobel Marshall (Leeds Beckett University) presenting; *“Who Going to Take Care of the Baby?” Diasporic Baby Dolls and Gendering Resilience in Carnival Mas’*

University) *“Who Going to Take Care of the Baby?” -Diasporic Baby Dolls and Gendering Resilience in Carnival Mas* was therefore of particular interest and examined the complex ways in which the Baby Doll mas has reflected, resisted and challenged sexual and racial politics in the Caribbean and explored the multiple manifestations of the mas in contemporary culture (Figure 8). Emily depicted ‘Baby Doll’ in Trinidad carnival, dressed in frilly bloomers and a bonnet, screaming at male onlookers to pay for the care of “their” illegitimate baby and thrusts a white doll into their arms. This traditional carnival masquerade has long been

implemented as a form of social commentary on absentee fathers, racial mixing and the rape of black women by white men. The speaker illustrated that while the Baby Doll mas was less visible in carnival since the 1930s, it is now being reused and reinterpreted by social activists such as Amanda Macintyre, Eintou Springer and others as a way of highlighting feminist concerns and tackling issues such as teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse. In the New Orleans Mardi Gras, large bands of women dressed as Baby Dolls, representing the role of segregated black sex workers under Jim Crow, take to the streets to proudly ‘walk raddy’ to defy sexual, economic and racial oppression.

With so many carnivals now being moved online because of the pandemic, there are indications that post-COVID-19, this mode of transmission may be retained by some because of its simplicity, depth of coverage, lower cost, reduced risk etc. However, the advantage of a live event far outweighs a virtual carnival a view which was expounded by Maica Gugolati (IMAF, Institute of African Worlds) in her address *‘Carnival and its Digitalscapes’* (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Dr Maica Gugolati (IMAF, Institute of African Worlds) addressing the topic of virtual carnival in *‘Carnival and its Digitalscapes’*.



She continued, carnival carries a mixture of movement or stillness such as if a truck gets stuck. The sensory effect of sound, reverberation off houses, movement, wearing a costume, tight streets, size of trucks, size of crowds are experienced by the masquerader or bystander.

She states further that it is transformative, both individually and collectively; the act of parading and movement, even though the 'costume' may only be a T-shirt, is cherished. Added to this the sensory system picks up the temperature, or the smell of chocolate, rum, barbecue chicken or even the glue of the costume. And superimposed on these experiences is the warmth and cordiality, for example when a friend re-fixes your costume if it comes loose, or the presence of your carnival partner/s, or the people you meet once a year at carnival. These experiences, although inherently not as safe as a Zoom fete are infinitely superior. Maica challenged the belief that these feelings could be replicated from digital/online experience and states affirmatively that once carnival is able to restart it wouldn't go back to the digitalscape except for archiving and educational purposes.

Roger Gibbs, chair and presenter at the conference commented: "The experience of playing mas' in a large carnival parade is a very powerful experience and Maica described it on a visceral level. We know those feelings well, even when our experiences with carnival are vastly different. I would add to her description of memorable things: the sound of steelpan; being in a steelband or pushing racks while jammin' calypso hard on the road. The beautiful revellers all around, the mind-altering sonic intensity of the engine room and steel drums."

He continues, "The Caribbean Carnival parade represents to me the power of the theatre arts captured in a loose ritual performance / production in which hundreds, even thousands, can participate. You would be hard pressed to find another arts performance model that delivers such bang for the buck, such an accessible and diverse experience of music, dance, and masquerade... to so many. The fact that this presentation moves through the streets also makes it accessible and interactive for spectators, multiplying its social impact."

He concludes:

"I too believe that a virtual carnival is a poor substitute. It should be looked at through a completely different lens, as if it were a brand-new construct and not a replacement for carnival as a 'live' event experience."



Figure 10. Chris Slann and Frankie Goldspink (The New Carnival Company CIC); double act presentation tackling the key issue of "How Can We Make Carnival More Inclusive for Disabled People as Producers and Performers"

In contrast to a medical model that is based upon an individual's impairment, the social model of disability proposes that what makes someone disabled is not their medical condition but society's attitude to it, a definition adopted by Arts Council England.

There is a difference between equality and equity. The latter is what we should be aiming for and this concept was expanded by Chris Slann and Frankie Goldspink (The New Carnival Company CIC) in their presentation *“How Can We Make Carnival More Inclusive for Disabled People as Producers and Performers”* (Figure 10). Their presentation focused on three of their main projects; (1) Blue Touch Paper Carnival (2011- 2012) which was conducted in partnership with West Sussex Arts Partnership and Cusp Inc., that tested a range of creative solutions to workshop delivery. This culminated in performances at the 2012 Hackney One parade for the arrival of the Olympic Torch and was part of the Paralympic closing events in the magnificent Queen Elizabeth Park, Stratford, London, a legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Park. The second project reported was Alegria UK (2015 – 2018), an Unlimited International Commission that worked with VIVA Integrated Carnival Club (Isle of Wight) and Embaixadoers da Alegria (Rio). The project allowed disabled artists to share practice through a series of international exchanges to develop a collaborative new carnival production based on the Brazilian Samba School model. The work toured extensively in the UK, Italy and Brazil. (3) The final project, designated ‘The Open Road’ began in 2016 and is ongoing as part of an Arts Council England National Activities project. This enabled four partner organisations to test new inclusive work and share the outcomes at their annual Association for Event Management Education conference. One of their goals is to influence event management teaching at university level and make it more inclusive.

The chair warmly welcomed the UK’s foremost Carnival Artist/Designer,



Figure 11. Clary Salandy and Mahogany Carnival Design tribute ‘White Angel’ to Notting Hill Carnival legend Russ Henderson funeral cortege with the two steelbands Nostalgia and PanNectar which he co-founded.

Clary Salandy (Co-founder, Mahogany Carnival Design [1989] and Artistic Director and Programme Co-ordinator of the UK Centre for Carnival Arts) to present the final paper of the day. With her husband, structural engineer, Michael Ramdeen, their larger-than-life kinetic Carnival costumes became a feature of NHC and most national and international festivals, including the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics or even the funeral of the legend Russell Henderson on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2015 when Clary’s stunning towering angel led the procession to the cemetery. (Figure 11).

Nobody was therefore better placed to help facilitate the first ever National Children’s



Figure 12a. (top) Speaker and Mas virtuoso Clary Salandy interviewing two of the three masqueraders following her presentation.

Figure 12b (below). The 3<sup>rd</sup> masquerade. Judging by the confidence and skills, these are the future masqueraders of Notting Hill Carnival and Britain who will follow in Clary's footsteps.

Carnival Week (NCCW), 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> July 2021. Its mission was to bring joy to all and

support literacy and manual dexterity. Participating schools were widely dispersed around the country and included Manchester, Bristol, Hastings, Somerset, Northampton, Norwich, Northampton, Derby, Leicester and Nottingham, with London accounting for 40 schools and 19 in the Isle of Wight. Each school/community chose its own approach, including the timeframe and format under the theme, *'Once upon a time...'* and went live on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021. The following week was Eid and costumes were also made for this festival. During NCCW, there were online activities in which packs could be downloaded for children and teachers to create costumes. All designs were made from paper and therefore accessible to all. Calypsonian Alexander D Great created beats that could be used for schools to produce their own song. Clary stated "COVID-19 threatened to deprive everyone, especially our children, of both the creative skills development that you get in a Pan Yard and a Mas Camp as well as the enriching emotional and social benefits, sense of achievement and aspirations that come from the creative Carnival experience". She continued "the National Children's Carnival Week provided an opportunity to work around the restrictions and Carnival cancellations of 2020. It created a refocus on the development of children through Carnival arts for teachers, artists, community groups, Carnival organisers, borough councils and funders." Its impact was immense and this was demonstrated throughout the presentation. To the utter astonishment of the audience, her presentation ended with three children masqueraders (aged 2 to 14) showing off their performance skills in costumes on stage (Figure 12). They were interviewed by Clary and amazed the audience by their

confidence and ability to articulate their knowledge of carnival, a delightful way to end the first day of the conference.

community. Vaccine hesitancy in the borough appeared to be similar to elsewhere in the UK until the figures were broken down according to ethnicity. The



Figure 13. The CarniVAX Steelband. Left to right; Alexander D Great, Haroun Shah, Frank Ward, Cyril Khamai, Vernon Thomas, the late Joseph Charles, Laila Shah (tenor pan) and Aisha Goodman (double tenor) Prior to the group playing, 120 reached the front door of St Charles Hospital and left without being vaccinated, - during the band's performance on 20<sup>th</sup> March - only 1 person refused to be vaccinated!

The second day of the conference opened with a joint presentation by Haroun Shah and Dr Yasmin Razak titled 'CarniVAX' – Steelpan and Calypso at London Hospitals to Boost Covid-19 Vaccinations. Dr Razak co-organised activities in the NHC area in North Kensington while Dr Evelyn Mensah extended the project to Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow. The presentation emanated from a paper by Laila Shah et al (2021) to reduce COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) where Notting Hill Carnival is held annually.

The presentation commenced with photos of St Charles Hospital from 1881 and its role in the Spanish Flu pandemic a century ago. The hospital is located in the heart of the Notting Hill Carnival footprint and many of its patients are from the carnival

results presented as a 'heat map' showed that the Black and Asian minorities were recording only about 40% vaccine uptake compared to the more affluent/white residents who were approaching 90%. Several projects (webinars, campaigns etc.) were undertaken to gain parity, the most successful being the live steelband/calypso performances at the entrances of hospitals, that began to show a reduction in hesitancy. Following three months of dedicated work, the borough became the first in the UK where there was parity in vaccine uptake for all races. Dr Razak pointed out that prior to these performances up to 120 individuals who queued for vaccination would turn up, only to leave before being vaccinated. When the steelband performances started on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021, only one person left before being vaccinated. The programme

culminated in a celebration party on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at St Charles Hospital when hesitancy in the borough was negligible (Figure 13). A BBC crew was at hand to record the event and Haroun Shah and Cyril Khamai were interviewed. The interviews were broadcast on BBC television in the UK on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021 and were also shown on television stations in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana.

These and other projects contextualise examples of cultural transformation and ethnography. Central to this is the pivotal role of steelpan that is adored by Caribbean youth. Yet disturbingly unofficial figures suggest >70% of young pannists between the ages of 18 - 25 are unlikely to play pan again following their entry to university. If the university/town they enter doesn't have a steelband, they generally lose interest following graduation 3 - 4 years later or lack the confidence to restart even if they pick up jobs in a town/city that has an active carnival. As part of the Silver Jubilee of St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra (SMA<sup>3</sup>SO), three pannist/students from the band, Candice Falconer, Dylan Mitchell and Laila Shah discussed how they found their own solutions to continue playing pan while simultaneously pursuing their university degrees. The session was guided by their band leader/arranger, Patrick McKay and co-chaired by Louise Shah. Louise was an active pannist with Nostalgia Steelband, tutored by Sterling Betancourt and played throughout her teenage years at Notting Hill Carnival. She went to a university in a town that did not have a steelband and was unable to continue play during her studies. She is a primary example of that lost 70%, who up to the present never miss a Nothing Hill Carnival nor Panorama yet have never resumed

playing pan. Can anything be done to resolve this huge loss of talent from a relatively small pool of musicians? The three pannists discussed with the chairs how they resolved their predicament. (Figure 14).

In brief, Candice studied at the University of Leicester and was able to continue playing during her studies with Contrast Steelband, Leicester. She stated that she was guided by a former member of the band who studied at the same university and was able to continue playing. As soon as Candice completed her studies, she returned to London and re-joined St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra.



Figure 14. Panel discussion with three pannist from St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra on how they found solutions to continue playing pan during their university studies. Left to right; Louise Shah, Patrick McKay, Dylan Mitchell, Candice Falconer and Laila Shah.

Laila deliberately stayed in London for her BSc/MSci and continued to play with Nostalgia and Mangrove Steelbands for Panorama, from 2018 and only chose to leave London in October 2021 to pursue to her PhD albeit in a town that has a carnival but no steelband. She is at the early stage of her PhD, but she said she was exploring ways to remedy this pan conundrum. Dylan continued to play with SMA<sup>3</sup>SO by virtue of being able to pursue a Music Production degree at the Institute of Contemporary

Music Performance in London, where he is now a final year student. They all indicated that they wished that there was an organisation to provide support for them at the time. Laila stated that she tried to establish a 'British University Students Steelpan Society' that may be set to help new students locate a local steelband or provide advice and support to establish a steelband at a particular university. However, to her dismay, her own university not only showed no interest in supporting her but was disparaging and saw steelband as being of little value to the Arts.

Current pannist/student, Marlon Hibbert was interviewed by Debi Gardner and Haroun Shah about his strategy to not only play at the highest level but start his own steelband. His journey is one of immense determination and approbation. From school he played in several bands which he continued to do whilst at the university of Middlesex. He is currently at Guildhall where he became the first steelpan player in the UK to study at a conservatoire with steelpan as the main instrument. He was invited by the BBC to take part in the programme, *Descendants*. Debi Gardner concluded "we need to do this again because your story is so inspirational." A member of the audience suggested that perhaps BAS (British Association of Steel Bands) may set up a small group to provide advice for upcoming students.

This was followed by another ex-Middlesex University student Delphina James who did her music degree on pan but also tutored and produced theory books for teaching clarinet, saxophone and bassoon. Her music school 'TamBam Steel



Figure 15. Delphina James during her presentation "Learn Music On ...A Steel Pan Music Tuition" which goes through her approach to teaching Steelpan along the lines of other traditional instruments.

Orchestra Academy' was launched in 2019. Her presentation covered her steelpan music series 'Learn Music On...', a two year curriculum for all pans in a steel orchestra. (Figure 15). The songs are designed as duets for tutors and learners and can be used for sight-reading practice, technique, aural training and understanding music theory. In her presentation, Delphina got the audience involved using hand clapping to follow the beats which included a few musical rest symbols to understand the concept. There was mutual praise for an



Figure 16. As so common during the COVID-19 pandemic, speakers were forced to do online presentations. For Dr. Bowie to be barred from travel was not only very disappointing for him personally but his entire steelband “Rose of Sharon” who had look forward to playing during the conference concerts.

outstanding piece of work which is now in progress to the next stage.

The three overseas speakers for the final session of the conference, Dr Bowie Sonnie Bowie (Nigeria), Professor Andrew Martin (USA) and Mr. Amadu Massally (Sierra Leone) were all unable to travel during this period. Mr. Massally was unable to send his presentation, but Prof. Martin’s was sent by video and was based on project work he carried out in Antigua. The island adopted steelpan almost from its inception via Hell’s Gate Steel Orchestra in 1945 and implemented steelband as a tour de force in its burgeoning tourist industry. However, Prof. Martin was impressed with the islands’ large youth contingent and the manner in which local schools have integrated steelbands in after-school classes whose players then flow directly into the larger established bands. Several of these steelbands such as Halcyon, Harmonites, Hell’s Gate, Panache etc. are well known abroad and Prof. Martin believes that the system developed there may be used as a model elsewhere.

Dr Bowie’s Plenary Lecture entitled ‘The Rise of Steelbands Across Africa’ was presented via Zoom and delivered with gusto, huge pride, compassion and energy. He charted the trials and tribulations to establish a foothold for steelbands in Nigeria and Africa as a whole following Trinidad and Tobago’s Starlift Steel Orchestra’s historic visit to Nigeria in 1977 as part of their Festival of Arts and Culture programme. The impetus for the birth of steelband there may have been Starlift’s generosity in leaving the instruments behind in Lagos after the Festival. Dr Bowie proudly announced that after 44 years, Nigeria boasts having some 30 vibrant steelbands who now run their own Panorama competitions. The steelband for him is almost mystical and symbolic of the triumph of Africans, who in the midst of extreme turmoil, torture and suppression by the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade still managed to craft something so beautiful that bore the hallmark of their ancestry. He endeavours to relate its history and spends a great of his time in promoting its uptake and culture on the Continent. South Africa leads the continent with >150 steelbands while Botswana has two and there is one in Tanzania. There is however, growing interest in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Ivory Coast and other West African countries.

### Panel Debate

The meeting closed with a lively debate on ‘Expanding the Space of the National Panorama’. The panel consisted of most of the leading figures of Notting Hill Carnival; Alexander Loewenthal (aka Alexander D Great), Allyson Williams, Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier, Clary Salandy, Debi Gardner, Eversley Mills, Pepe Francis, Patrick McKay, Robbie Joseph, Toussaint

Clarke and Matthew Phillip (remotely) (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Panel debate on the future Panorama space. From right to left; Alexander Loewenthal (aka Alexander D Great), Clary Salandy, Allyson Williams, Pepe Francis, Debi Gardner, Patrick McKay, Toussaint Clarke, Robbie Joseph, Eversley Mills and Matthew Phillip (remotely)

Dr Bowie was due to act as the panel's moderator but in his absence, Pepe Francis chaired the session. He opened the debate by addressing the huge cost in taking a steelband to Panorama, which deters most bands from entering the competition. Despite the limited number of steelbands all agreed that the current venue is overcrowded and patrons were staying away. Central to the debate therefore is whether the venue, Emslie Horniman's Pleasance, has outgrown its space and is now suppressing the development of the Panorama. Consensus could not be reached within the 90-minute allotted time. There were passionate and rational views to retain it at its current venue, increasing ticket charge to 3 - 4 fold to offset cost. Some audience participants, who also perform at Panorama, fervently opposed these views, arguing that many would not be able to afford such cost. Some, including panel members favoured a move to a larger venue

such as Wembley or Hyde Park that would permit a greater number of steelbands, including 'Small' or 'Medium' category bands to participate. They argued that this would increase revenue and improve the quality of the event while also enabling wider participation. This was opposed on the grounds that travel outside the current venue would be so costly (>£30,000) for the core large bands that many may not be able to participate. The debate ended unresolved but perhaps there was a leaning towards re-examining the potential of Hyde Park as a future venue.

### **Commemorating the Silver Jubilee of 'St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra' and the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Arrival of 'Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra' (TASPO) in Concert**



Figure 18. A cross section of St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra playing their hearts out during the conference as part of their Silver Jubilee celebrations.

St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra (SMA<sup>3</sup>SO) was founded in 1996 and remains in the Borough of Brent in Stonebridge and Harlesden. Some 300 youths have passed through the band and many go on to become leading players in bigger bands such a Ebony, Mangrove and Metronomes. Its current leader Patrick McKay stated that the band extended its responsibilities to its youths by raising their



self-esteem, self-worth and aspiration through educational, musical, recreational, personal development and leadership activities. Over the years many of its youths have picked up prestigious awards and gone on to study at universities. The band faced near dissolution in 2016 but bounced back to celebrate its Silver Jubilee in 2021. The first half of the concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> October was part of this celebration and saw the band entertaining a packed audience for over an hour of continuous music with a scintillating and versatile repertoire which included classics, jazz, rock, soul, military, Latin and of course calypso (Figure 18). Alexander D Great, Roger Gibbs and Ebony Steelband, led by Carlene Etienne's 'pan-round-neck' side then joined the tribute to St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra by first playing on stage and then parading through the audience with several



Figure 19. Carlene Etienne (far right), Musical Director of Ebony Steelband leading the pan-round-neck team as they performed on stage - then flaunting through the audience. Bubbles with the red handkerchief hanging loose from the back pocket, impersonating the TASPO icon Antony Williams.

upbeat calypsos that included Kitchie's 'Sugar Bum Bum' (Figure 19).

The second half of this concert commemorated TASPO's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary

and was presented visually as a PowerPoint by Haroun Shah with an ensemble of Notting Hill Carnival pioneers who played with pans on their laps to mimic TASPO's players. These included: the leader, Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier (single second), Haroun Shah (tenor), Patrick McKay (5-note base), Dudley Dickson (dudup), Cyril Khamai (scratcher), Frank Ward (maracas/cowbell) and Herman Betancourt (maracas). A black and white frieze of the Festival of Britain obtained from the Southbank Archives was used as a backdrop for the evening. Lord Kitchener's 1950 calypso titled 'Festival of Britain' was played to start the event. There is no mention of TASPO in this calypso as TASPO was just being formed and Kitchie may have been unaware of developments at home. They were entrusted with raising the \$6,000 needed as the Trinidad and Tobago government's support was not forthcoming. Some of the key fundraisers such as Albert Gomes, Bhadase Maharaj, Edwin Lee Lum and Bermudez represent the diverse racial background of the country in the early history of steelpan.

