

VOLUME 10
JULY 2025

ISSN 2752-342X

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CARNIVAL ARTS



This volume is dedicated to:

**Mark Loquan:
Panman's Odyssey and the Rhythm of a Nation
13th October 1961 - 6th April 2025**



Mark Loquan was a graduate of The University of the West Indies (UWI) with a B.Sc. in Chemical Engineering (1st Class Hons) and an MBA at Duke University, North Carolina, USA and remained a Distinguished Alumni of UWI. In 2024, he received the nation's highest honour, the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, for his achievements in Science (energy sector) and Steelpan innovation. He is best known by the nation for his significant contributions to the development and global promotion of its national instrument, through his multifaceted career as a composer, educator, and cultural advocate. Over thirty of his compositions have been performed by prize-winning steelbands across major national competitions such as Pan is Beautiful and Panorama. He co-founded the Music Literacy Trust in 2004, a not-for-profit organisation committed to nurturing the next generation of pannists by offering music scholarships and implementing music education initiatives. His efforts extended internationally, notably through his role as musical director of Perth Pandemix in Australia, where he helped amplify the steelpan's presence on the global stage. He was a frequent visitor to the UK where he was highly respected.

In 2006, we convened the inaugural international conference on Steelpan at the University of East London's illustrious Docklands Campus. This event was strategically scheduled to follow London's Notting Hill Carnival, taking place between 30th - 31st August 2006. Among the participants was Mark, whose presence enriched the gathering through his enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and compassionate engagement. His contribution was not only intellectually stimulating but also deeply encouraging, reinforcing the importance of continuing such scholarly exchanges. The enduring commitment of individuals such as Mark has played a vital role in sustaining this conference series. This volume commemorates our 11th meeting, held in Trinidad in collaboration with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) at the nation's iconic National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) and is dedicated to the nation's patriots such as Mr. Mark Loquan.

Herman Betancourt: Unsung Pillar of the Steelpan in London

Herman Betancourt, elder brother of TASPO's legend Sterling passed away on Thursday 5th June - 99 years and 27 days according to his daughter Sue. Herman was a quiet pioneer of the steelpan movement in London playing with Nostalgia Steelband since its inception. Arriving from Trinidad in the early post-war years, he was among the first to introduce Pan to British audiences, supporting small ensembles at gigs in the UK at a time when Caribbean culture was often marginalised, Herman helped lay the groundwork for what would become a vibrant UK Pan tradition. Though never in the spotlight, his dedication, musicianship, and community spirit made him a steady force behind the scenes. Herman's legacy lives on in the rhythms of Notting Hill Carnival and the enduring presence of Pan in British cultural life.

Front Cover Credit:

Photograph of the floral display conceived, designed, executed, and presented by Melissa Lee Foon for the 11th conference, '*Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections: Cultural Cadence - Steelpan, Calypso, and Mas and the Global Diaspora Connection,*' held between 6 -8th March 2025 at The National Academy for the Performing Arts and hosted by UTT. Photo by Laila M.N. Shah.

Chris Gibbs (1944 – 2025) was a Barbadian musician, athlete and cultural icon. He co-founded the legendary calypso-folk band **The Merryman** in 1962 alongside Robin Hunte and Emile Straker. As the band's steady bass guitarist and backing vocalist, he helped shape their signature blend of Caribbean rhythms and troubadour-style charm, performing internationally across five decades. Beyond music, Chris was an accomplished watersports athlete - in 2003, at age 58, he became the first Caribbean national to swim the English Channel, finishing in 11 hours 30 minutes. His calm presence and impeccable musical timing earned him admiration from bandmates and the wider Barbadian creative community. He also co-founded REC recording studio, fostering local talent in the 1970s and 80s.

Chris Gibbs passed away in June 2025 at the age of 80 following a battle with cancer. He leaves behind a distinguished legacy as a musician, athlete, and enduring symbol of Barbadian cultural pride. The International Journal of Caribbean Arts (IJCA) extends its deepest condolences to his brother, Roger Gibbs, and the entire Gibbs family. Roger Gibbs, a respected member of the IJCA editorial board and is a regular contributor to the journal.

Prime Minister Mottley Pays Tribute to Chris Gibbs

As I reflect on Chris Gibbs' passing this week, I am mindful that despite his immense familiarity among older Barbadians, most of our school-age citizens probably have no idea who he was or his contribution to national life.



President of Barbados, The Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason presenting the *Order of the Republic* to Christopher Mark Gibbs in 2023.

This ought to be a reminder to all of us who have responsibility for, or influence over, our youth and who are concerned about what appears to be our failure as a society to consistently pass on the values that created that true Bajan spirit, which made Barbados a special place, that we have a critically important task ahead of us.

Chris was the very epitome of the Bajan spirit. He was as caring as he was humble. He revelled in the Bajan culture, particularly in sports and music, and like many Barbadians of old, he was self-taught in the areas in which he excelled. His life is a potent lesson for every young Bajan with a goal - it is within you to determine your future success, regardless of where you start or what obstacles confront you along the way.

As one of the founding members of the most recognised Barbadian musical group of the 20th century, The Merryman, Chris not only played a key role in the development of our entertainment industry but was an essential part of the cultural element that gave the island's tourism its stable foundation.

Chris Gibbs, along with (Sir) Emile Straker, Robin Hunte, Willie Kerr and Peter Roett, performing authentically Caribbean musical styles as the Merryman at home and in many of the world's