TASPO playing at the South Bank led by Barbadian-born Lt Nathaniel Joseph Griffith conducting the band of 11 players is shown in this volume in Nestor Sullivan's paper. Vivid accounts of three TASPO members were relayed first by Roger Gibbs (from Barbados) who shed light on Lt. Griffith's background and his aspirations for starting the first national steelband. Griffith was ably supported by Anthony Williams and Ellie Mannette. Williams's protégé at Pan Am North Stars, 'Bubbles' dressed like Williams for the evening (Figure 19) gave his view of the genius of this 93-year old living legend. TASPO's members, Theo Stephens (Free French) and

Belgrave Bonaparte (Southern Symphony) were from San Fernando where Cyril Khamai grew up and played pan with them. Cyril provided detailed information on the impact of TASPO in San Fernando, an area where there are huge gaps in our knowledge. (see Laila Shah, 2020). The author described it as “the single, most poignant event that propelled steelpan to the global stage ...TASPO did not simply perform at a momentous exhibition of cultural arts in Britain, these pioneers went on a mission to demonstrate the ingenuity and novelty of a nation, that was set to break away from colonialism, and stamp its presence on the world... and inspired a generation to take their talent to Europe and North America”. She declared that 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 should be written into the history books of Trinidad and Tobago and designated “**TASPO Day**”. This memorable evening closed with the ‘TASPO and Friends’ ensemble playing with the pans on their laps, three classics, ‘Matilda’, ‘Ole Lady Walk a Mile and Half’ (Russ Henderson and TASPO’s Sterling Betancourt’s favourite) and their arrangement of ‘Doh Stop the Carnival’ with Sterling’s elder brother, 97-year old Herman Betancourt even singing along while the band played.

### **Acknowledgements**

The organisers of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts titled ‘*The Transformative Power of Carnival Arts (Steelpan, Calypso and Mas), Rebounding from the COVID-19 Pandemic*’ gratefully acknowledge the support of the following, without whom it

would not have been possible to hold this conference:

### **Carnival Village Trust**

For providing the venue and contributing towards the cost of the event.

### **Partners**

St Michael and All Angels Steel Orchestra, Middlesex University, The New Carnival Company, Centre for Culture and the Arts at Leeds Beckett University, Cultural Industries Research and Innovation Network at Oxford Brookes University, Maestro7 and UKON Careers.

### **Organising Committee:**

Laila Shah, Alexander Loewenthal (aka Alexander D Great), Ros Alexander, Emily Zobel Marshall, Hanna Klein-Thomas, Maica Gugolati, Chris Slann, Lynda Rosenior-Patten; Overseas; Roger Gibbs (Canada), Kela Francis (University of Trinidad and Tobago), Suzanne Burke (University of the West Indies), Bowie Sonnie Bowei (Nigeria), Leon Foster Thomas (USA) and Andrew Martin (USA) and Chair, Haroun Shah.

### **ACASA Support**

Vincent M. John (Chair) and the team from the Association of Calypsonians and Soca Artistes (ACASA) for support performances from Lord Cloak, G-String, Helena B and De Admiral along with D’Alberto.

### **Photographs**

These were all kindly provided by Stephen Spark, Roger Gibbs and Robbie Joseph. Our warm thanks for their generosity and support.

### **Support from Funders**

RBKC - Black History Month Grant (£500).

K&C Foundation - Green Shoots Fund - £2,500

City Living, Local Life (CLLL) Fund (£1000)

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## " Who Going to Take Care of the Baby?" Diasporic Baby Dolls and Carnival Activism

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### Abstract

In Trinidad carnival 'Baby Doll', dressed in frilly bloomers and a bonnet, screams at male onlookers to pay for the care of their illegitimate baby and thrusts a white doll into their arms. This traditional carnival masquerade has long been implemented as a form of social commentary on absentee fathers, racial mixing and the rape of black Caribbean women by white men. While the Baby Doll mas has been less visible in Trinidad carnival since the 1930s, it is now being reused and reinterpreted by social activists such as Amanda McIntyre, Eintou Springer, Tracey Sankar-Charleau, Makeda Thomas and others as a way of highlighting feminist concerns, exploring queer sexualities and tackling issues such as teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse.

Over in mainland America, in the New Orleans Mardi Gras, large bands of women dressed as Baby Dolls representing the role of segregated black sex workers under Jim Crow, take to the streets to proudly 'walk raddy' in defiance of sexual, economic and racial oppression to strengthen the bonds of sisterhood.

This article will examine the complex ways in which the Baby Doll mas has reflected, resisted and challenged capitalistic sexual and racial politics. It will outline the history of the mas in New Orleans and Trinidad and explore the multiple manifestations of Baby Doll as a form of political activism in contemporary carnival culture.

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**Key Words:** Baby Doll; Carnival; Masquerade, Caribbean, New Orleans; Madi Gras; Feminism, Sexual Politics; Gender; Activism.



Figure 1. Amanda McIntyre, *Midnight in Belmont: St. Francis Church 2*. Photographer, Jason Audain (*Tout Moun: The Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2021)

## Introduction

### The Trinidadian Baby Doll: Origins

Baby Doll was a popular figure in French influenced carnivals in the Francophone colonies. An *en bebe* character and mas was first documented by the journalist Lafcadio Hearn in the Carnival of Saint-Pierre in Martinique in 1888 (McIntyre and Wegner, 2020). In Trinidad Carnival, the character was an important mas figure to Martinican immigrants who relocated to the island after the French revolution. In late nineteenth-century Trinidad there are 'reports of men and women parading in women's nightdresses, sometimes short and frilly', although the name 'Baby Doll' came later (Franco in Vaz-Deville, 2018, p.67).

The earliest recorded Baby Doll mas in Trinidad dates back to 1885; the description of the mas is found in the book *The De Lima of Frederick Street* (1981) by Arthur De Lima. The De Lima family were well-known jewellers in Port of Spain, and Arthur De Lima explains that in 1925 his father recounted the story of a Baby Doll mas in the carnival of 1885. De Lima's father described how uncomfortable the mas made him feel:

I did not enjoy the 'old mas' women with cloth babies in their arms who stopped to claim me every time as the father of their child. They embarrassed me, and I quickly paid up the shilling they demanded.

Six children were pinned on me by these money makers.

(De Lima, 1981, pp. 47-48)

In 1930 the Baby Doll mas is also described in Michael Anthony's book *Parade of the Carnivals* (1930) under the headings 'ole mas' and 'mothers with babies in their arms seeking fathers' (Anthony in Henry, 2020, p.48). In a 1988 interview with Trinidadian carnival bandleader Stephen Leung describes the mas as a 'begging mas' popular with women from lower socio-economic backgrounds as it allowed them to make a bit of money during carnival (Leung in Vaz-Deville, 2018, p.68).

### Baby Doll: Symbol of Empowerment or Desperation?

There is clearly much more to the Baby Doll mas than simply 'begging'. In Trinidad the mas character is closely linked to the figure of the 'Jammed', a woman considered under the 'diameter of respectability'; an 'unruly body', who, from the late nineteenth-century 'retaliated against her dehumanizing position in society' (Henry and Plaza, 2020, p.5). The Jammed character is brought to life in Tony Hall's 2002 play *Jean and Dinah, Who Have Been Locked Away in a World Famous Calypso Since 1956 Speak Their Minds Publicly*, 'inspired by the title of the Calypso song 'Jean and Dinah' sung by Mighty Sparrow. The play was performed by Susan Sandiford and Rhoma Spencer who proudly describe themselves 'modern day Jammeds' (Hall in Riggio, 2004, p.166). Jammed women can be interpreted as a disruptive force who call for a revaluation of the role of women in Trinidadian society by refusing to ascribe to social etiquette and patriarchal power structures.

Carnival scholars often identify two competing ideologies in Trinidad carnival; traditional mas, to which performances like Baby Doll belong, and pretty mas, which is the beads and feathers bikini-style mas. We have now clearly outgrown this dichotomy; women are using both ‘pretty ’and ‘traditional ’mas in ways that not only celebrate their sexuality but also to create a platform for social activism and a social justice.

The contemporary critics of ‘pretty mas ’ are numerous, however; carnival scholar Dwane Plaza, in *Carnival is Woman: Feminism and Performance in Caribbean Mas* (2020) calls pretty mas the ‘overrepresentation of the female carnival body’, a body which is ‘excessively sexualized ’and therefore supports patriarchy, objectification, misogynistic treatment and ‘persuasively affirms the Caribbean as a sexualized paradise where certain exotic Caribbean women are available and willing to denigrate themselves in order to be noticed and celebrated ’(Henry and Plaza, 2020, p.9).

Caribbean feminists such Anna Kasafi Perkins strongly challenge this type of conservative view and argue that women on the road in carnival are ‘revaluing their formerly owned and colonised bodies ’ (Perkins, 2011, p. 373). Perkins insists that the masquerade of sequins and bikinis is in fact a progressive one - one which celebrates the female body in public through bodily transgressions, and assaults conservative notions of a woman’s ‘proper place ’(Perkins, 2011, p. 368). In my view, playing mas normally centers around confidence building, sexual self-determination, joy and pleasure, and importantly, politics. Connections can be

drawn here between the theories of Jamaican academic Carolyn Cooper on the role of women in Jamaican dancehall culture, which she argues centres on an ‘act of self-conscious female assertion of control over the representation of her person ’(Cooper in Plaza p. 24/p.11).

The history of the Baby Doll mas, however, is not rooted in liberation politics but in the sexual servitude of black women both during and after the plantation period. Similarly to the dichotomy formed in the theorisation of pretty vs traditional mas, there are two popular competing interpretations of Baby Doll at play both inside and outside academia. One interpretation positions Baby Doll as representative of a weak, downtrodden woman, while another sites the mas as deeply empowering. Frances and Jeff Henry explain that traditionally Baby Doll is depicted as a young, shallow, unthinking, promiscuous female who has a child with a man she has briefly met ’(Henry & Plaza, 2020, p.47). She is confused and can’t take care of her baby after a fling. In this reading she becomes symbolic of the ‘ultimate symbol of the oppression of African women ’(Henry and Plaza, 2020, p.47).

Pamela El Franco also demonstrates that that in Trinidad the performance of the Baby Doll ‘categorized her as promiscuous and immoral’, as she was an unwed mother searching for her baby’s father (Franco, 2018, p. 68). The mas could be interpreted as enacting the role of a woman who slept with several men (with possible hints towards prostitution) and as a result cannot identify her baby’s father.

However, an alternative reading of Baby Doll in Trinidad sees her as symbolic of upholding one aspect of the ethics of a

society. Baby Doll is asking for support; she loves her child, she is an innocent mother drawing attention to her vulnerability and abandonment. In the Caribbean motherhood is central; there is a strong expectation, traditionally, to run the home and often no choice but to do so alone due to the persistent abandonment ‘baby fathers’. In this reading, Baby Doll is re-positioned and forms a part of the moral compass of Trinidadian society (Franco, 2018, p.69).

Despite the numerous conflicting readings of the Baby Doll mas as either empowering or symbolic of desperation, the white baby Baby Doll carries delivers a clear message. This is an unambiguous comment on the rape, sexual abuse and power relations between black women and white men on the island.



Figure 2. Belmont Baby Dolls, ‘Carnival Baby.’ Photographed by Arnaldo James. Carnival Tuesday, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 2019. (Thomas, 2020).

### **Stay Home and Mind Baby: Child Support Legislation**

Key to understanding the role of Baby Doll in Trinidad are the changes to child support legislation on the island. In both the pre and post emancipation period, illegitimate

children were fathered with Black women by white men and no financial support structure was in place to support either mother or child. Black women were at the very bottom of the social and economic hierarchy; they were stereotyped as overly sexed and of loose morals. White French Creoles in particular in Trinidad had black ‘concubines’, fathered children with them and offered them no financial support.

In Trinidad there is a clear link to the beginnings of the Baby Doll mas and the 1880 ‘bastardy’ ordinance survey, which called for child support to be paid by men to illegitimate children. This was initially defeated by French Creole men in power, but finally passed in 1888, despite strong resistance from the white male elite. Dr De Boissiere, a prominent planter, doctor and member of the legislative council, spoke on behalf of the French Creole elite and victim blamed. He said that unmarried mothers were the ‘root cause of the problem,’ and there were no deserted children as these women ‘had intercourse clandestinely with several men’ and seduced them – as ‘seduction, in the full meaning of the word, is rare in our midst’ (Trotman in Franco, 2020, p. 249/p.51).

In 1927 the Legitimation Ordinance in Trinidad No. 8 did allow the courts to track down fathers and ask them to pay child support for their offspring, but mothers would need proof of a marriage and birth certificate, as well as verifying the address of their abode. Many men made it hard for the women to collect this information and single mothers often ended up on the street, homeless, and with no financial support (Franco, 2020, p.70). We can conclude that Trinidadian Baby Doll mas is a clear demonstration and protest against men



sexually exploiting black women and their avoiding their responsibilities as fathers.



Figure 3. Baby Doll Meets Midnight Robber', Idakeda Group. (Springer, 2010).

### **Workin Fuh Deh Yankey Dollar: American Airbase in Trinidad**

The Trinidadian Baby Doll also responds to the development of a military base in Trinidad and the sexual politics that ensued. In 1941 a US naval base was developed on the island. The base caused a growth in the sex trade on the island, in particular in bars, brothels and clubs in Port of Spain. In the 1940s the blue-eyed dolls carried by the Baby Dolls represented the sexual relationships and exchanges that ensued between the servicemen and the local Trinidadian women. These relationships were well-documented by Calypsonians at the time, for example in the Harry Belafonte Calypso, entitled 'Brown Skin Girl' (1947), Belafonte sings:

Now the Americans made an invasion  
We thought it was a help to the island  
Until they left from here on vacation  
They left the native boy home to mind  
their children

[Chorus]

Singin', "Brown skin girl, stay home  
and mind, baby

Brown skin girl, stay home and  
mind, baby"

I'm goin' away in a sailing boat

And if I don't come back

Stay home and mind, baby

A cutting response to the patriarchal politics at the heart of Belafonte's calypso can be found in this version of the song in a booklet of 15 calypsos entitled 'Jamaican Calypso Songs' published in the 1950s:

Brown skin gal stay home and mind  
yo' baby.

Brown skin gal stay home and mind  
yo' baby.

Papa's gone to sea in a sailing boat.

And if he don't come back, *throw 'way  
de damn baby.*

(Garnice 2013)

Calypsonian Lord Invader also documented the sexual politics on the island during this period in the famous calypso 'Rum and Coca Cola' (1945) which describes mothers and daughters 'workin Fuh deh yankey dollar';

And when de Yankeys first went to  
Trinidad,

Some ah de young girls were more  
than glad,

Deh said that de Yankeys treat de  
nice

And deh give dem the better price.

Deh buy rum and coca-cola, went  
down point Cumana,

Both mothers and daughters,

Workin Fuh deh yankey dollar.

In the Calypsos that use the presence of the air base as a source of 'cheeky' mirth and

social analysis, the male singer, as a conduit for a deeply sexist Trinidadian society, positions the women as responsible for either their poverty, their professions as sex workers, their naiveté or their sex drive, rather than holding the American sailors accountable for abandoning their sexual partners and children. The most problematic calypso responding to the sexual politics of the airbase is aforementioned 'Jean and Dinah' (When The Yankees Gon) (1956) by Mighty Sparrow. When carnival Theatre Practitioner and Director Tony Hall responded to Sparrow's song with his 2002 play 'Jean and Dinah Who Have Been Locked Away in a World Famous Calypso Since 1956 Speak Their Minds Publicly', he fleshed out the characters of Jean and Dinah and showed their power, vulnerability and humanity. Mighty Sparrow's carnival road march is a comment on the prostitution that the bases supported and the desperation of female sex workers following the closure of the bases. The girls are feeling 'bad' as there are no more 'Yankees in Trinidad', but this leads to, much to the singer's delight, a fall in their prices for local men who can now 'get it all for nothing':

So when you bounce up:

Jean and Dinah, Rosita and Clementina

Round the corner posing

Bet your life is something they selling

And if you catch them broke

You can get it all for nothing

Don't make no row!

When the Yankees gone,

the Sparrow take over now

In the 1940s the blue-eyed, blond haired white doll the Baby Doll mas player carried on the streets in carnival carried yet another layer of symbolism in the history of Black female sexual and economic exploitation at

the heart of the mas. Having lost the financial support of US servicemen, the 1950s Baby Doll took to the streets accusing local Black men of being the father of her 'white' child.

Similarly to the mas in New Orleans, however, there was a decline in the popularity of Baby Doll in the late 1950s and 1960s as Black nationalist and anti-colonial politics took hold on the island. The 1980s saw a resurrection of traditional mas as a resistance to the rise in popularity of female-dominated 'pretty' mas, and Baby Doll returned to carnival. Franco argues, however, that 'this time she was 'passive, a shell of herself, even if the 'memory' of her radical performance persisted (Franco, 2020, p.71).



Figure 4. View of the 1st Bombardment squadron based at Waller and Carlsen fields, 1941-1945.' (*Flight Spirit Magazine*).



Figure 5. A promotional still from Tony Hall's play, 'Jean and Dinah.' Photographer, Abigail Hadeed (2002).

### The Baby Dolls of New Orleans

Today Baby Doll mas is thriving in New Orleans, and its most prolific scholar is Kim Vaz-Deville, Professor of Education and Associate Dean at Xavier university. As both New Orleans and Martinique were French colonies, it is likely that the mas tradition was brought over from the French Caribbean to the US. The New Orleans Baby Dolls do not usually carry dolls and their costumes could be described as a vaudeville-cum-doll outfit, with a frilly apron, a frilled umbrella, silk stockings and garters. There is no thrusting of plastic dolls into the arms of a ‘father’ figure in the crowd, and no demands for accountability – she does not have a vocal or speech element to her performance. She does ask men in the crowd for money, however, which, when received, is tucked inside her garter belt.

In her book *Walking Raddy: The Baby Dolls of New Orleans* (2018), Vaz-Deville carefully chronicles the cultural history of the mas in New Orleans. ‘Walking raddy’ is a type of strutting which she describes as a ‘flamboyant display – claiming space and one’s body and using improvisational strategies to create an unforgettable character’, which is typical of the New Orleans Baby Doll mas (Vaz-Deville, 2018, p. 103).

The Baby Doll mas in New Orleans has its roots among the women working in the ‘quasi’ red light district close to the notorious Storyville red light district in the city. Here ‘gambling, drinking and sex for pay were readily available to both black and working-class white men’ (Vaz-Deville in Ramsey, 2021). Black and brown prostitutes from this area self-named themselves ‘Baby Dolls’, an appellation

also used by their pimps and ‘Sugar Daddies’ to address them. These women were not recognisable immediately as prostitutes as they came from a slightly better part of town than Storyville itself. As a result of its beginnings among sex workers in New Orleans, Baby Doll became closely linked to prostitution as it did during the years of the American air base in Trinidad in the 1940s.

Vaz-Deville draws from an interview with Beatrice Hill, a sex worker in New Orleans who is attributed with starting the first Baby Doll group in 1912. Hill explains that the New Orleans Baby Doll tradition was a result of the competition between her uptown group of sex workers and a downtown group of women working in Storyville itself. Another Baby Doll performer and sex worker told investigator Robert McKinney that she always dressed as a Baby Doll during this period and other women began to emulate her. Vaz-Deville does not push to prove either claim, but demonstrates how by the 1930s the Baby Dolls have their own ‘gang’ (the New Orleans term for carnival bands or troupes) and had become fully integrated into Black Mardi Gras traditions alongside other traditional New Orleans carnival bands such as the Skeleton gangs, the Indian gangs and the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club parade.

Pamela Franco explains that the early mas fell into two categories, the ‘sexy’ Baby Dolls (*bebe*) who would dance and sing bawdy songs and the women who dressed prettily and emulated ‘little girl’ dolls (Franco, 2018, p.67). According to Vaz-Deville, some sex workers playing the Baby Dolls mas would also ‘turn tricks’ during the carnival parade.

In a 2018 radio interview, Cinnamon Black (Resa Bazile), who plays with the famous Million Dollar Baby Dolls, explained the appeal of the mas. When she was growing up, she explains, little girls were supposed to be ‘seen and not heard’, while the Million Dollar Baby Dolls she saw for the first time in 1972 in the Mardi Gras parade were wild and rowdy – unruly bodies – and held the promise of liberation from having to be a ‘good girl’ (Black interviewed by Jackson, 2018).

Cinnamon Black explains the important distinction between ‘carnival’ and Mardi Gras in New Orleans; Mardi Gras is a structured parade while ‘carnival’ is chaotic. While Mardi Gras starts and stops at a certain time, carnival happens in the African American neighbourhoods; ‘it’s where the grandmas can sit on their porches with the children and the people who didn’t have the money to go downtown’ (Jackson, 2018). Black loved watching all the different Baby Dolls in the parade and in carnival in her neighbourhood; the re ‘were prissy ones,’ ‘pretty ones,’ ‘wild dancers, some ‘walking raddy,’ and some accompanied music made from banging pots and pans and, later, with a band.

The first Baby Dolls she saw, Brown remembers, wore garters and stockings and asked men to put money in their garter belts. This demonstrates the direct link to the mas and sex work in New Orleans, compared to the mas as a means to highlight the sexual abuse of black women and the need for money to support illegitimate children in Trinidad. It is this strong connection to the sex trade that made it difficult for more ‘respectable’ women to play Baby Doll mas in New Orleans, Brown explains, and the Baby Dolls received a

great deal of ‘bad press’. The tradition declined as masqueraders grew older as well as a result of its association with prostitution, becoming particularly unfashionable (as it did in Trinidad) with the rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the 1960 and 70s. There was a push in the 1980s to try and dissociate the mas from prostitution, but the mas saw its big revival post-millennium; ‘the revival of the tradition began in the millennium’, explains journalist Jan Ramsey, with the efforts of three women, Antoinette K-Doe, Geannie Thomas and Eva Perry. Antoinette was apparently very vocal in dissociating her group from ‘the reputation of the Baby Dolls, reminding everyone that the new Baby Dolls were strong, independent women working in legitimate professions’ (Ramsey, 2021).

Since 2016, increasingly elaborate, ornate and flamboyant costumes for Baby Doll competitions have become de rigueur in New Orleans and the Baby Doll mas has become a vehicle of escapism for women. According to Cinnamon Brown, through the costume, performance and dances, women can become ‘other’ to what they are during the week; they can transform. There are a wide range of Baby Doll gangs to choose from who play different versions of the Baby Doll mas; to name a few. The gangs often have a male escort for protection (‘big papa doll’), which echoes the roles ‘pimps’ or ‘sugar daddies’ would play for the original Baby Dolls working in and around Storyville.

The Baby Doll gangs today also enjoy get-togethers; they celebrate each other’s birthdays, exchange Christmas gifts and undertake charitable work in the Black community – as well as ‘celebrating each

other '(Jackson, 2018). A less radical element of the dolls is the teaching of domestic etiquette to younger dolls by the older dolls, which include housekeeping skills, such as how to lay a table, 'how to get a stain off the floor, how to sew a button, how to hem a pair of pants', and practical advice on how to take care of a businesses (Jackson 2018).



Figure 6. The New Orleans Baby Dolls held their annual "Blessing of The Streets" on Saturday, May 1, at their annual gathering on the North Peters side of the New Orleans Jazz Museum. (*Offbeat*, 2021).

### **Trinidad Baby Doll Today: Mas Activists**

While many of the Baby Dolls of New Orleans celebrate their Black sisterhood, their liberation from their daily lives as mothers or wives and undertake important community work, Baby Doll in Trinidad is used as a vehicle for political activism.

Many contemporary Trinidadian women mas players are educated, well-travelled, proud of their bodies and have some disposable income, a far cry from the disenfranchised Baby Doll represented in the 1940s mas. In Trinidad carnival, women



Figure 7. Stephanie Leitch, 'Leslie the Lesbian Doll'; "Ah lookin fah she". Parade of Characters. Traditional Mas Competition, St James Amphitheatre. (Leitch, 2013).

are re-defining themselves as in control of their own sexuality and calling for societal change. There have also been changes to Baby Doll's costume; no longer is she in a long white dress, but a shorter one in which she assumes a more sexualized and assertive demeanour. In her article 'The Baby Doll: Memory, Myths and Mas' (2021), Trinidadian activist, scholar and Baby Doll performer Amanda McIntyre argues that the mas is now a 'triad representation 'of doll, girl and women in a single performance.' According to McIntyre, while the mas may have started as a parody of single mothers, these 'male-

centred politics of respectability [are] dismissed almost entirely in contemporary carnival presentations of the Baby Doll in Trinidad and Tobago '(McIntyre, 2021, p.4).

The contemporary Baby Doll is not being laughed at or pitied for her situation, but is continuing to be implemented to call attention to the sexual exploitation of women as well as to highlight the taboos of incest and rape. The mas is also a platform through which to explore lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer and non-cisgender identities.

Playwright, Actress and Poet Eintou Springer directed and performed in a short film produced by Idakeda, an arts group founded by Springer with Actor and Choreographer Dara E. Healy and Writer and Cultural Consultant Atillah Springer, exploring safe sex and sexual behaviour entitled 'Midnight Robber meets Baby Doll '(2010). Since the film was released, Springer explains that women have been coming to her asking how they can develop the Baby Doll figure and use it for activism.

Hazel Brown, Coordinator of the Network of Advancements for Women, also implements the mas for gender advocacy and performs the character at rallies for women's rights. Another manifestation of the mas was developed and performed by feminist Stephanie Leitch in 2010 through the creation of her mas 'Leslie and the Lesbian Baby Doll', a queer identified character mothering a doll and looking for a wife (McIntyre, 2021, p.5).

Helen Kennedy, in a 2018 Baby Doll mas in association with the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago,

presented a quadruple pram overflowing with sixteen dolls as part of a sexual health campaign and distributed condoms to spectators. In 2020, Mas Designer, Performing Artist and Teacher of traditional mas and folklore Tracey Sankar-Charleau created the Crick Crack Baby Doll mas, 'The Red Thread Cycle – All the Dead and All the Living', which focused on intergenerational patterns of sexual abuse and violence, while Amanda McIntyre performs the mas for the 'She Right Collective, 'a Caribbean feminist organisation focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights (McIntyre, 2021, p.5).

McIntyre also created a queer Baby Doll mas with researcher Jarula M. I. Wegner in 2019. The mas, entitled 'You are Worthy', saw a Baby Doll couple dressed as 'women 'parenting the same child, one of whom was a man dressed as a 'woman'; 'thus affirming transgender, non-gender binary and non-gender conforming family life '(McIntyre, 2021, p.8). Until recently, McIntyre argues, queer culture in carnival was minimally promoted; the 'You are Worthy 'performance was in solidarity with the 'legitimacy, inclusion and visibility of marginalized sexualities '(McIntyre, 2021, p.8).

Trinidadian Choreographer and Designer Makeda Thomas forms a part of the Belmont Baby Dolls. Their 2019 diasporic mas was shaped around the ethos of reclaiming and asserting control of their womanhood and connecting back to the history of Baby Doll as well as across the ocean to the Baby Dolls of New Orleans; 'we invoke the jamettes, the women of Storyville, those women who for themselves define their womanhood,

motherhood, and sexuality. And we reject the idea that if we are all of those things, we are not precious '(Thomas, 2020).

The Belmont Baby Dolls also created a series 'Spirit Dolls' to reinterpret the Baby Doll mas in a way that 'subverts the usual presentation '(Lindo, 2019). Makeda Thomas explains that the subversion of the mas is vital, as it was 'about a mother who is trying to hold someone accountable for a child, and can be played very pitifully. 'She explains that the reaction to the mas in Trinidad has been 'very disdainful '(Lindo 2019). She believes that there is a 'lack of agency and deep critical thinking 'in Trinidadian carnival performance, but hopes to create space of agency for the performer to connect them to 'their real lives 'through the mas; 'so it's not a parody, it's not funny, so we can talk about what this mas means '(Lido, 2019). Thomas's 'spirit dolls', created in collaboration with Trinidadian artist Brianna McCarthy, are dolls that combine diasporic materials; African textiles, European lace and fabrics 'commonly found in Caribbean home 'such as florals and cotton prints. The sprit doll as a diasporic doll is a vessel through which Black women connect with their ancestors as well as with their unconscious selves.

The post-millennial Baby Doll in Trinidad and New Orleans is a vehicle for social activism, sisterhood and change as well as an embodiment of a history of profound gender inequality and exploitation. She is being used by women in carnival to carve out new radical and dynamic political and social spaces. She has become central to the toolkit used to dismantle longstanding patriarchal and colonial legacies. This new Baby Doll does not need taking care of; she can take care of herself and is active in her demand for

agency and accountability. Her protestations will not cease.



Figure 8. Makeda Thomas and Brianna McCarthy's spirit doll. Presented for "Fluid Black: Dance Back", the 4th Collegium for African Diasporic Dance Conference at the Rubenstein Arts Center at Duke University, 21 February 2020. (Thomas, 2020).

### "A girl's doll is herself"

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#### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Amanda McIntyre for her feedback on the draft version of this article and for her inspiring Baby Doll performances and scholarship. A big thank you also to my good friend Max Farrar for his careful editing of the manuscript. I would also like to give a big shout out to Haroun Shah for his unwavering dedication to this journal and for creating a dynamic and supportive academic and artistic space for the analysis and celebration of Caribbean carnival cultures in the UK.

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## **Seventy Years and TASPO's Journey of Mythical Proportions Lives On; Intergenerational Links, Key to Preservation**

**Nestor Sullivan**

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### **Abstract**

Seventy years on from TASPO's (Trinidad All-Steel Percussion Orchestra) seminal performance at the Festival of Britain in 1951, memories of this historic journey are fading as all but two of its pioneers have passed on. However, this trailblazing mission and its colossal impact on the development of steelpan needs preservation through intergenerational links. Workshops and tutorials at schools or panyards in Trinidad and Tobago meet youths and teachers alike who are oblivious to this period of history that shaped the format of the contemporary steel orchestra. Much is written on this inaugural voyage of discovery and vivid monochromic photographs capture poignant moments of the trip that have been reproduced in books and presented at conferences over the years. This brief account summarises key aspects of the TASPO project that can be incorporated into educational packages to help preserve the legacy of this near three-week journey of mythical proportions across the Atlantic in a banana boat to dumbfound audiences in the mother country. In a recent paper written by Laila Shah (2020) she calls for the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951, the day TASPO's envoys embarked on that momentous journey by boat on the S.S. San Mateo from the Wrightson Road Wharf, Port of Spain to be made a public holiday, designated "TASPO Day", in honour of these 11 heroes and Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith who took steelpan to the world. She suggested that steelbands should gather at this spot and play to mark the significance of this day in the history of pan. This author unequivocally supports this call especially while two of TASPO members, Anthony Williams (Trinidad) and Sterling Betancourt (London) are still active and can be present.

**Key Words:** Steelband, TASPO, San Mateo, Festival of Britain, South Bank, TASPO Day, Intergenerational Links

### **Introduction**

To fully appreciate the role and impact of TASPO on the steelband movement it is important to understand the historical context within which this development took place. The period of TASPO is defined as the era of "The Consolidation of the Modern Steelband -1945 to 1960" The period immediately preceding this is "The Birth of the Modern Steelband - 1939 to 1945" (Goddard, 1991, Stuempfle, 1995).

Trinidad was a British colony and slavery was abolished in 1834-1838, this freedom was celebrated by the formerly enslaved people of the island in song, dance and masquerade, it was referred to as "The Camboulay Carnival". Camboulay is a derivative of the French words "Cannes Brulees" which means "Burning Cane". This was a ritualistic event where the enslaved peoples from neighbouring plantations were assembled to go to assist in cutting the fresh-burnt canes. It was also

a social occasion that involved singing, dancing and merrymaking after the chores were completed. It was this celebration that was brought onto the streets of the early Trinidad Carnival (Liverpool, 2001).

These Camboulay revelers were under constant attack from the colonial authorities who considered these celebrations to be a nuisance and disturbance to the peace. In 1880 the revelers were stopped from their celebrations by the colonial police, in the following year, the Camboulay revelers confronted the police and won a battle against them for the right to celebrate. This event is called the Camboulay Riots of 1881. The resultant Commission of Inquiry recommended among other things, that the African Drum should be banned. This was the main instrument for the procession on Carnival Days for the masses of the people. By the turn of the century the Tamboo Bamboo was developed to replace the drum as the main instrument on Carnival Days (Cowley 2008).

History records that by the mid 1930's the dustbin was rapidly replacing the Tamboo Bamboo. This introduction of metallic instruments laid the foundation for the discovery of the steelband instruments with notes. The carnival was banned during the majority of the period of World War 2 (1939 - 1945). At the end of the war in May 1945, the people were allowed to parade the streets in carnival like atmosphere on Victory over Europe (VE) Day. It was the first time the majority of the population were hearing the new instruments with notes, prior to that the bands were only percussive, without melody (Dudley, 2007, Pierre, 1962).

In December 1950 the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandmen (NATTS) was formed with Sydney Gallop of Crusaders, as President. The function of

this association was to seek and promote the interests of the member bands and to resolve differences among the bands. Lennox Pierre, solicitor and musician, was an adviser to the association and one of his colleagues who resided in London, Edric Connor, informed him of the festival and lobbied the Festival Committee to include a Trinidad Steelband in the Festival of Britain. The formation of TASPO and its participation in this Festival was the first major task undertaken by the Steelband Association (Brown, 1990, Ozuzu, 2012).

### **Purpose of TASPO**

The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was formed to participate in the Festival of Britain in July 1951. A steelband was invited to perform at this prestigious festival that was held in post-war Britain where performers came from the colonies of the British Empire. It consisted of eleven players from different bands throughout the country. The member steelbands of the newly formed National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandmen (NATTS) were asked to submit the names of two players who they believed to be suitable. A committee was nominated to make the final selection, originally twenty players were suggested but it eventually went to eleven (Table 1, Figure 1). TASPO left Trinidad on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 and returned on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1951 (5 months).



Figure 1. TASPO Performing at the South Bank under the leadership of Lt. Nathaniel Joseph Griffith.

Table 1. Composition of TASPO under Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith.

TASPO Member	Steelband in Trinidad	Pan played with TASPO
Elliot ‘Ellie’ Mannette,	Invaders, Woodbrook	Ping Pong
Theophilus ‘Theo’ Stephens	Free French, San Fernando	Ping Pong
Orman ‘Patsy’ Haynes	Casablanca	Ping Pong
Andrew ‘Pan’ de la Bastide	Hill 60 (Chicago)	Ping Pong
Winston ‘Spree’ Simon	Tokyo	Ping Pong
Sterling Betancourt	Crossfire, St James	Alto Pan
Belgrave Bonaparte	Southern Symphony, Marabella	Alto Pan
Dudley Smith	Rising Sun, Belmont	Tenor Bass
Anthony ‘Tony’ Williams	North Stars, St James	Tenor Bass
Philmore ‘Boots’ Davidson	City Syncopators, Quarry Street	Bass

\*Granville Sealy declined his selection for personal reasons and was replaced by Sonny Roach who fell ill in Martinique and had to return to Trinidad.

**Preparation of The Orchestra**

The Musical Director, Lt Joseph Griffith, together with Lennox Pierre, introduced a system of music notation that allowed the TASPO members to read the music. The ranges of the alto, middle and bass sections were expanded chromatically for the first

time. The orchestra was then able to perform a repertoire of music including: Latin American; Calypso; Popular Standards. The band practiced at the Youth Centre, Cocorite and all players received contracts for their services to the orchestra.

**Fund Raising**

The fundraising took place under the label ‘Operation Britain’ and was a nationwide project with collections taking place in shops across the country. Donations from the Governor, the Business Sector, the Legislature and the population at large were



Figure 2. TASPO’s members transporting their pans out of compatriot Eric Connor’s basement flat in London in 1951 for a performance. The black painted Victorian corrugated iron railings and steps are a unique feature of different parts of London.



Figure 3. TASPO members offloading their pans at the South Bank on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1951 to a bemused audience of mostly children. (Newspaper clipping courtesy Kim Johnson)

sourced. In addition, concerts and performances took place in cinemas, community centres and anywhere there were facilities to do so.

### TASPO in Europe

The central focus of TASPO's performance was at the Festival of Britain, South Bank, London (Figures 3 -5). The band stayed at the home of Edric Connor and practiced there but their 'hosts'



Figure 4. TASPO performing at the South Bank on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1951 in the presence of a well-attended audience. The tenor and alto sections of the band are seen. The base players are not visible in this photo. (Newspaper clipping courtesy Kin Johnson)

were keen to promote them as much as possible. Hence, they performed at the West Indian Students' Union, 1 Collingham Gardens, Earls Court, London whilst also doing shows with Boscoe Holder and Lord Kitchener. Following the Festival of Britain, TASPO went on to France, St Lucia and Martinique, making a record while in France.

### Response to TASPO

The reports reached Trinidad and Tobago via news reels such as Pathe News, reports



Figure 5. Lord Kitchener performing to the backing of TASPO players. (Newspaper clipping courtesy Kin Johnson)

in the UK and Trinidad Guardian and were very positive. So awestruck were some people at the South Bank when they heard the music from the 'rusted oil drums' that they described it as "Black Magic"

### Impact on The Steelband Movement

The impact of TASPO's trip was immense and can be summarised as follows:

- Increase in self-confidence and self-esteem
- Expansion of ranges in the orchestra
- More accuracy in the performance of music
- Expansion of repertoire
- Steelband category in Trinidad Music Festival in 1952
- Members of TASPO excel with their bands: North Stars; Syncopators; Free French; Southern Symphony
- Introduce steelband in Europe: Betancourt; Davidson; Stephens; Simon

- Ellie Mannede at West Virginia University

### Intergenerational Links



Figure 6. Intergenerational Links: Laila Shah speaking on the role of youths in steelpan and education at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Carnival Arts Conference, London 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2021.

The author presented a paper on “The role of the youth in the plan for world conquest –musicianship, instrumentation and administration’ at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Steelpan Conference in London titled ‘*Empowering the Youth to lead the UK Transformation of Carnival Arts*’, 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> October 2018. Prior to my presentation, Laila Shah co-presented a paper on her debut and experience of Panorama with Mangrove Steelband who had just won their first recent competition after a few years of being runners-up. It was an awe-inspiring panorama experience for a youth who has a real passion of steelpan. She played mas from 11 months, helped to co-organise these biennial conferences, launch their website, co-manage the International Journal of Carnival Arts, is a trustee of the Carnival Village Trust and the youth representative of the Windrush Memorial Committee while still a student.

Laila recounts that she “grew up in steelband at Notting Hill Carnival”, wearing her first costume as a sailor while

still in a pushchair, aged 11 months. She was tutored in piano, guitar and saxophone while growing up but it was steelpan that truly immersed her interest. She also took piano jazz lessons at a basement pub in North London called ‘*Moon Under the Water*’ where many pannists gathered with the legendary Russ Henderson for a weekly lime and drinks. Russ overheard that a young ‘Trini child’ was taking music lessons there and took it upon his own to find the specific cubicle (there were many) where she was having lessons. He politely interrupted her tuition to wish her success and whispered passionately, “*don’t forget your pan*”. Laila was just seven then but she recalled this as a watershed moment in her life as she was already aware of the magnitude of Russ Henderson’s presence in Notting Hill Carnival and his status as an international jazz pianist. She was spurred on by his sincerity and passion and by this intergenerational communication.

Another decisive moment was to follow a few years later. London’s 2012 Olympics was imminent, and Colin Salmon (UFO Steelband) came up with an idea to host an event he called “Thousand Pans” on London’s South Bank on the River Thames on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012. Because the Olympics was heading off to Brazil, messages went out online for anybody interested to join a steelband jamboree on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and that the tune to be played would be “Brazil” under the direction of Brent Holder (CSI Steelband). It was a day of glorious sunshine and an ecstatic atmosphere in London as ‘Team Great Britain’ was putting in its best performance at an Olympics. Tens of thousands of visitors and residents gathered to look on at this mesmerizing outdoor “Thousand Pans” spectacle. The event brought in enthusiasts from all over the UK

and even Europe with their pans. However, despite the euphoria, the event bore a dark cloud due to the passing of the remarkable pannist, Crystal Holder, wife of Brent on the eve of the event. Brent carried on bravely through the concert; proclaiming to all present that “this was the exact site where TASPO played in 1951 and we should all pay our respects to these titans as the Olympics got ready to move to Latin America. He initiated a ‘one- minute silence’ to honour those TASPO members who had passed on. It was this plea to recognise TASPO and consider the ground that the “Thousand Pans” was taking place as sacred that captured Laila’s imagination and her mission to learn more.

This intergenerational link between the author and Laila demonstrated how vital these conversations are in preserving the history of steelpan (Figure 6). She was now driven by a passion to appreciate more and followed this with her first trip to Trinidad in 2013. She was overwhelmed when she met her first cousin, the legendary Bobby Mohammed whom she heard about her whole life and spoke to by phone, but never met. She spent a full day talking to him about the journey of pan, the world-renowned Guinness Cavaliers and their panorama experiences, especially 1965 when the band first won Panorama to dethrone the invincible Pan Am North Stars.

Bobby then took her to the corner of Drayton and Coffee Streets to see the old panyard of Free French, also the home of his former friend and San Fernando’s erudite pannist, Theophilus ‘Theo’ Stephens who led this extraordinary band. Theo was San Fernando’s representative in TASPO and was just 100 yards away from where Laila’s dad lived, grew up and played with Free French, especially on

J’Ouvert mornings as they were the first band on the road for carnival. Many stories relating to TASPO and including Free French and Theo Stephens were narrated to Laila by Cyril Khamai in London prior to this trip, so she could easily visualise it when she visited the site. Years later she documented her experience following months of interviews with the pan pioneer Cyril Khamai (see Shah, 2020).

Bobby recognising her yearning for pan, procured tickets for her to attend ‘Camps in Steel’ post carnival 2013. She was overwhelmed at the show and so inspired by Bunji Garlin’s performance of ‘Differentology’ that as soon as she returned to London, she began playing this on her newly made pan by Jimi Phillip from Chaguanas. She set about doing her own arrangement of this melodic piece and took it to Nostalgia’s panyard. To her utter shock the senior members of the band gave her the green light to arrange this tune for the band for Notting Hill Carnival 2013. It was to be Nostalgia’s first trophy in carnival competitions in its 50-year history. The author was in London for this carnival and was one of the judges for Notting Hill Carnival – he and his peers had all placed Nostalgia in first place.

The author interviewed Laila Shah on several occasions following the conference 2018 and also hosted her band, Nostalgia Steelband at Pamberi’s panyard when they visited for carnival 2018. She had just entered university to start her BSc and needed to jump several hurdles to be granted ‘special leave’ for time off for Trinidad’s carnival. Nostalgia teamed with up Southern All Stars and played on the streets of San Fernando for both days of carnival (Shah and Shah, 2020). She was sad to see first-hand that steelbands were no longer the focal point of the street carnival

as they are in the diaspora. But she was overjoyed to be playing with a band such as Southern All Stars who continue to buck the trend by playing on the road for both days of carnival; under the leadership of arranger Ishmael “Luxy” Zackerli, protégé of Bobby Mohammed. One of her proudest moments was when she learnt that Theo Stephens was also the founder of Southern All Stars. In London, another TASPO member Sterling Betancourt was the founder of Nostalgia Steelband. She immediately decided that she would document this memorable visit under the title *‘The Memory of TASPO Lives On; Lineages of this Legendary Steelband Team up to Play on the Streets of Trinidad for Carnival 2018’* to emphasise the intergenerational reverberation of this inimitable band that continues to live on. Her walk in the path of TASPO did not end there. When she returned to London to continue her studies at King’s College, University of London she lived and studied near the South Bank where TASPO played in 1951. She said she vividly recalls the “Thousand Pans” event on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and the call from Brent Holder to regard this “ground as sacred to TASPO”. She says that every walk on the South Bank enables her to reflect on the “Thousand Pans” event and gives her a chance to visualise how monumental TASPO’s 1951 performance must have been.

At 70 years there was no way in which she would let this landmark pass unrecognised and was instrumental in co-organising the conference programme for the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021) and the concert *‘Celebrating 70 years of TASPO’s Arrival’*. She had now left London to start her PhD at Oxford University but helped to create the seven-member ‘TASPO

Ensemble’ to perform on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021 to re-enact TASPO’s 1951 performance. She was pleased to see that her call to designate 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 as ‘**TASPO Day**’ was greeted with such jubilation when this was announced at the conclusion of the concert. Many of the youths that evening would have learnt about the phenomenal work of TASPO, such events help to ensure that this intergenerational link with TASPO perpetuates for posterity.

### Conclusion

TASPO was an important incursion in the development of the steelband, locally and internationally. The most recently deceased member of TASPO was Ellie Mannette (USA) who passed on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2018. The surviving members are Anthony Williams (Trinidad & Tobago) and Sterling Betancourt (UK). In July 2011, the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in London hosted an event to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of TASPO’s performance on the South Bank of the River Thames. While in 2012, Brent Holder and Colin Salmon organised an open-air “Thousand Pans” concert on London’s South Bank on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012. The event amassed some 700 steelpan and had the dual purpose of a ‘sending off party to the Olympics to Brazil’ while celebrating TASPO’s performance there in 1951. This year marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TASPO and an exhibition to commemorate excellence in steelpan, including the work of TASPO, was organized by Sonny Blacks and held for a week at the Carnival Village Trust in August 2021 (Spark, 2021). An award was given to Sterling Betancourt on behalf of TASPO which in his absence was collected by Pepe Francis, chair of the British Association of Steelbands. This was

followed by the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts titled *'The Transformative Power of Carnival Arts (Steelman, Calypso and Mas), Rebounding from the COVID-19 Pandemic; Celebrating 70 years of TASPO's Arrival'*, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021. A concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021, paid tribute to TASPO in the form of a 'TASPO Ensemble' who played with the pans on their laps to give authenticity to the recreation of the event.

In 1957 TASPO 2 was formed but the trip to Miami did not materialize. The Trinidad and Tobago National Steelband was formed some years later and lasted until the early 1970's. In 1998 the Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Orchestra was formed and is survived today by the Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Symphony Orchestra. However, preserving the legacy of TASPO is vital, clearly in the hands of the youth and it is here that intergenerational links will retain its place in the history of steelpan.

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## Conversations and Comments on TASPO at 70! 'TASPO Day' - 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951

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### Abstract

The suggestion to include a steelband at the Festival of Britain 1951 initially came from Sir Hubert Rance, Trinidad's English governor at the time. The Trinidad All-Steel Pan Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was formed specifically to participate in this Festival. A dozen players were selected under the leadership of the Barbadian musician, Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith. Profound changes took place as a result of the forming of this band, including the introduction of multiple pans which laid the foundation for the modern-day steel orchestra. The fundraising programme 'Operation Britain' which accrued \$6000 to cover the cost of the trip took place island-wide and drew in all corners of society to support a venture which the higher strata of society had hitherto derided. TASPO members left Trinidad amidst much fanfare on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 and just 20 days later were performing on London's South Bank to a bemused but captivated audience. A British newspaper reported "A revolution in music reached London today, and experts predict it will sweep the country in a new craze," ... "Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra sat outside the Festival Concert Hall and tapped sweet, swingy music out of rusty pans still with steamer labels stuck to them after their trans-Atlantic voyage." (Johnson, 2011, 2012).

While these steelpan musicians were amongst the most gifted ever assembled, it is questionable whether their huge impact, both in Britain and the Caribbean would have been so immense if compatriots such as Edric Connor and Lord Kitchener were not at hand in London to steer them and maximise their exposure. There are only two members alive today to relate the story first-hand, however, there are still many players who were indirectly involved with TASPO and its members, such that many aspects of this ground-breaking project still prompt vigorous debate. During the organisation of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021), a seven member 'TASPO Ensemble' was created to re-enact TASPO's performance of 70 years ago. This stimulated much discussion, and it is evident that many questions still remain unresolved – was their success down to serendipity, or of its own making, or perhaps a mixture of both? Some of these issues are addressed in this paper. There was unanimity that 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 should be designated as 'TASPO Day'.

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Key Words: TASPO, Festival of Britain 1951, London's South Bank, Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith, Anthony Williams, Theophilus Stephens, Edric Connor, Lord Kitchener.

## Introduction



Figure 1. Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier 'beating iron' with Ebony Steelband's 'Pan-round-neck side' to usher in the 'TASPO Ensemble' on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021. Photo by Robbie Joseph, Pan Podium

The weeks leading up to the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021) at the Carnival Village, Notting Hill witnessed a period of hectic planning which included a concert to commemorate TASPO's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. (see Figure 1). There is little doubt that TASPO was the catalyst that drove steelpan music in Britain and simultaneously set the flames soaring back home in Trinidad. The conversations taking place during these moments of preparation concerning TASPO were argumentative as expected, incisive, in-depth and profound, but were regrettably not recorded. The question posed on more than one occasion was, 'would TASPO's impact have been so deep if they did not have the support of Trinidadians who were already domiciled in London?' The prominent names of course being referred to were Edric Connor, Boscoe Holder and Lord Kitchener. The latter had already been in London from 1948, arriving as one of the Empire Windrush's 492 passengers along with fellow calypsonians Lord Beginner and



Figure 2. View of the centrepiece of Festival of Britain from the north side of the Thames. The towering rocket shaped 'Skylon' dominates the skyline while to its right is the 'Dome of Discovery' mentioned in Lord Kitchener's calypso 'Festival of Britain'. This is the site where TASPO played on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1951 but the Festival took place on several other sites, cities and towns in Britain (see text below).

Lord Woodbine. Nobody was sure if the two latter calypsonians were involved with TASPO and the Festival of Britain, 1951. Lord Kitchener on the other hand was conspicuous, very proud of the steelband and, as expected, played a prominent part in supporting TASPO. But it was Edric Connor whose involvement was pivotal to the success of TASPO's sojourn.

### **Project and debates arising during planning**

We contacted the South Bank where an exhibition on the 1951 Festival of Britain was in progress, and they willingly provided access to their photographic archives. We anticipated using some of these photos to create a backdrop for a proposed concert to re-enact TASPO's performance, but unfortunately no photos of TASPO were found in their archives. The photo above (Figure 2) was from the collection and was kindly provided by the Southbank Centre and selected as the backdrop for the concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021 during the conference. It shows some of the prominent features of the site from the north side of the Thames.

With nearly every major ground-breaking discovery, serendipity plays a decisive role; TASPO's performance at the Festival of Britain in 1951 was no exception. The barriers to success seemed unsurmountable at the time and their destiny rested on the impulse to overcome the challenges as they arose. TASPO's visit was certainly driven by people who felt a deep passion, conviction, and shrewd vision for the future of this instrument at a time when it was in its embryonic stages. It required utter belief on both sides of the Atlantic for this project to materialise. Three factors may have helped to heighten its chances of success: (1) World War II had ended six years before, and its impact on society was felt in both Trinidad and Tobago and Britain. Something new was needed to quell the gloom and despondency of the population. (2) From a two to three note instrument prior to WWII, the steelpan had undergone

a transformative process and now carried fully chromatic scales and multiple pans that enabled contemporary music to be played. However, pannists still kept the secret of their innovations to themselves. A call for a challenging event would enable the skills of these steelpan pioneers to be combined into something more accessible and advanced. The appointment of Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith was decisive (Stuempfle, 1995). His insistence on modifications to upgrade the existing pans, design new ones, create multi-part musical arrangements, and to teach music notation to the TASPO players was transformative. (3) Britain already had a handful of professional Caribbean artists on its soil who were highly successful and patriotic and who were prepared to make considerable sacrifices to promote steelpan in a new land.

The questions most often debated over the weeks of preparation were as follows:

#### **1) Did the country and politicians welcome the Festival of Britain in the aftermath of war?**

The Festival of Britain opened on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1951 and coincided broadly with the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 held at the mythical Crystal Palace. Although implied, it is not known for certain if the 1951 Festival was planned to coincide with its predecessor. It was just six years after the end of WWII, and there was evidence of mass bombing and destruction everywhere. The UK's general election in 1950 had placed the Labour party in government, but with a majority of only five seats. Thus, it was under the Labour Party that the green light was given for the Festival of Britain to go ahead. Keen to improve their majority in Parliament, the party called another general election in October 1951 (Newman and Smith 2000). It was generally believed that Churchill, the incoming conservative Prime Minister, would consider the Festival a 'piece of socialist propaganda, a celebration of the

achievements of the Labour Party' and pull the plug (Newman and Smith 2000). Consequently, the Labour party raced ahead and cleared the 27-acre area on the South Bank, London, which had been left untouched following sustained bombing in the war, and began construction. The government saw it as an opportunity for urban design in the post-war rebuilding of London and other UK towns and cities. Hugh Casson, only 38, was appointed Director of Architecture for the Festival. The local poor and the working classes could not see the Festival as beneficial to them, as many were jobless and destitute. By the time Churchill came to power in October 1951, it was too late to scrap the Festival and many of his own middle class supporters strongly endorsed it. (See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap_election)).

## **2) Was the Festival of Britain in any way meant to be beneficial for Trinidad and Tobago?**

As early as 1947, the Labour Party's Herbert Morrison began drawing up plans for the Festival of Britain. At the onset he made it abundantly clear there would be no 'World' nor 'Commonwealth' themes, so the question arises – why was TASPO invited? For the Labour Party, public confidence in the government was waning and the Festival was viewed as an opportunity to reverse this by creating a euphoric atmosphere in the aftermath of the war, recasting national identity. Mr Morrison's aim was explicitly to promote British science, technology, industrial design, architecture and the arts (Conekin, 2003; Banham and Bevis, 1976). Lord Kitchener's calypso proclaimed that the public will thank Mr Morrison as 'there will be dollars in great quantities...to help the financial situation of Great Britain' (Grant, 2006). The government allocated a budget of £12 million, but none of this would be filtered off to their invited guests such as TASPO. The Festival was held at numerous

venues such as Poplar (Architecture), Battersea (Festival Pleasure Gardens), South Kensington (Science) and Glasgow (Industrial Power). Festival celebrations also took place in Cardiff, Stratford-upon-Avon, Bath, Perth, Bournemouth, York, Aldeburgh, Inverness, Cheltenham, Oxford, Norwich, Canterbury and elsewhere, and there were touring exhibitions by land and sea (Conekin, 2003; Banham and Bevis, 1976). However, the organisers had no idea what to expect from TASPO (per. comm. Sterling Betancourt) as steelpan was only known to a minority through a previous television show a year earlier by Boscoe Holder. By a stroke of luck, TASPO was placed at the Festival's centrepiece on the South Bank of the Thames, London. Sterling stated that on the opening day, onlookers looked at their rusted oil drums and laughed, they thought it was simply a display at this Arts Festival. They were bemused, but as soon as TASPO began to play they were utterly mesmerised. Sterling continues 'many were spellbound' and could not apprehend where this rich vibrant music radiated from, nor comprehend their impressively diverse repertoire that included Tosselli's Serenade, After Johnny Drink Mih Rum, Jamaican Rhumba, Golden Earrings, Mambo Jambo and God Save The Queen. By contrast, their Caribbean compatriots who looked on simply smiled, stood proud and soon began dancing and applauding, which spurred the band on to play even more confidently. This performance alone had already boosted their self-esteem and gave them great self-assurance and satisfaction.

## **3) Why did the Trinidad and Tobago government not see the value of this trip and underwrite its cost?**

This question has been put to politicians in Trinidad and Tobago repeatedly and no clear response has ever emerged. Our own organisers of the current conference recalled their own experiences of steelbands at the time and provided some

answers that corroborates with Betancourt's view (2011). TASPO's journey preceded the era of company sponsorship of steelbands and with no accountability, violence among bands was endemic. Steelbands gave themselves names that were meant to engender fear to their opposition and many bands literally lost all their instruments due to intense skirmishes, sometimes involving major injuries to both parties. Carnival days presented major problems for the police as fights often broke out on streets when bands 'clashed' as eloquently resonated in Lord Blakie's epic calypso 'Steelband Clash - if you see Cutlass' between 'Invaders' and 'Tokyo' steelbands. Consensus suggests that the government had little confidence in the conduct of the steelband players who came from rival bands, thus when approached by the Trinidad & Tobago Steel Bands Association for support, they chose not to get involved. Others believed that the Trinidad & Tobago government simply had little regard for the steelband as up to decades later there was only modest acknowledgement of its immense cultural value. Just six years prior to TASPO's formation, the Trinidad and Tobago's Legislative Council had prohibited the playing of "noisy instruments" such as steelpan in public (Johnson, 2011, 2012).

#### **4) Who in fact funded the project and who were its visionaries?**

The suggestion to include a steelband in the Festival of Britain initially came from Sir Hubert Rance, Trinidad's English governor at the time. The \$6,000 needed to cover the trip drew in a group of entrepreneurs who had every confidence in the players and their ability to represent their country with dignity and so fervently set about the process of fundraising.

Port-of-Spain solicitor Lennox Pierre, Carlyle Kerr, Oscar Pile and union leader Nathaniel Crichlow – all outstanding activists of the steelband crusade – were extremely excited and immediately began to work with groups such as TTSBA (The

T&T Steel Band Association). Interestingly, the fundraisers reflected the multicultural composition of Trinidad and Tobago and included prominent leaders such as Albert Gomes, a unionist and politician of Portuguese descent, Bhadase Maharaj, a staunch Hindu civil rights activist and trade unionist, Edwin Lee Lum, a Chinese businessman, and the Bermudez company, a prominent family who came from Venezuela. The fundraiser 'Operation Britain' took place island wide. One such trip brought TASPO to the Empire Cinema where the legendary Ellie Mannette would meet Cyril Khamai (Shah, 2020).

#### **5) When TASPO arrived in Britain, did the organisers of the Festival of Britain consider it added value to their celebrations?**

Information posted up about the Festival of Britain was unlikely to include mention of TASPO or the appearance of a steelband. This can be inferred from Lord Kitchener's calypso 'Festival of Britain' in which he notes 'Sir Thomas Beecham will be conducting his symphony – there will be concerts, dancing, sports and exhibitions...' but there is no mention of TASPO. As Kitchener was such a fervent disciple of steelpan, he would definitely have included TASPO in his lyrics if it were on the programme or if he were aware of it.

#### **6) If TASPO was left in the hands of the organisers of the Festival of Britain, what would have been the impact of their visit?**

TASPO arrived a few weeks later than expected but the Festival organisers evidently made no plans for their stay in London. Arrangements for the Festival may not have been as smooth as reported; some leading figures such as Sir Thomas Beecham described it as 'a monumental piece of imbecility' (Reuters, 1949). In TASPO's case it was left up to the benevolence and generosity of compatriot Edric Connor to accommodate them and all their instruments in his basement flat. The



Figure 3. Some members of the 'TASPO Ensemble' gathered at the basement flat of Cyril Khamai on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September for a single rehearsal before the concert on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021. Left to right; barely visible, the bronze 5-note base being played by Frank Ward, Cyril Khamai (head only) playing a dudup, Haroun Shah, tenor on lap and 'Bubbles' with a single second on his lap. This basement flat would be very similar to that of Edric Connor's.

photo (see IJCA Vol. 2, p. 44) shows how arduous the task of getting their instruments in and out of a basement flat must have been. If TASPO had simply come to Britain, performed at the Festival of Britain and returned home, its impact may have been negligible. Trinidad & Tobago's Panorama champions Pan Am North Stars of 1963 and 1964 and Guinness Cavaliers of 1965 and 1967 toured the USA in 1968 and Canada in 1970 respectively yet remain largely anonymous despite their remarkable achievements. When TASPO left Trinidad aboard the banana boat SS San Mateo on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951, Edric Connor and Lord Kitchener were at hand in London to maximise the impact of this pioneering expedition. Following their performance at the South Bank and their return to Edric Connor's flat, the band accepted a contract with the Savoy Hotel which enabled them to undertake a two-week tour of Britain, playing at great northern cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester. Their reputation was markedly enhanced when they performed live on a 30-minute BBC television programme 'Caribbean Cabaret' on 24<sup>th</sup>

August 1951 alongside Boscoe Holder and his Caribbean Dancers, and Lord Kitchener. TASPO then travelled to Paris for a two-week engagement before returning to Trinidad on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1951. Sterling Betancourt was the lone member who did not return to Trinidad but instead made London his home and started his own steelband, Nostalgia, with Russell Henderson that eventually helped to establish the Notting Hill Carnival. Thus, while the Festival provided the opportunity for TASPO to perform, its legacy is largely of its own making.

A group of Notting Hill pioneers played with pans on their laps to reconstruct TASPO's performance at the Festival of Britain. Prior to this, the group had a rehearsal at Cyril Khamai's basement flat in Notting Hill that served to also recreate TASPO's rehearsal at Edric Connor's basement flat. Both Khamai's and Connor's London basement flats appear remarkably similar (see Shah et al., IJCA Vol. 2 Figure 3, p. 100). They both lead out of the front door via a small patio from which two adjacent sets of concrete steps

exit to the road through an elegant black painted Victorian wrought iron front gate and fence.

newly formed Trinidad All Star Percussion Orchestra (TASPO). Born in 1906, he joined the Barbados police band at 14. He left Barbados at 26 years in 1932 to play



Figure 4. 'TASPO Ensemble' performing on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021.

Left to right: Frank Ward (maracas), Patrick McKay (5-note base), Haroun N. Shah (tenor), Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier (second pan), Cyril Khamai (scratcher), Dudley Dickson (dudup), and Herman Betancourt (maracas). Photo by Robbie Joseph, Pan Podium

The TASPO Ensemble for the concert included; Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier (single second), Haroun Shah (tenor), Patrick McKay (5-note base), Dudley Dickson (dudup), Cyril Khamai (scratcher), Frank Ward (maracas/cowbell) and Herman Betancourt (maracas) (Figure 4).

Roger Gibbs, Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier and Cyril Khamai provided in-depth and personal comments of three of TASPO's members.

### Excerpts from Steelband Movement (Stuempfle, 1995) provided by Roger Gibbs.

'Lt. Joseph Nathaniel Griffith is steelpan's greatest unsung hero. Griffith was summoned to Trinidad in 1951 to lead the

clarinet and sax with an American jazz band. Returning to the Caribbean, in 1935 he took over the St Vincent Government Band and founded the St Vincent Philharmonic Orchestra. Then he led the Grenada Harmony Kings, before joining the Trinidad Police Band in 1938. He taught at the Tacarigua Orphanage and led its band and conducted the Royal Victoria Institute's orchestra. In 1947 he was appointed bandmaster of the St Lucia Police Band, and there he was working when he was recruited to lead TASPO. Griffith brought a vision and thoroughness to the early steelpan movement that would revolutionise the steelband. He insisted on the need for all pans to be tuned to concert pitch and to include all notes. This required crafting of a number of new pans, since at



the time only the ping pong was chromatically tuned (Johnson, 2012). An alto pan was redesigned and expanded to include 14 notes. He had tuner Anthony Williams create cello pans from two oil drums with 7 notes each to replace the old 5 or 4 note ‘tune boom’ made from a biscuit tin of poor quality. Griffith insisted the bass must have the full range of notes. When told that they couldn’t fit, he replied, to everyone’s surprise, ‘Then use three drums.’ As a result, a new bass instrument made up of 3 oil drums and a total of 13 notes was created to replace the old pair of caustic soda drum basses. Griffith taught TASPO members the fundamentals of music theory and several learned to read standard music notation. Griffith developed the musical genius of pioneers like Tony Williams and Ellie Mannette. The new knowledge and skills that TASPO members acquired spread through the steelband movement with long-lasting consequences. Joseph Griffith’s arrangements set the standard for future arrangers.’ (Roger Gibbs).

#### **Anthony ‘Muff-Man’ Williams through ex- Pan Am North Stars Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier.**

Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier, protégé of the legendary Tony Williams, played with Pan Am North Stars at its panyard on Upper Bournes Road St James, Port of Spain from adolescence (Figure 5). Bubbles went on tour with the band to the USA during which they teamed up with Winifred Atwell in the watershed recording of ‘Ivory and Steel’ in 1969 (Atwell, 1969). His last trip with the band was to the UK in 1971 where the band stayed on and, in response to a plea from Merle Major, ‘played on the road for carnival 1972 and saved Notting Hill Carnival from collapse’. Bubbles was therefore well placed to give deep insight into this TASPO pioneer fondly called ‘Muff-Man’ whom he consistently referred to as a ‘pan virtuoso’. Academically Tony Williams’ attention and inspiration came from a science teacher who incorporated



Figure 5. Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier playing a single-second pan and leading the ‘TASPO Ensemble’ on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021. Photo by Robbie Joseph, Pan Podium.

some music during his night classes at Tranquillity School close to his home. Williams was only 12 when he began playing pan with Sun Valley and did so up to 1950 before joining North Stars. [Herman Betancourt (brother of TASPO’s Sterling Betancourt - see Figure 4) was also a member of Sun Valley – see below]. The band developed rapidly through the 1950s, with Williams now spearheading its direction, tuning pans, arranging their music and eventually becoming band leader. He is described as ‘the scientist supreme of tuning and creating pans ... master arranger, composer, innovator, leader, and a man ascribed the title by many I spoke to as “the ultimate genius of the steelband’ (Matthew, 2017; Rakhal-Fraser, 2021). When selection for TASPO began, it was hardly surprising that Lt. Griffith would choose him as his closest confidant. Their interaction was crucial to the progress of the steelband and the success of TASPO. Griffith learnt a great deal about the instrument from him, while Williams in turn was taught to read music and become conversant with the operational and structural elements of an orchestra. Bubbles describes Williams as quiet, shy, generous,

deep-thinking and such an unassuming man that it was sometimes difficult to tell that he was their maestro. He loved to dress, always wore a felt hat that covered his ‘muff’, carried a shoulder bag that had his pan sticks and other essentials and was the stereotypical ‘sagaboy’ who carried a red handkerchief that hung from his back pocket (Figure 1). When the TASPO Ensemble played on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, Bubbles performed dressed up to impersonate Tony Williams with his felt hat, shirt unbuttoned at the top, smartly polished shoes, bling and to the delight of the audience demonstrated how Tony Williams would fold his handkerchief and play his pan. Bubbles ended with a prayer and thanked Tony Williams for what he so generously gave to the band and the world of steelband.

### **Steelpan Psalm**

Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier

**“The steel pan is an instrument we shall and shall not want**

**It took us by the hands .. and made us play with pride, excellence, vigour and vitality**

**When playing it led us out of the house of violence and confusion**

**It restoreth our future and our musical capabilities.**

It led us out of the house of bondage

It made us who we are today.

Yeah, though we sing, laugh, drink without a care,

Men woman and children have sacrificed their lives through the valleys of life;

We will fear no evil ...for thou art with us; thy pans and sticks to comfort us

**He presented pans, sticks, hammers, tuners and innovators before us to love and Honour he innovated our minds.**

**He gave the discipline, tolerance and production to our nation all the days of our lives...**

**And we shall dwell in the panyards, the stage and in your hearts, forever and ever**

And together we will aspire  
Together, We Will Achieve”

### **Cyril Khamai on Theophilus ‘Theo’ Stephens**

The seven members of the improvised ‘TASPO Ensemble’ know and played with TASPOs’ Sterling Betancourt through his steelband, Nostalgia, based in Notting Hill. Sterling was one of TASPOs’s appointed tuners and played the alto pan on their tour. For the concert, the TASPO Ensemble was privileged to have Sterling’s elder brother, Herman Betancourt, playing at 95! (Figure 6). Around the period of the formation of TASPO in 1950, Sterling was a member of Crossfire Steelband while Herman was in



Figure 6. Three of Notting Hill Carnival’s pioneers and confrères of TASPO playing as part of the ‘TASPO Ensemble’ on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021. Left to right; 90-year-old Cyril Khamai, [led the development of steelpan from the mid-1940s in Trinidad]; Dudley Dickson [referred as the pan surgeon, global master tuner and steelpan innovator; co-founder member of the UK Steelpan Tuners Guild.] and 95-year-old Herman Betancourt [veteran pannist from Trinidad and Nostalgia Steelband, London and brother of TAPSO’s Sterling Betancourt]. Photo by Robbie Joseph, Pan Podium

Sun Valley which eventually dissolved to become North Stars and then Pan Am North Stars. Sterling’s account of the history and experience of TASPO is well documented



Figure 7. Corner of Coffee and Drayton Streets, San Fernando where TASPO's pioneer 'Theo' Stephens lived and also led Free French Steel Orchestra in late 1940s. Taken by Laila Shah in 2013.

(see e.g. Blake, Cuffy, Johnson, 2011, 2013, Joseph, 2021, Stuempfle, 1995, TASPO Wikipedia). Cyril Khamai was very much in the presence of TASPO in 1950 as preparations got underway for their trip to Britain. He worked closely with San Fernando's TASPO representative, Theophilus 'Theo' Stephens, leader of his own band Free French, whose panyard was on Coffee Street, San Fernando. Cyril and Theo shared a deep passion for pan and started playing at similar ages; both lived in San Fernando and also went to San Fernando Boys' RC school. Cyril was a member of Free French for two years but he felt that the preparation for TASPO's trip in 1950 was stifling the experimental work he was doing on steelpan and so moved to another band, Melody Makers, whose panyard was diagonally across the road to Free French. Here he had an unlimited set of drums to experiment with and was also the band's tuner and arranger. He and Theo, however, maintained a very close relationship throughout life. To Cyril's surprise, Theo left Trinidad unexpectedly in 1955 to join the Royal Air Force in England and trained to become a helicopter pilot whilst also studying music. He returned to London in 1960 and with Gerald Forsyth OBE started a comprehensive programme of 'Steelband in Schools' project. Outside of school, Theo held steelpan tuning

workshops and many of Britain's top steelpan tuners today such as Toussaint Clarke (Rainbow Steel Orchestra) were his students. During this period, he was reunited with Cyril Khamai and with Leonard Marshall (former Pan Am North Stars pannist) played at numerous gigs in London and Zurich. Later, Stephens was offered the opportunity to transfer his teaching skills to schools in San Antonio, Texas and did so for a few years. He moved to New York, drawn by the presence of formidable pan players and the birth of the New York's Labor Day Carnival. He was in frequent contact with Cyril and was due to return to London to pick up an award but sadly passed away on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2001 before he could do so. Cyril described him as a brilliant pannist, solo performer, innovator, entertainer, teacher and meticulous tuner (see Shah, 2020) – to add to the list of extraordinary artists that TASPO embraced.

## Conclusion

Every one of these eleven TASPO players were gifted musicians and virtuosos of the highest calibre; all able to tune and arrange – to see them playing live must have been an indelible life experience. Such a *tour de force* could hardly fail, and their impact has been so immense that 70 years on, gatherings in London are still dominated by discussions on TASPO especially if the Betancourt family, Cyril Khamai, Bubbles, Dudley Dickson, Frank Ward, and Patrick McKay – who were part of the 'TASPO Ensemble' – are present. To have had the courage to play with their pans on their laps to re-enact TASPOs' performance 70 years ago is a tribute to the high esteem and respect in which pannists still hold this phenomenal band today. Laila Shah, following an interview with Cyril Khamai in 2020, summed it up as follows:

“Listening attentively to Cyril Khamai's commentary on the early history of steelpan in one corner of Trinidad and extracting the captivating accounts of Johnson (2011,

2013) Blake (1995) Cuffy 2013) et al. in other parts of the island, the single, most poignant event that propelled steelpan to the global stage is unequivocally TASPO's discovery journey of 1951. It is hardly surprising that Khamai evokes the analogy with the Apollo 11 1969 mission. TASPO did not simply perform at a momentous Exhibition of Cultural Arts in Britain, these pioneers went on a mission to demonstrate the ingenuity and novelty of a nation, that was set to break away from colonialism, and stamp its presence in the world. They did so in the most humble and dignified way by stunning their audiences with their discipline, commitment, and spectacular music from 'rusted oil drums'. TASPO's mission inspired a generation to take their talent to Europe and North America and these very humble pioneers are the same individuals who initiated the largest carnivals on the planet today such as London's Notting Hill Carnival, Toronto's Caribana and New York's Labour Day Carnival. It is the firm conviction of this author that the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1951 should be written into the history books of Trinidad and Tobago in a meaningful way – this day should be called "**TASPO Day**" and should be celebrated annually near the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Wrightson Road, Port of Spain with steelbands from around the world performing to mark the day and place that proved to be the launchpad for steelbands to the world.' (Shah, 2020).

### **Acknowledgement:**

The organisers and audience are grateful to Carnival Village for providing the elegant venue and facilities for the event and unlimited access prior to preparations. The authors are indebted to the ad hoc 'TASPO Ensemble' for their time and enormous effort into making this performance possible. In particular, Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier, protégé of the legendary Tony Williams, for his discipline in training the group and persistence to play with pans on our laps when we were all very nervous and unsure of doing so. There were many occasions when the idea was nearly abandoned but he was relentless in his commitment to pay tribute to these legendary pioneers in the "most authentic way" as he frequently stated. Members owe huge gratitude to Cyril Khamai for allowing all to use his basement flat as a panyard and meeting place to organise the event – which even involved Bubbles tuning and blending the pans in his flat to the curiosity of Cyril's neighbours who came in to "learn how to lime" as he would tell them.

We are thankful to Clare Wood, Southbank Centre Archivist for giving us access to the Centre's archives and to Robbie Joseph, Pan Podium for taking and providing us with free access to a wonderful cross section of photos for use.

Finally our immense thanks to renowned calypsonian Roger Gibbs (Toronto) and Alexander D Great for their help during planning of the event and in critically reading the manuscript.

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## Carnivals in the Borough of Barking and Dagenham, its Impact on Youth Careers and Vision of UKON Careers Carnival Art Academy

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### **Abstract**

UKON Careers delivered the Barking Dagenham Carnival Arts Development Project 2021 with the support of The National Lottery and Arts Council for England funding, Barking and Dagenham Council and much grass roots collaboration and support in kind. The event which ran from May 2021 to August 2021 fully adapted to the changing COVID-19 restrictions by enriching community participation in person and online, while simultaneously helping to increase the understanding of carnival and boosting participation and the development of the art form. UKON brought together professional carnival artists and specialists with workshop participants from communities who were then not engaging with the arts and created a grand carnival event at Barking Town Square, Essex together with smaller satellite activities. The events drew in participants from across East London and parts of East Anglia. The workshops included face to face Carnival Mask Making, live and online Soca Dance, and online Traditional Carnival Characters' workshops. Rather than presenting wholly as a 'street' event, part of the carnival day event was held indoors and sited at The Barking Learning Centre. The project represented UKON Careers with its first serious engagement of students in further and higher education and also enforced a stronger commitment to online and hybrid models of carnival. The paper discusses the impact of this approach, particularly during the viral pandemic, against a background of the aims and long-term objectives of UKON Careers.

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**Key Words:** UKON Careers, Caribbean Carnival, Barking and Dagenham Council, Mas Workshops, Virtual Carnival, Hybrid Carnival, Dance.

### **Introduction**

The Barking and Dagenham Carnival started in July 2014, initially as a children's celebration. The purpose was to bring communities and cultures together, supporting social cohesion and promoting understanding. Its aim was to give children a sense of pride, develop their confidence

and support positive parenting. It was also meant to stimulate awareness of and engagement in the carnival, helping address the negative narrative of carnival and carnival arts (Boyle, 2021, Brookes, 2021). UKON Careers was established the same year and was developed to deliver carnival arts-based projects, services, and courses to support a greater understanding and

participation in carnival arts. Its strategy was to develop a positive narrative of carnival arts to support increased inclusion in academia and onto professional platforms. UKON set out to use carnival arts-based themes to deliver careers guidance and information services to encourage economic wellbeing and inspire success in young people and local communities.

The name UKON is derived from the Japanese UKON Cherry Tree (Hessayon, 1983). The Japanese UKON cherry tree symbolises the proposed work and philosophy and is a metaphor for the aims and aspirations of UKON Careers. Interestingly, when the UKON Cherry Tree is left to its own accord, it grows as a shrub-like form and does not reach its full potential and beauty. However, once it's cared for it grows into a majestic tree supporting positive mental health and wellbeing and giving much comfort to the community. Its mystical powers can be envisaged to help build community cohesion, add creative beauty and inspire confidence, while promoting volunteering and employment opportunities for those who ensure they are cared for and grow to maturity in communities.

UKON's core learning material is of African and Caribbean origin and supports the BAME community while promoting an appreciation of the arts for all. It closely follows the traditional carnival of the Caribbean (Innes, 2013, Stuempfle, 1995). In essence, the organisation promotes an understanding and respect for each other's differences and cultures. It does this by working in partnership with parents/careers and other organizations to enhance existing provision, support greater access to

borough/council opportunities and services while ensuring its products and services embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. Projects centre around an increase in understanding and participation in carnival arts thereby gaining access to employment, education, training, volunteering, and making informed and realistic career decisions. The target groups UKON aim to support are families, younger people, the 19+, senior citizens and adults. People with disabilities, those with drug, alcohol challenges, experiencing mental health problems or refugees are also welcomed.

### **Core Activities**

UKON delivers practical arts and craft workshops and seminars to prepare pupils for further learning, employment, and training opportunities, particularly within the cultural industries (Figure 1). It also develops and manages the annual Barking & Dagenham Carnival which brings all communities within the Borough together in a celebration of its ethnic and cultural diversity. The workshops centre around

- Creative Thinking
- Carnival Mask Making
- Carnival Headdress Design and Making
- Carnival costume Design and Making
- Drumming, Steel Pan, African, Samba
- Dance, Soca and Afrobeat

It is well captured in SocaNews ... “there will be carnival arts workshops in which the audience can participate, such as steel pan, African drumming, tamboo bamboo, samba and carnival craft making, plus performances from carnival artists and bands, a mini carnival parade and opportunities for audience participation (Charles, 2021).



Figure 1. Youth taking part in workshops ahead of the July’s Barking and Dagenham Carnival

Patrons include local schools [e.g., Gascoigne Primary School], community organizations [e.g., B&D Volunteer Bureau], social care and housing organizations’ [e.g., Look Ahead -The Vineries], colleges and universities [e.g., Barking & Dagenham College] and community events [e.g., Becontree 100 Festival].

**Barking and Dagenham Carnival Arts Developmental Project 2021**

UKON Careers began running this event from 2015 and built up a considerable portfolio and experience to successfully deliver the event. The last live Barking and Dagenham Carnival was in 2019 and many activities were captured on camera during the day (Figure 2a, 2b).

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 the UK went into lockdown due to substantial increases in



Figure 2a. Performers during the last live Barking and Dagenham Carnival in 2019.



Figure 2b. Performers during the last live Barking and Dagenham Carnival in 2019. Konverse Dance Krew

COVID-19 infections. The public at first were optimistic that the spike in infections would soon diminish and that carnival might take place in 2020. However, a live event soon looked impossible, and the



Figure 3. Barking and Dagenham Carnival 2020 was the first virtual carnival. UKON Careers like all Carnival Bands needed to adapt very quickly.





Figure 4. The Face Mask that has come to symbolise the coronavirus pandemic from 2020 has now become an integral part of mas costume as seen in Barking and Dagenham Carnival on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021.



Figure 5. UKON Careers costume designs 2021

Barking and Dagenham Carnival was forced online (Figure 3).

This presented hitherto unknown challenges, but much was learnt, and the project provided valuable professional development opportunities, better equipping the team to deliver and support high-quality carnival arts in the future (Figure 4). There was much vaccine hesitancy in the Black and Asian communities, and it was essential that the carnival went ahead to retain some of the core principles that UKON is built upon. These include supporting community cohesion, promoting positive mental health and social harmony.

UKON went ahead in 2021 to plan Barking and Dagenham Carnival Arts Developmental Project 2021 as a live event in July but also had a backup plan if restrictions prevented this.

Emerging carnival performers were mentored by We Mas, developing their skills in costume-making and Ole Mas performance, learning how to use tradition, to innovate and take artistic risks from some of the art form's most distinguished practitioners, and producing new work.

### **UKON Careers and We Mas**

We Mas were formed in 2011 by a group of friends who had a passion for developing and preserving Ole Mas and Traditional Mas. They also combine Ole Mas and Traditional Mas in many of their performances to showcase a new innovative take on these two carnival art forms to help tell a story and/or make social commentary.

We Mas perform on the first day of Notting Hill carnival (Sunday) and form the

traditional/Ole Mas element within United Colours of Mas carnival band. We Mas deliver seminars within the UK on the carnival art forms to develop greater understanding and also encourage others into taking up this art form within carnival. Some of the presentations they have performed at Notting Hill Carnival include; Windrush - Deportation - tackling issues around the Windrush Scandal, Golliwog a statement about poverty and the challenges individuals face to keep up with the expectation of the status quo and more.

### **Traditional Mas /Ole Mas presentation by We Mas at Barking Carnival 2019.**

We Mas delivered a unique masquerade street performance of African origin, found in St. Lucian masquerade and Jamaican carnival arts performances. The characters portrayed included Papa Djab (King of the Masquerade), Mary Anset (his pregnant wife, see Figure 7a).

Much was learnt from this experience. For example it allowed the team to test and develop relationships, tools and techniques for practice-based carnival arts learning which we will take into our work towards establishing a carnival arts academy. In addition to this, they learned from further



Figure 6. Cllr Peter Chand – Mayor 2019 - 2020

experience of flexible adaptive planning and logistical management more about meeting the challenges of an uncertain and rapidly changing government and council requirements for delivering the project safely during the continuing pandemic.



Figure 7a. Characters from We Mas, Mary Anset, pregnant wife of Papa Djab (King of the Masquerade)

The group gained experience in writing COVID Management Plans and Risk Assessments and how to produce many additional COVID-19 safeguarding documents and are now very confident of

their ability to crisis manage and produce emergency plans. Perhaps most importantly, the team learnt more about how to deliver a large online interactive musical show, particularly the technical requirements for this.

Some of these opportunities are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Opportunities Created by Barking and Dagenham Carnival Arts Project**

Opportunity	2019	2020	2021
Volunteering	67	13	34
Paid Employment	3	8	5
Internships	1	0	1
Work Experience	6	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>42</b>



Figure 7b. Masqueraders from We Mas, Papa Djab (King of the Masquerade) and Mary Anset (his pregnant wife).

### **Examples of opportunities with UKON – (Paid, Voluntary, Work Experience, Internships)**

- Event Manager & Event Assistant
- Production and Operations Manager & Assistant
- Publicity, Marketing, and Digital Manager & Assistant
- Security Manager & Security Assistant
- Stewarding
- Customer Service
- Reception & Administration
- Social media monitoring
- Social Media and Design
- Carnival Workshop Assistant
- Administration & IT
- Website support Technician
- Stage Management
- Teaching Assistants
- Electrical and Electronic Assistants
- Safeguarding Officers

### **Impact of COVID-19 on opportunities**

- UKON required more skilled staff and volunteers
- Less opportunity to directly support employees and volunteers
- More Monitoring and Micromanagement

### **Conclusion**

Due to COVID-19 UKON Careers had to adapt to the pandemic by developing new ways of working from direct face to face to online delivery. This posed significant challenges since UKON did not have the skill, expertise, or tools for delivering online. Despite these challenges, UKON successfully transitioned to its online delivery with staff/volunteers working

remotely. UKON successfully continued to create employment and volunteering experiences for residents and staff.

The online transition impacted the number of volunteering and work experience opportunities that UKON could offer. The number of volunteers and work experience opportunities were decreased because UKON was unable to support volunteers as effectively as it would have liked remotely. UKON increased the number of skilled employees, due to the urgency of requiring these skills for delivery. UKON is also successfully increasing networking opportunities for carnival artists and performers, employment opportunities, and online exposure, while also continuing to raise the engagement in carnival arts by residents locally, nationally, and internationally.

### **Acknowledgement:**

UKON Careers gratefully acknowledge the support of the following:

- The late Lincoln Rahamut, founder of Masquerade 2000 (M2K) and Mas

Art. Lincoln passed away on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 and Vol. 2 of IJCA was dedicated to him.

Lincoln mentored the author for many years and supported the development of We Mas through mentoring, delivering costume making workshops as well as training the team on the history and traditions of Traditional and Ole Mas.

- Arts Council England and National Lottery
- Barking and Dagenham Council
- Barking Learning Centre for loan of their facilities
- Soca Massive Fancy Sailors UKSoca News for their publications

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## The History of Genesis Carnival Band

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### Abstract

Genesis Carnival Band can trace its lineage through its founder, Vernon ‘Fellows’ Williams, involvement in the two events that were precursors to London’s Notting Hill Carnival celebrated each August Bank holiday. Vernon participated in Claudia Jones’ indoor carnivals of 1959 -1964 and Rhaune Laslett’s Notting Hill Fayre of 1966. Like most migrants from Trinidad, Vernon had Carnival in his blood and pursued every opportunity to ‘Play Mas’ in London. This he did by joining Larry Forde’s Sukuya, designing and making his own costumes before branching out to create his own performance platform – Genesis - in 1980. On Vernon’s passing his creative mantle was embraced by his wife, Allyson, and his children, Symone and Kevin, steering the band to celebrate its Ruby Anniversary – 40 years of Carnival – in 2020 and marking the significant contributions made to Carnival and Festival Arts in the UK.

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### Key Words:

Genesis Carnival Band, Vernon ‘Fellows’ Williams, Mas, Costumes, Notting Hill Carnival, Mas Workshop, Carnival History, Ruby Anniversary.

### Introduction

Vernon ‘Fellows’ Williams, founder of Genesis, was fully immersed, from birth, into the culture of Trinidad’s Carnival, showing a passion and commitment for carnival arts from an early age by socialising with some of the country’s local artists who rose to international prominence, notably Geoffrey Holder, Boscoe Holder, Jeff Henry and Beryl McBernie.

Vernon started his own Mas band in Trinidad in his early twenties and was one

of the early contemporary artists, George Bailey, Harold Saldenah and Rudolph Corbie, all of whom went on to become legendary bandleaders.

The movement of people from the Caribbean to the UK was characterised by the desire to learn or earn and then return. Vernon came to London to learn; to study in Leeds but decided to earn and not return by changing his career path to join the music and entertainment business in London. He first became a dancer, then a trained percussionist and jazz band leader

and worked extensively across Europe for more than sixteen years.

Like most migrant communities, the corporate glue that drew the Caribbean communities together was the re-creations and re-fashioning of their cultural practices and festivals; the communal venues and places to network and lime and congregate at events like a West Indies Cricket tour of England. Whether you were a student, worker or Diplomatic staff, these opportunities brought them together - the Colherne Pub in Earls Court, the parties of High Commission staff and Junior Telfer, the Carnivals at the Albert Hall and Lucita's rotis on sale at the Oval Cricket Ground.

These limes and parties were the magnets that brought the community together to celebrate, to have a Jump Up just like home. Claudia Jones elevated this practice with her indoor Carnivals, the first being at the St Pancras Town Hall in January 1959 and Vernon was there to offer support.

Claudia Jones, *née* Claudia Vera Cumberbatch (21 February 1915 - 24 December 1964) organised these events to coincide with the annual Trinidad and Tobago Carnival which as a Pre-Lenten event is held on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. This being the UK's winter months, it was far too cold and impractical to replicate the street parade, thus all of Claudia Jones's Carnivals that took place between 1959 -1964 at St Pancras Town Hall were held indoors (Funk, 2009).

Ms Jones untimely death on Christmas Eve 1964, aged 49 due to heart disease and tuberculosis (Mahamdallie, 2004) saw an end to these memorable celebrations. Her funeral on 9 January 1965 was a grand and political fulfilment, with her burial plot located to the left of the tomb of her hero, Karl Marx, in Highgate

Cemetery. She is remembered for her immense social and political work but in terms of Carnival she is personified by her slogan: "*A people's art is the genesis of their freedom*" (Boyce Davies, 2007; Lauren, 2011) and this may have been the inspiration for Vernon's name for his Mas band (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The blue heritage plaque erected for Claudia Jones, Notting Hill

These indoor Carnivals were not only a re-interpretation of the Trinidad ones but a public affirmation of the determination to unite the community following the race riots of 1958. They had some of the distinguishing features of the archetypical Trini Carnival - Calypso, Costumes, Dances and the obligatory Carnival Queen crowning.

Headlining the first of these indoor Carnivals were the Boscoe Holder Dance Troupe, jazz guitarist Fitzroy Coleman and singer Cleo Laine. The first event was televised nationally by the BBC.

Totally unrelated to what happened in North London, events in West London sowed the seeds for the gestation of the Notting Hill Carnival that we know today. Rhaune Laslett, a local Social Worker created the London Free School to help improve the education of adults and the London Fayre to unite children from multi-

ethnic communities. She invited Russell Henderson and his musicians, including Vernon, to play music at the Fayre in September 1966. These musicians held a regular Sunday School (jazz sessions) at the Colherne Pub in Earl's Court.

It is reported that Henderson grew impatient with just playing at the Fayre and decided to 'do a rounds', as Trinis would say, and opened the gates and like the Pied Piper took the audience with him onto the streets (Blagrove and Busby, 2014).

This simple event in 1966 gave everyone the taste of Carnival in the Grove. Carnival in London. And not missing an opportunity, several Caribbean community activists, the likes of Junior Telfer, Andre Shervington, Leslie Palmer, Alan Charles, Peter Minshall and many others, stamped their Carnavalesque features on the event that is now enshrined as the Notting Hill Carnival.

In the early 1970s, Vernon returned from Europe to settle in London and started helping his cousin Larry Forde who had a well-established Mas band called Sukuya. Vernon's creativity and flair excelled with his signature use of brocade and velvet, making large elaborate individual costumes for himself that won prizes at the Carnival Gala competitions.

My friends and I have fond memories of working at Sukaya's Mas camp and playing mas with Larry Forde (Figures 2a and 2b) Vernon was encouraged to start his own band. He finally did so in 1980 and called the band Genesis because it reminded him that he was there at the beginning of carnival in London.

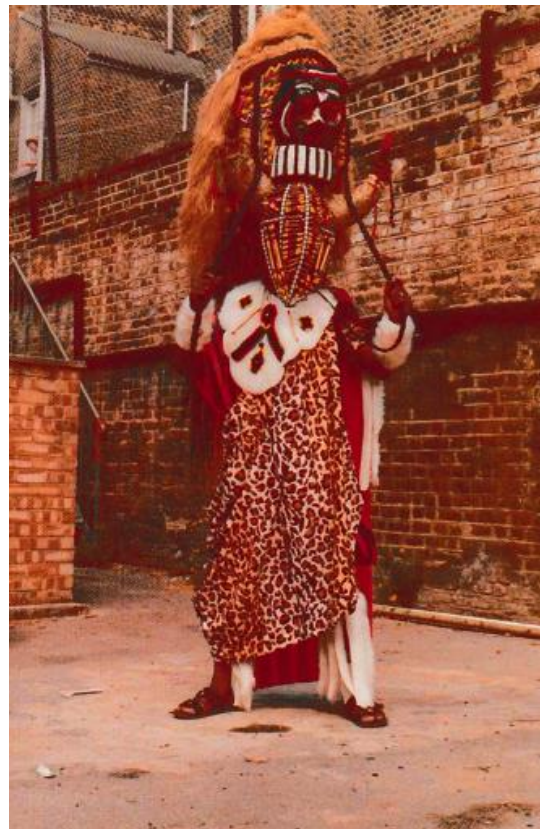


Figure 2a Vernon - (top) 1975 – Band Sukuya.

Figure 2b Vernon - (bottom) 1978 - African King



Vernon was always passionate about portraying historical themes. He felt it was very important to celebrate the world's history and he would do extensive research on the chosen theme to create the most authentic portrayal of costumes of the time. I was the band's administrator, responsible for the paperwork necessary for seeking sponsorship and funding. Vernon was seen as the aide-de-camp who never hesitated to help up and coming designers in a very reassuring and selfless way.

Our first portrayal was called the Great Khans and featured the main rulers and characters of the Mongol Empire. Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan. They were spectacular costumes that featured the use of copper in the headpieces.

### **King, Queen and Individuals from the band The Great Khans 1980**



Figure 3. King, Queen and Individuals from the band The Great Khans 1980

richly coloured costumes of Kings, Queens and Individuals from various historical periods. Throughout its development, the band won many trophies and accolades for its exquisite work, including Band of the Year, Best King, Best Queen, Best Designer, Best Male Individual. Vernon received Special Awards for achievement and commitment to the Notting Hill Carnival. He was particularly proud of his

Award received in 2000 for his work in the community. Genesis was chosen to represent carnival by participating at the Opening ceremony of the Millennium Dome.

Because of his expertise and passion for the arts, he represented Carnival and the Caribbean communities on several committees including the Arts Council England, the Notting Hill Carnival Board and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Vernon was regularly commissioned to run workshops around the country to teach carnival arts in Leeds, Coventry, Manchester, Birmingham, and Derby. He frequently took our children with him and included them in his teaching assemblies. He was adamant that our own children should be well grounded in the history of carnival arts. They visited Trinidad regularly with us and became prolific steelpan players as well as passionate exponents of the art of costume making and production.

Vernon always welcomed everyone and actively encouraged youth participation and intergenerational collaboration. He felt strongly that children should learn about carnival arts as it was an integral part of the legacy of their black history.

We are particularly proud of the young people and children of Genesis who have grown up with careers partly or wholly influenced by their time playing mas with Genesis. For example, one child is now a dancer at Covent Garden, one a doctor, two design costumes for bands in Trinidad and London, one did a degree in fashion and worked for designers such as Alexander McQueen while one migrated to Australia and is a fashion and jewellery designer.

Our own children have followed likewise, Symone is a costume designer, band leader

and manager while Kevin is an actor who is developing a prolific career in the film industry. They are all very confident, self-assured and hard-working professionals who have clearly been influenced by the history and ethos of the band.

In May 2002 Vernon passed away and his legacy was embraced by our daughter Symone and the family. The band celebrated his passing by performing at the Queen’s Jubilee parade in June 2002 on the Mall.

Since 2002, Genesis has been part of the revolution and evolution of costume design, as women were asking for costumes that helped them express their own freedom. This led to the entry of the so called ‘bikini mas’ that entailed very little clothing and an abundance of gems and feathers.



Figure 4. Individual from the band East meets West, 2000



Figure 5 The costume from the band Olympia - the Ancient City of the Games 2012. This was also a tribute to the Olympic Games held in London in 2012



Figure 6. Individual from the band, Myths and Treasures beneath the Sea, 2011



Figure 7. Miss Universal Carnival Queen, represented Tobago at the Miss Universal Carnival Queen UK. competition, 2014. The designer Symone Williams won Best Carnival Costume Design. She also created an evening gown and a recycled costume for the contestant.



Figure 9. The Puppet was the King of the band, Sailors in this Time, 2004. This was created in tribute to the founder Vernon Williams, and in celebration of 40 years of Notting Hill Carnival, as he was a founder member. The face of the puppet was made in his image by a sculptor.



Figure 8. Individual from the band Greed 2015



Figure 10. Sioux Indians 2006



Figure 11. This is Shango, King of the band Back to Africa, 2002

Now branded as Genesis Carnival Enterprise, Genesis is now a global carnival enterprise, recognised for its excellence and innovation of its designs, participating in showcases and parades representing the UK and partnering with others to promote creative diversity in Carnival arts.

Genesis is now synonymous with quality, creativity and daring. Making an artistic statement at the World Beauty Fitness and Fashion Competition; achieving second place in NHC and touring with Elimu to represent the UK on the global stage – Malta and China.

Pre-Pandemic, we have partnered with the Carnival Village Trust (CVT) to curate joint programmes at the Yaa Centre successfully extending our reach, engagement and participation to adults and families from lower socio-economic groups, adults and children between the ages of 10 - 70 and plus-size individuals shy of performing in beads and bikinis.

We are a de facto Band in Residence at the Yaa Centre leading with diverse programmes in learning, developing and promoting the arts

Our appeal to BAME performers and artists continues to be high, enabling us to consolidate traditional elements in our performances with an emphasis on enjoyment and safety. Despite the challenge to increase the participation of men and teenagers, we are seeing more interest among children and performers from other bands attracted to the ambience and services of Genesis.

Our goals are excellence and quality in live performances and costumes, cultural relevance and diversity in themes and development opportunities for artists; achieved with creative partnerships to develop new vistas, choreograph innovative performances and make visual statements on the road, for young and old.

Our focus is children, youths and Millennials, inheritors of Carnival, to secure continuity and legacies of the arts of Mas and Dance; putting them at the core of creativity and governance, not as paying customers or clothes horses but as designers, makers and performers.

We have survived the rocky road of Covid and retained the interests of young people by giving them absolute priority to develop Carnival as the premiere platform, community owned and governed, where they can exhibit their work

To do so, we have designed bespoke learning programmes to elevate our development by creating an alternative engagement using secure access to an online platform, restart the momentum of arts activity in local schools, at half term and practical work at home. We currently work with 6 local schools (St Marylebone, St Joseph, Our Lady of Dolours, Essendine, Edward Wilson and St Mary Magdalene).

Our performance platforms are not just the street parades of the Carnival as Genesis provides opportunities for the maintenance and continuity of arts action with suitable and attractive alternatives to the street procession, to participate in global Carnivals and to refine our craft with the discipline of making production and learning meaningful and beyond Blue Peter expectations, to offer themed designs with a modern twist.

Vernon's inheritors are his children and the future of the Band is in the hands of his daughter, Symone, who has blossomed into a prolific designer, working for carnivals around the world such as the Seychelles, Port Harcourt in Nigeria, the Congo and Batabanu in the Cayman Islands.

For the past five years Genesis has collaborated with Elimu Mas Academy to retain its presence in the Notting Hill

Carnival and its drive to educate participants in the arts and history of Carnival and elevate creativity as an achievable goal and aspiration for the very young and shift their perceptions from street party to street art.



Figure 12. Characters from The Art of Mas 2016

## Conclusion

Genesis has survived for 40 years by maintaining the highest standards of artistic work with meticulous and exquisite attention to detail and a willingness to push the artistic boundaries to be innovative and to appeal to a changing demographic.

We have gained a high-profile media, intensified during the two year period of not having a street parade and promoting our ambitions on GQ, Time Out, British Vogue and the Metro newspaper, BBC Radio, Capital Extra, Google Arts and Culture and the Guardian, and a live workshop and panel discussion for Tik Tok (see below).

This Ruby Anniversary is a milestone that will be the impetus to initiate another milestone to explore other developmental

paths within the Carnival Arts sector, continuing to be a respected voice, exemplar in design and performance, broker for developing the talent of younger artists and fulfil our mantra:

**MAS IS THE MESSAGE**



Figure 13. Fun Sunday Mas 2020

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## Calypso Memory: Some Observations on the Beneficial Effects of Engaging in Calypso Music for People Living with Dementia

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### Abstract

Calypso and Soca have been integral to the creation of music for Carnival. Simple “call and response” (C and R) lyrics are at the heart of the participatory aspects comprising the essence of the activity. I have facilitated calypso composition in a variety of settings, including working with adults with mental health challenges, included memory difficulties at various stages of dementia. Methods of engagement have comprised singing and moving to well-known songs as well as creating group composition with simple lyrics on a chosen theme or topic. In this paper I shall focus on group song writing activities with several elders’ groups, based in areas which include West London, Watford and four venues in Kent. The first two of these venues are Caribbean lunch clubs, while the four in Kent engage in programmes for adults with early stage dementia. I will endeavour to give some insight into how the collaborative group approach ensures that all those taking part have “joint ownership” of the songs produced. These are usually quite short and may only consist of a single verse, but the sense of achievement engendered by the outcomes is of prime importance to the wellbeing of all participants.

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**Key Words:** Calypso, Music, Dementia, Reminiscence, Therapeutic engagement, singing, poetry

### Introduction

Music is one of the most successful mediums for enhancing the memories of people living with Alzheimer’s and dementia. It is the last thing to go in terms of memory experiences, often represented by songs from childhood, which might include lullabies, participatory party songs, (e.g Hokey Cokey), popular songs from the charts or playground games, as well as well-known classical pieces and hymns. I have personal experience of the beneficial effects of music on people with these conditions because my mother and five of

her siblings all developed Alzheimer’s in later life. From 1995 my siblings and I all took care of my mother and her youngest sister, our aunt, by establishing a rota system involving overnight stays at their home. Part of our routine was to take my mother to a lunch club and a day centre respectively each week. In both venues singing and playing of music made the atmosphere more relaxed.

My mother’s condition lasted for twelve years, and my siblings and I looked after her at her home for all but the last eight months



of her life, which were spent in a care home. Although her memory deteriorated drastically in the last five years, just singing any song would have her smiling or joining in, even if it was just the tune and not the words. Singing had a transformative effect on her mood every time, without fail.

As a Trinidadian family, calypso music was heard in our home throughout our lives, initially through records brought during the 1960s and '70s by visiting relatives and later through radio programmes and stations that played it. We also heard a lot of '40s and '50s Jazz and swing because my mother's generation loved Ella Fitzgerald, Nat "King" Cole and Sammy Davis Jnr. By the 1980s Soca, Reggae, Two-tone and other variants had become part of the British Black Music scene, whereas American Blues, Soul and Rhythm and Blues had long been part of mainstream music broadcasting in the UK.

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### **Clinical observations**

Clinical neuropsychologist Brenda Hanna-Pladdy (Emory Department of Neurology, Atlanta, Georgia) has undertaken research on people aged between 60 and 83 to test cognitive abilities, including memory retention. They found that people who had engaged in musical activities for 10 years or more (including lessons on an instrument) scored higher in cognitive tests than those who had not. (Quoted in Diane Cole, "Your Aging Brain Will Be In Better Shape If You've Taken Music Lessons" in *National Geographic*, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2014). Furthermore, studies have shown that simply indulging in arts programmes in general (including community singing or dancing) contributed positively to a sense

of identity, communication, strengthening of social and community networks, with positive effects on both mental and physical health.

There are increasingly many and varied therapies for improving the ways in which mental health challenges are addressed. The arts, particularly drama, music and dance, have been shown to be beneficial in assuaging the effects of health conditions such as depression, PTSD, anxiety and related issues. Social interaction and wellbeing can be improved whilst these activities are engaged in therapeutic practice. As far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century handicrafts were employed to help military personnel to deal with what was originally termed "shell-shock" because it could help them to re-connect with civilian life after conflict. Singing, dancing and playing even simple rhythms can provide relief from stress, help people to relax, reduce anxiety or stop negative thoughts from encroaching too much on thought processes. As well as increasing feelings of confidence and achievement, these activities can go some way to improving social skills and interaction with others.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence in the UK (NICE, 2015) has included the arts for the first time in its guidelines for older adults' health and social care. Public Health England (PHE, now UKHSA[UK Health Security Agency]) published its first framework for evaluating arts and health programmes in 2016. In 2017 the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) published its report "Creative Health" which details the benefits of engagement in arts and culture, including people with dementia.

## The Caribbean context

Drumming and playing of percussion instruments in groups involves non-verbal “call and response” types of activity and call and response is one of the most characteristic elements of group music making. This is particularly strong in both African and Indian Caribbean societies. Apart from dance movement, percussive noises such as finger-snapping, stamping of feet, clapping, or patting a table can be a basic way of keeping time and engaging with the common pulse. In addition, emotions such as anger or stress can often be reduced by rhythmical musical activity, especially when done with others.

As a Caribbean child growing up in 1950s Britain, I was aware that Calypso and Mento (its Jamaican variant) always brought particularly positive responses from those listening to or taking part in these musical expressions. The evolution of the Steel pan in the 1940s added to the interest in this genre. In 1950 painter, choreographer, dancer, and artistic director Boscoe Holder appeared on BBC TV on a show entitled *Bal Creole*, wherein he introduced the steel pan to viewers. At the Festival of Britain in 1951 (see papers in this volume) many people in the UK saw a live steel Band for the first time in the shape of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO), consisting of a dozen players. The British public were astounded that these “rubbish cans” could make music but most of all the tinkling tones and rhythmic syncopations in the music attracted them. They have been consistently enjoyed by many people from widely differing cultural backgrounds and I believe the “off beat” stress in the music elicits excitement as well as enjoyment. The success of Harry Belafonte, Miriam

Makeba, the Cuban group, The Manhattens in 1950s and 60s America is indicative of how the recording industry had spread these infectious rhythms of African origin around the world.

The first school in London to have a steel band established in it by Steelpan tutor/arranger Gerald Forsythe was Islington Green School in 1969. In 1978 Forsythe was appointed Steelband Organiser for Schools in London and by the early 1990s there were 150 schools in Greater London with active steel bands. Many of the bands played calypso covers at fetes, school events and beyond. This means that there is a possibility that many older people alive today may well have participated in or perhaps attended a school where pans were played.

Calypso music of the Caribbean ranges from storytelling and celebration to political commentary and ridicule throughout the British, French, Spanish and Dutch territories. For the British islands the latter two aspects of Caribbean music grew out of the burgeoning defiance within 19<sup>th</sup> century carnival practice after the abolition of slavery in 1838. Parody and scandal along with mimicry of the old plantation characters became among the most successful of carnival formats, enjoyed by all classes of society. “Shame and Scandal” entertained everyone. The songwriters were keen to oblige. They wrote songs like “My landlady” by Lord Kitchener, “No Carnival in Great Britain” by The Mighty Terror, describing some of the shortcomings of life in the UK for West Indian arrivées. In Kitchener’s case it was the overcharging and strict arbitrary rules of landlords when renting to Africans and Caribbeans

The experiences of many Caribbeans of leaving homes and families to migrate to the “Mother Country” and create new lives here had the effect of adding anxiety to the feelings of separation, exacerbated by the trauma of racism and discrimination (which few had experienced back in the Caribbean). The songs and music of their culture were of prime importance in assuaging these feelings in their daily lives. Some examples of the causes of these feelings of disconnect were noted by members of the Watford United Friends Club, with whom I worked in 2018. I discuss my work with them later in this paper, but the list of topics they compiled (which has both positive and negative connotations) is worth mentioning at this juncture. It reads as follows: Leaving Friends and Family.

Split from the family back home/Loss of contact with school friends, work colleagues and neighbours/Financial costs of making the trip to the UK in pursuit of a “better life”/Thoughts and views of England, Bright lights of the big cities, Buckingham Palace/Getting letters of invitation, suited and booted in “best clothes” to make good impressions/Seeking support from their community.

Meeting family members

Lost years of not being together/Reunited at last/Bringing over children who had not seen one or both parent(s) for a long time/Expectations not met/Excited, prospects of a job or career/Sending money back home to support family members/Fun times, dances, getting married.

Journey By Sea: A long voyage/Sharing cabins, sea-sickness, meals/ meeting people from different islands.

By Plane: Shorter time but another experience/Propellers and stopovers.

By Train: To London or beyond depending on familial locations in UK/

Times of year: Frightened, alone, bitterly cold, biting winds, dense fog, dimly lit streets in the Winter/Longing for Summer/Weather change, fog, damp, mildew.

Acclimatising and Settling

Waiting for a phone call outside the red public telephone box/Letter writing/Loneliness but also being brave.

Housing: Seeking accommodation/Shared kitchens and bathrooms with other families/All living in one room/Rejection/Renting, council estates, getting a deposit, the “pardner” system/Draughty windows and doors, mould and peeling wall-paper.

People who helped

Running for the bus or tube/people holding the door open for you, struggles with pushchairs, bus drivers waiting for you as you ran towards them.

Food

Switching from yam, plantain, green banana, roti, callaloo, aki and saltfish to fish and chips, bangers and mash, Yorkshire pudding/Missing a flat iron to make roti/Adapting and spicing up English recipes.

### Overt and covert racism

Insults, people staring, police harassment of youths, shopkeepers refusing to serve people, finding a welcome at church/But also feeling occasional antipathy in places of worship, (There were even situations where church pastors with very low congregation numbers turned their churches into storehouses, rather than letting people of Black or Asian origin use them for worship.)

### School/work/career

Assumptions by teachers, as addressed by Bernard Coard in his book “How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in British Schools” (pub. 1971)/Directed to apply for low paid jobs/fear of dismissal/ lack of opportunities for advancement/Loss of family ties as young ones move to find cheaper accommodation or work in another town/city.

- Highly skilled professionals, often with qualifications earned by sitting Oxbridge or London exams in their home country found themselves demoted to street cleaner, dishwasher or porter/loader, while Rachman rooms (named after a notorious owner of appallingly substandard properties) were rented to Black people at extortionate rates because they could not easily find places to stay. When they were out on the streets some of them felt alienated and vulnerable. When they were at home with family or in the company of their fellows they were “home” in the Caribbean. The food, the clothes and especially the music took them “home”.

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### My experience of working with elders’ groups

In the early 2000s I began to do occasional “memory café” sessions in my borough, where I performed songs for groups of people with memory challenges. Sometimes these sessions were held in community centres or church halls, at other times in care homes. These sessions did not require any specific creative input from the participants, who either listened or joined in with the singing (sometimes just the tune) of songs they knew. These included well-known hits by singers from the 1950s to the 1970s (Sinatra, Nat ‘King’ Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, The Beatles etc.) but I also noticed that well-known Calypsos like “Matilda” (1940s), “Rum and Coca Cola” (1950s) and Soca hits like “Hot, hot, hot” (1980s) made the most impact in terms of Caribbean members’ participation.

I have used Calypso and mini steel pans to explore artistic engagement and creativity with people who may live in a variety of vulnerable situations involving either physical or mental challenges or both. There is rarely one way to success and one size does not fit all. Therefore, I have attempted to make access as easy as possible in as many ways as possible. In its simplest form this may be just singing and asking participants to move with the music, sing along or play some percussion instrument to accompany the song. It may be a combination of some of these. It may also be the crafting of new lyrics to a known tune or the creation of a new song from scratch. The last method inevitably requires longer time and more trial and error, but it can also have the most satisfying outcome. I attempt to include all participants in this group exercise. I shall focus on this method

as I discuss three situations where this has been attempted.

### **2017 - Nubian Life Centre**

The Nubian Life Centre in West London serves a group of Caribbean elders, some of whom have memory challenges, varying from early dementia to Alzheimer's. In 2017 I was asked to take part in a reminiscence programme wherein the centre was paired with the Bush Theatre in West London. The project involved photographs, food, poetry and music being employed in the creation of a display and performance that was presented to families and friends of the participants. I ran four song and poetry workshops over a period of three weeks, and we began each session by singing familiar songs as a group. We then worked on reminiscences, creating short poems about things that were dear to individual members' hearts and which were more often than not, shared by the majority. Finally, we made up a song about the centre, which was, after all, a place where they met, had lunch and shared their feelings.

Here are the lyrics of that song, which was composed using the "call and response" structure. The two ladies named in the song, Admira and Jenny, are two of the key personnel who work at the centre and who are obviously held in great affection by the members, as the lyrics show. Just singing (or saying) the refrain/response each time was enough to be a performer.

### **We are members of Nubian Life**

Jenny has to go and make the tea  
We are members of Nubian life  
But even if there's biscuits she'll get no fee  
We are members of Nubian life  
Everyone's feeling a little bit tired

We are members of Nubian life  
But our friend Admira is really admired  
We are members of Nubian life  
We are ladies who enjoy dancing  
We are members of Nubian life  
In the gardens where I'm prancing  
We are members of Nubian Life  
When we come here, we all make friends  
We are members of Nubian life  
We hope the friendship never ends  
We are members of Nubian life  
Any music makes us dance  
We are members of Nubian life  
Looking good in your tight pants  
We are members of Nubian life

As well as this group effort several participants produced individual poems. Here are three of them, all different but all connected in the images they conjure up. Note the topics, which are all indicative of the pride and affection they felt for their cultural roots, be they location, food, family or friendship. There are only two negative references in these pieces, "Cold England" and "Black fog". Most of their lyrics are positive as they remember childhood but there is also a stoic attitude represented in the third poem.

### **I'm From...**

I'm from St Lucia where the scenery is lovely  
My mum was strict, wearing proper clothes  
At Christmas I'd sew the clothes for  
Midnight Mass  
I'm from a well-dressed nation.

I'm from Mum  
I'm from living 3 streets from Bob Marley  
Cooking rice and peas on Sunday

I'm from dancing ballet on Fridays  
 I'm from loving British fish and chips.  
 I'm from Mum  
 I'm from Mum

I'm from me a comin' to cold England,  
 1956  
 Black fog on the streets  
 I had to feel my way around  
 Evenings we would drink, dance, cook for  
 friends  
 Baking bread and cakes.

### **2018 - Watford United Friends Club**

In 2018 I worked with Watford Palace Theatre on a project with the Watford United Friends Club, which was linked to a church in the town. The membership included people with memory challenges of varying degrees, including early dementia signs. Three of the participants, who were unaffected by memory loss, each created their poem, while the whole group contributed to a “call and response” song in which everyone joined. In addition, four of the members worked on a 15 - minute piece of drama, re-enacting a situation that many had experienced, of seeking accommodation and being turned away. This was done without a script, consisting of the actors improvising their dialogue to a planned scenario. It was an emotional journey for some of the members but also cathartic for some in its content. The whole group also rehearsed two old well-known calypsos in which two members aged in their mid 70s (one male, one female) played electric guitars. The whole show was staged at Watford Palace Theatre on an afternoon during October (Black History Month) and around 600 people came to watch the show. Needless to say, the participants' feelings of

achievement and joy were palpable to see for all who attended. Here are the lyrics of their group song, to which many if not all, contributed ideas.

### **United Friends Club is the place to come**

United Friends Club is the place to come  
 We are all brothers and sisters here  
 United Friends Club is the place to come  
 You know that for all of you we care  
 United Friends Club is the place to come.  
 Another caring sharing day  
 United Friends Club is the place to come  
 We would like it to stay that way  
 United Friends club is the place to come  
 They treat us well I must confess  
 United Friends Club is the place to come  
 The Elim boat trip was a great success  
 United Friends Club is the place to come  
 We had a lot of fun playing bingo games  
 United Friends Club is the place to come  
 And the music was lovely from Phyllis and  
 James  
 United Friends Club is the place to come.

*Continued from above*

(The “Elim boat trip” refers to a day out facilitated by a local Elim Pentacostal church, while Phyllis and James are names of the two guitarists who played in the show).

### **2019 - Bright Shadow Zest Christmas songs**

In November 2019 I did a single workshop at each of four centres in Kent where a short Christmas song was created at each venue. These sessions were facilitated by The Bright Shadow Group, part of Zest Community Groups run by Arts 4 Dementia. This organisation puts artists

together with participants showing early-stage symptoms of dementia. Their mission is to enable people living with dementia along with family or others affected by it, to live well and engage in enjoyable activities involving the arts. At all four venues I did a Christmas song composing session but for two of the venues I also took four mini steel pans along (originally constructed from biscuit tins) and these proved to be a source of interest and enjoyment. As many will know, mini pans require little technique to get a sound initially. A pan stick strikes a note and the result is instant, enjoyable and immediately infuses the would-be player with a positive sense of achievement, something which is of prime importance in these situations. There was no attempt to “teach” anything, just to have an enjoyable “new” experience at the beginning of the sessions.

In most cases the participants were known to one another and enjoyed the idea of creating their own Christmas calypsos. The tunes we used were suggested by participants, as were the lyrics. The songs were based on ideas suggested by members of the group and were put together following the members’ suggestions as much as possible. Only occasionally were small adjustments made to the lyric lines (suggested by me, in order to lengthen or shorten them in order to fit into the four beats - per - line structure). When I did this, I explained my reasons, so that those who had suggested the line understood the reason for an adjustment, rather than my just doing so without explanation. Teaching a known song can be enjoyable and uplifting but composing one from scratch means that contributors “own” the song and a stronger sense of achievement may be felt by those who brought it into being.

I used a flip chart to list participants’ ideas or wrote the lyrics up as they were suggested (see photograph to the right). These were shaped into a “call and response” structure, one which enables everyone to participate, even if it is just to repeat the response line at the required spots in the song. Here are the lyrics from the workshops from Dover, Whitstable, Hythe and Canterbury respectively.



Photograph of flip chart used to list participants’ lines as a song is composed.

### It’s Christmas Time – Dover

-  
It’s Christmas time and snow lay all around  
It’s Christmas time, a new king has been found  
It’s Christmas time, so let us celebrate  
It’s Christmas time, with pudding on your plate  
It’s Christmas time, with reindeer and a sleigh  
It’s Christmas time, from a place that’s far away  
It’s Christmas time, the stars are shining bright  
It’s Christmas time upon this blessed night  
It’s Christmas time, the kids are wide awake  
It’s Christmas time, they’re thinking of the cake.

**Lights shining – Whitstable**

Lights shining nice and bright,  
 Hanging on the Christmas tree.  
 Santa's coming here tonight  
 Bringing presents for you and me.

**Meet your family for Christmas dinner – Hythe**

Meet your family for Christmas dinner,  
 Pull a cracker and wear a hat  
 Meet your family for Christmas dinner,  
 After eating we're feeling fat.  
 Meet your family for Christmas dinner,  
 Singing the carols that we all knew  
 Meet your family for Christmas dinner,  
 Ask your friends to join in too.

**Join the Line – Canterbury**

Join the line and sing his praises  
 Come together at this time  
 What we bring the spirit raises  
 Christmas can be sublime

**Conclusion**

It cannot be over-emphasized how much cultural links, stories, songs and language are important factors in assuaging the negative effects of early-stage dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. The feelings of belonging are more strongly felt when social activities reflect familiar situations and experiences. Hence, Calypso, and its related Caribbean genres (Reggae, Zouk, Chutney, Cadence and Salsa) are musical styles which appear to have a strong impact in improving the well-being of some older Caribbeans with memory challenges – especially during the

early stages of dementia. It is my hope that a lot more research will be done to hone and improve the knowledge we already have, to the benefit of all concerned.

**Acknowledgement:**

The author is grateful to the staff and members of Nubian Life Resources Centre in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, The Dutch Pot Lunch and Social Club in the Borough of Westminster, The Pepper Pot Centre in The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and the Zest Bright Shadow community groups in Kent for allowing me time to work with their members. Thanks also to the Watford Palace Theatre and the Bush Theatre in Hammersmith and Fulham respectively for inviting me to participate and facilitate in their two projects. Thanks are also due to Music For Change (Canterbury) who contracted me to work with Zest. Haroun, Saheer and Laila Shah for their tireless work over many years on the International Steel Pan Conference and the International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA).



© Kings Davis  
 Alexander Loewenthal (pka Alexander D Great performing at Watford United Friends Club Alexander





© Kings Davis

*Watford United Friends Club; participants concentrating on their lines*

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## **A Life in Pan: Cyril Khamai, Steelpan Icon, Turns 90! Celebrating and Capturing Oral Histories from the T&T Diaspora**

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### **Abstract**

Much of steelpan history is either unwritten or is recorded long after events have taken place. When documented, the content is generally sourced from casual interviews, prompted by different reporters' interests in particular individuals or steelbands. By 1945, national newspapers such as the Trinidad Guardian were reporting carnival events, but this was often in response to some disturbance or a competition that drew attention. Together these sources provide a documentary sketch of the steelbands and their activities, especially in Port of Spain, and from time-to-time promotional material from gigs or competitions resurfaces to weave together the narrative. In London, this historical patchiness is even more pronounced because the early establishment of a steelband was of little interest to the wider public and there was no incentive for a national newspaper to cover a story unless there was an incident with the law that was likely to draw the public's attention. It is therefore within the memories of its pioneers and aficionados that the history of steelpan and carnival arts typically resides, and indeed where its foundation lies. Over numerous interviews and documentaries, steelpan pioneers such as Sterling Betancourt have eloquently offered deep insights into the journey of the Trinidad All-Steel Pan Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) - their performances of 1951 and the early history of pan in Britain and Europe - and also particularly into the evolution of Notting Carnival. There are however many others, like Herman Betancourt, Sterling's elder brother, who also lived a lifetime in steelpan from Trinidad to the UK having played with Sun Valley Steelband as a youth growing up in Port of Spain, ahead of the formation of the legendary Pan Am North Stars. At 95 years old, he too holds an as yet untapped but expansive knowledge about periods of steelpan in both contexts for which we know information is sparse. Similarly, the history of steelpan in San Fernando remains so poorly documented that many of the great steelbands such as the legendary Free French or Guinness Cavaliers have all but vanished with only fragmentary details of their glorious past, their devoted members and the huge contributions they made to the development of this instrument and the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. At Cyril Khamai's recent 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party he proved that not only can he still expound the rich history of steelpan in both San Fernando and London in particular, but that such public recollections can be a useful tool to stimulate others - from those he shared a ship to the UK with to those he played alongside in both places he has called home - to fill in important blanks, dispel myths and elaborate on important landmark moments and characters in the history of steelpan. Such events have multiple benefits: they allow elders in the Caribbean diaspora to remain connected to one another, to pass on culture authentically to UK-born generations that

have come after them, and importantly, they enable historical facts to be instantly peer-validated by a public sharing (and questioning) of collective memory. This paper acts as documentation from a landmark day in the life of Cyril Khamai and captures some key contributions, including a transcript of his own speech.

**Key Words:** Steelpan, History, Cyril Khamai, Pioneers, Celebrations, Recollections, Calypso.

## Introduction

Cyril Khamai has been described as a “Global Pan Pioneer” by Ray Funk (2013), the “Quiet Pan Pioneer” by Ray Funk and Andy Martin (2018), immortalised in “Golden Moments from the Star in Silver” (Spark, 2018), and Alexander D Great and Debra Romain’s calypso “Unsung Heroes” (2017) as well as countless titles by others. His 86<sup>th</sup> birthday, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017 was titled ‘Nice One Cyril’ after a song

dedicated to England’s Tottenham Hotspur footballer Cyril Knowles that was released for the Football League Cup Final of 1973. Although the origin of the phrase is still debated (Blake 2020), the song became very popular and was appropriated by Cyril Khamai as part of his steelpan repertoire over the years. Then, those who know Cyril will have heard him pepper any conversation with the phrase ‘Nice one.’ It was therefore naturally adopted as the event name for an open steelpan and calypso birthday party that was celebrated at the



Figure 1. A view of the concert hall during Cyril’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party, taken from the gallery. Calypso icons such as the Mighty Sparrow, Lord Kitchener, David Rudder and Lord Explainer, and pannists including Len ‘Boogsie’ Sharpe, Duvone Stewart, Andy Narell, Rudy ‘Two Left’ Smith, Rus Henderson and Sterling Betancourt have all performed at the Tabernacle.



Figure 2a. (Left). St. Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra getting the evening off to a blissful start with a number of Cyril's 'Golden Oldies' Figure 2b (Top Right). Cyril unable to resist and out comes the Scratcher.



Figure 2. The central table nearest the stage seated Mr. Khamai (green shirt) but not his expected family who at the last minute were forced to cancel after one member tested positive for COVID-19. To his left his close friend Alfred 'Freddy' Totesaut, arranger and tuner of St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra; to his right is Myra Collier, next to her (grey cap) is the veteran pannist, 95-year old Herman Betancourt, and behind Mr. Khamai is renowned pannist Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier.

Carnival Village’s Tabernacle in Powis Square, London on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018, a month after his actual birthday. The event was widely covered and brought out enthusiasts from all corners of the carnival community (Spark 2018a, 2018b). For his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, celebrated on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021, the event name was evolved to ‘Nicer One Cyril’; Cyril has already declared that his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday will be called ‘Nicest One Cyril’! The Tabernacle provided a magnificent setting for the event (Figure 1) which was opened with the scintillating sounds of St. Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra (SMASO; Figure 2a, 2b)

Following SMASO’s performance, Cyril Khamai - who was seated at the top table and flanked by icons such as Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier, Freddie Totesaut and Herman Betancourt – was invited by Prof. Haroun Shah (who organised and hosted the event) to receive a series of tributes. (Figure 3). These began with a video address from Dr Suzanne Burke, Department of Literary, Cultural, and Communication Studies, University of the West Indies (UWI), Trinidad.



Figure 4a. Bubbles escorts Cyril to a wicker chair. Bubbles made up this chair (which he brought) to mirror a throne that he draped with Trinidad & Tobago flags.

Dr Burke highlighted how important these occasions are to mark, and that “these rituals are essential to who we are as Caribbean people.” She personally thanked Mr. Khamai for generously sharing his experiences and knowledge - especially of San Fernando - with her when she came to London on her study leave in 2016 from UWI to look at carnival traditions in the Caribbean diaspora. However, she also expressed gratitude to him “on behalf of the communities of practice in the carnival arts, carnival scholars and ordinary citizens, for carrying on this tradition for well over half a century.” She added, “I’m aware that these occasions are often filled with cliches and hyperboles, but it is no exaggeration when I state that [your] life in pan represents ‘the’ Life of Pan.” She referred to Mr. Khamai as a “living museum whose journey in pan can be used to trace not only the technical developments of the instrument, but also to illustrate its meaning as a tool of resilience, as a symbol of resistance, and as a site of restoration from the many ills and traumas that we experience every day from just being Caribbean in the world,” and thanked him for “the joy that both [he] and [his] ministry in pan have brought to thousands of people all over the world.”

Two further video messages were sent from the USA from Prof. Andy Martin (Professor of Music, Inver Hills College, Minnesota USA) and Leon ‘Foster’ Thomas (Florida International University and Florida Memorial University). Both are steelpan musicians and academics and have frequently commented on the immense value to the community that innovators such as Cyril Khamai hold by openly sharing their life experiences in steelpan

and seeking to find channels to house their personal stories and archives.



Figure 3b Cyril Khamai sits on the stage in a wicker throne flanked by T&T flags, assembled for him by his close friend and fellow musician, Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier. His address was carefully listened to by an attentive audience who have utter respect for this steelpan pioneer and elder.

This interaction between practitioner and academic offers a dynamic approach to documenting the multifaceted aspects of carnival arts. When the artist has migrated, there is opportunity to study its evolution: understanding both that which is retained as tradition and that which has evolved as a result of external influences in a new land with new materials, fresh demands, different environments, collaborators and working conditions. This tests the limits of the bond between the islands and its diaspora. Dr Burke's contribution set the stage for Mr Khamai to share his life's journey in pan, over 84 years of dedication to the art, the full transcript of which is provided below:

“At 90 I am still an eligible bachelor, but I am secretly married to my pan.

My journey started as a boy of 6 in San Fernando trying to tune tin cans. My father noticed I would spend the whole day doing this and gave me a larger biscuit tin for my

6<sup>th</sup> birthday. I could not have asked for a better present – I soon made a pan with a few musical notes and everybody would come to see it and I would show off. Even at this early age I enjoyed it so much I decided this is what I wanted to do for my entire life. My father was OK with this unambitious, lowly life but my mother was very upset with me – and often said “You can't spend your whole life liming”

During World War II between 1939 -1945 all outdoor activities were banned but many of us would hide from the police and came together to form small steelbands - a pan then only had a few notes – the rest was all percussion - which is why I still like rhythm and my scratcher is so dear to me. When the war ended in 1945, there were celebrations on the streets everywhere in Trinidad and the first steelbands appeared. The public was shocked to see pan developing so quickly behind the scenes.

The Americans were in Trinidad during the war and we had cunning ways of acquiring their oil drums to make new larger pans. The police were aware that we got the drums illegally – in other words we stole them - and they constantly harassed us. Often, they came to our panyards and destroyed our pans and take us down to the Police Station where we often spend the night in a cell. I was very good at evading the police – one day when I was at Melody Makers panyard they raided us at midday, I saw them coming and pretended I was just walking through. The police stopped me and said “You – I heard you are the ring-leader”. I said “Me” – I have never seen a pan in my life” and just kept walking – and was spared the horrors of a cell that day.

I made my first fully chromatic pan with Melody Makers steelband in 1948 but arranged and tuned for several steelbands in Trinidad before being sent a ticket to travel

to Wales in 1957. A group there wanted a steelband and I made and tuned all the pans before heading off for London in 1958. London by this time was acquiring pan players from Trinidad such as Sterling, Rus Henderson and many of my friends who are in the room tonight. I have played with many of them through Tropicana and played pan in 35 countries – being lucky to play even behind the Iron Curtain during the years of the cold war.

I have never missed a carnival except for Carnival 2020 when COVID stopped carnival but even then, I was lucky through my doctor (Dr Yasmin Razak) to be given the chance to play during the vaccination programme at St Charles Hospital. I thank them for coming tonight and also for part sponsorship of this evening's event.

When I look back at my life in pan, I do not recall a single bad experience. Pan has a way of bringing peace and joy to all and it is through pan that I have made so many long-lasting friends, many of whom have passed on but are spiritually here tonight. I thank them all for making my life so fulfilling and happy and I thank God for giving me the opportunity to enjoy such a wonderful life.

My thanks to all who came out on this cold winter evening and that includes my nieces and family all the way from Cardiff and Gloucester but who sadly had to turn back because of a positive COVID-19 test. My sister Theo (see Appendix 1 below) was here for my last birthday in 2018 and I am sure she is here in spirit with us tonight again.

If I had to do it all over again, there is only one life I would want again – **A Life in Pan**. I have one wish and that is for the youths of today to continue to work to make pan the best musical instrument ever made. Treat a steelpan as sacred, make it the pride of your



Figure 5a Organiser and MC - 'Nicer One Cyril'. Chief Editor; International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA)



Figure 5b. Elders sharing stories on 'the liming bench.' The first to join the lime was Vee (far right) who shared stories of life on the S.S Colombie – the ship she and Mr Khamai came to Britain on in 1957. Ken Singh added his recollections of Tropicana, as a co-member of the band alongside Cyril Khamai.

life and let it bring peace and joy to you and all your friends and family as it has done for me over the years.”

After Mr Khamai received a standing ovation, MC, Haroun Shah adapted the end of the stage into a 'liming bench' so that participants could come up, sit and discuss their personal experiences with their friend and/or collaborator, Cyril (Figures 5a, 5b). A woman of 85 years (Velma 'Vee' Davis seen to the right in a red turban) revealed that she travelled on the same boat - the French merchant ship, the S.S. Colombie (Wikipedia) - across the

Atlantic to Britain with Mr Khamai. She recalled him bringing out his pan and playing at the various gala evenings and described how the West Indians on board were immensely homesick and so got to know each other quickly. They were traveling to a place they knew nothing about and talked nervously about what to expect in England. She commented that Cyril's music did so much to make them feel more composed and helped them to bond – and consequently “he became very popular with the ladies!” Vee went on herself to work as a chef for Richard Branson at the Virgin Manor studios in Oxfordshire. We learnt that recently she started a new career as a model/actress, appearing in Vogue magazine, an advert with Billy Connolly, a Harry Potter film, Love Actually, and Alicia Keys' ‘Girl On Fire’ video.

When Clive ‘Mash Up’ Phillip joined the bench it was an example of how public sharing and storytelling is not only fascinating but enables vital strands in the history of steelpan to be inserted into the common narrative (Figure 6a). ‘Mash Up’ explained that he has been involved with carnival since a boy of 6 or 7 years old who “lived within walking distance of Renegades, Desperadoes, Casablanca and Syncopators” (Joseph, 2019) and played guitar pan briefly with the latter. In 1961, Mr Phillip settled in West London where he has remained a resident of the Notting Carnival area ever since. In 1965, he participated in the street parade that eventually gave rise to Notting Hill Carnival. However, it was his teaming up with Frank Critchlow in 1980 that led to the establishment of Mangrove Steelband that he is best known for among steelpan devotees. During the discussion, prompted



Figure 6a. Clive 'Mash Up' Phillips of Mangrove Steelband renown, recalling his childhood and beginnings in pan in San Fernando.

by Mr Khamai's recollections about southern steelbands such as Free French and Melody Makers, Mr Phillip recounted his own early life in Trinidad and revealed that he too was born in San Fernando and grew up on Fonrose Street. This was a shock to many as Fonrose Street runs off Coffee Street and he may have trodden the same path as Cyril, yet those who know him associate him only with Port of Spain.

Two of the overseas tributes came in the form of calypsos that caught the attention of the veteran calypsonians such as D'Alberto



Figure 6b. Calypso legends, D' Alberto (left) and Alexander D Great listening intently to tributes to Cyril in calypso by Allison Noreiga Clark (Trinidad), Dawn Batson (USA) and Roger Gibbs (Canada).



and Alexander D Great. Roger Gibbs (Canada), fresh from his presentations and performances at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Conference in Carnival Arts (1-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021) at the same venue, sang a calypso he wrote called ‘Uncle Cyril’ to his own accompaniment on a Cuatro, and Allison Noreiga-Clarke sang her own composition which was produced by David Boothman in Trinidad and sung like an Extempo to the music of ‘Sans Humanite.’ Her video included a few words of good wishes by Dr. Dawn Batson (Associate Professor of Music, Florida Memorial University).

Dr Batson became close friends with Cyril through her visits to London, the first of which was to deliver a Plenary Lecture at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Biennial Steelpan Conference in 2012. As one of the leading international experts on steelpan - both as practitioner and academic - she has continuously expressed her admiration for Mr Khamai’s commitment and innovative work throughout his life. Allison Noreiga-Clarke has been a close friend of Mr Khamai’s for over 15 years, connecting through Nostalgia Steelband where for over ten months they worked closely on the intense preparations for the opening ceremony of the London Olympics in 2012. She also however founded and ran an octogenarians dance group in London, prior to her return to Trinidad, called the ‘Raunchy Rockers’ which Mr Khamai often accompanied with his double-tenor pans. (The group’s leader, Myra Collier, is seated next to Cyril Khamai in Figure 3. The lyrics to Allison Noreiga-Clarke’s calypso tribute are below:

*Born in Pepper village Fyzabad  
Raise in San Fernando in Trinidad*



Figure 7. Mr Khamai's double tenor cake - the instrument he enjoys playing the most, alongside his infamous scratcher.

*In Free French playing sweet Melody  
Till de foreign bug come an ketch he  
Ah hear Coffee Street was de stompin  
ground*

*Girls swarming like bees when Cyril  
around*

*Coffee tun tuh tea since Scratch left dey  
'57 was de year dat he went away.*

*I doh know how dey call he ah rogue  
Wid all he nice clothes and fancy brogue  
Anyting he play, it sound so sweet  
Pan o scratcher he does get people on dey  
feet*

*Spain gorn wile when dey hear Tropicana  
And de Nice One play for de seniorita  
But when he jam ah going dong San  
Fernando  
Still ah Trini from he head tuh he big toe*

*So Happy Birthday Cyril my fren  
Is only YOU who could get me to pen*

*Yuh know I know wat yuh have in yuh case  
An how yuh could make people pelt dey  
waist*

*You are a true gem, so patient and kind  
Yuh maturing nice like ah fine wine  
So ah say tuh yuh Cyril, my laad  
Yuh should know by now, we love yuh too  
baad”*

With much of the formalities over, Cyril was evidently more relaxed and began to participate more. Figures 8a, 8b show him walking around to meet his guests and dancing (Figure 8c). It was at this point that Bubbles gathered his friends to form a guard of honour to lead Cyril back to his seat (Figure 8d).



Figure 8c.

Cyril’s family compiled an album of photographs covering his early years up to the passing of his sister in 2018, including Mr Khamai’s parents whom he had earlier referenced – his mother, Amelia, and his father, Durham (see Appendix 2 below). In the unfortunate absence of Mr Khamai’s family, MC Haroun Shah asked questions about the photos to elicit details.

Tobago Crusoe, D’ Alberto, Alexander D Great and De Admiral (on pan) took over the next segment of the evening on stage,



Figure 8a. (above). Figure 8b. (below)



Figure 8d.



Figure 8b

beginning with D’ Alberto’s resurrection of Nat Hepburn’s 1960’s ‘Tell Santa Claus,’ and then ‘Margie’ - one of Kitchener’s most popular calypsos at the Tabernacle, which as expected roused the audience who sang and danced along. Crusoe, accompanied by Alexander D

Great also on guitar kept the momentum elevated with Crusoe’s comical version of



Figure 9. Tobago Crusoe (former Calypso Monarch of T&T and performer in the Paddington/ Paddington 2 films) and Alexander D Great during the calypso section of the evening.

‘Deck the Halls’ and finally ended with his version of ‘Happy Birthday’ for Cyril (Figure 9).

The inimitable Michael ‘Bubbles’ Olivier closed the final section of the evening which he labelled ‘Back in Time’ with the aim of reminding Cyril of his early life. His plans were (1) a Solo Pan performance (2) sing four popular songs to backing tracks and (3) a tamboo bamboo parade for Cyril with audience participation. However, due to time limitations he was forced to select only elements of this programme beginning with a pan solo performance that silenced the audience who were hypnotised by his incredible dexterity, harmonies and musicality.

Like Cyril, Bubbles has lived a life in pan, performing all over the world. He began playing pan by the age of 8 or 9, becoming sufficiently proficient at the age of only 14 to join the foremost steelband of Trinidad and Tobago at the time, the ‘Pan Am North Stars.’ Among his many tours was the landmark trip to New York in 1970 to record the album ‘Ivory and Steel’ with the distinguished pianist Winifred Atwell. He arrived in London in 1971 and was soon

directing the ‘20<sup>th</sup> Century Steel Band’. He made his debut at Notting Hill Carnival in 1972 in response to Merle Major’s pleas to prevent the carnival from dissolution. Ottewill (2017) states “He’s perhaps best known for his tune ‘Heaven and Hell is on Earth,’ a track sampled by the likes of the Jungle Brothers, Black Eyed Peas, Lauryn Hill and even Jennifer Lopez.” It won him awards from the British Music Industry and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.

‘Bubbles’ ended the event by serenading Cyril Khamai with an uncanny rendition of Louis Armstrong’s ‘We Have All The Time in The World’ which everyone sang along to, closing out what was truly an historic celebration of not only one of the UK’s founding fathers of carnival arts, but also a T&T icon and national treasure.



Figure 10: ‘Bubbles’ singing and playing a song from his solo repertoire – Stevie Wonder’s Village Ghetto Lands.



Figure 11a. Cyril Khamai and band members dressed as Spanish conquistador on a virtual tropical beach. The band made this album in Germany in 1968, ahead of their tour to Russia.

### Conclusion

Although the event was planned as a birthday party with the usual food, drinks, calypso, steelpan, lively conversation and dancing, the event and the various tributes and speeches people voluntarily offered in that setting prompted discussions that served to provide depth to existing knowledge and fill in some blanks. With so much of the history of carnival arts locked away in the memories of elder artists, occasions such as these help to reignite the grey matter to embellish episodes in steelpan history where there is a paucity of information. For an octogenarian, long periods of sitting alone with an interviewer can be daunting, strenuous and even

unproductive. Pooling artists together with a common interest, and in a less formal setting, may be an alternative means to gather more qualitative information on the history of carnival arts. It may also help to give credibility to a topic through consensus in areas of controversy where perhaps only one perspective has been formally presented to date but perhaps is quietly disputed. Such events also serve as educational for younger community members such as Candice Falconer from St Michael & All Angels Steel Orchestra who dug out a treasured LP that her father had given her as a child which was formative in her evolution as a pannist: ‘The Original Trinidad Steel Band.’ While Mr Khamai has been in her life for some time, she had never noticed that in fact he was on the

cover of that LP. Such finds are not only key for the archives, but are essential to our understanding of these pioneers’ lives and their narratives are tightly interwoven with our own self-identification, whether as T&T diaspora, or as UK-born citizens of Caribbean, particularly of Trinidadian descent.



Figure 11b. Cyril Khamai clearly recognisable - dressed as a Spanish conquistador on a virtual tropical beach. The band made this album in Germany in 1968, ahead of their tour to Russia.



Appendix 1. Cyril and sister Theo dancing at his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Tabernacle

### MUM AND DAD



Amelia "Mamin"



Durham "Pops"

Appendix 2. Cyril ‘s parents; mother Amelia (left) and dad, Durham. His dad was of East Indian descent and encouraged him to experiment with tuning tins from the age of 6. From there he naturally progressed to tuning the larger biscuit tins and eventually oil drums.

**Acknowledgement:**

We are indebted to Carnival Village for support towards procuring the Tabernacle for this event, and for the technical and managerial support to ensure it was a success. We are extremely grateful to financial backers of the event which included a grant from the local NHS (Colville Health Centre) via Dr Yasmin Razak (Golborne Medical Centre, W10 5PE) who also gave enormous support to Notting Hill Carnival Community from the start of the pandemic, and also to Consultant Evelyn Mensah, Central Middlesex Hospital, London, NW10 7NS for supporting Cyril's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations. There were generous donations from Cyril's family and friends

without whose benevolence the event may not have materialised. We warmly acknowledge their considerable generosity, and those of the Shah family who led the organisation of the event. Finally, our thanks to the many artists who performed, provided support and made the evening a memorable and joyous event for Cyril; these include the calypsonians Alexander D Great, Tobago Crusoe, D'Alberto and De Admiral. St Michael & All Angels brought the entire steelband and added immeasurably to the programme and Michael 'Bubbles' Olivier, who not only performed and attentively looked after Cyril for the entire evening, but helped immensely in co-organising the event.

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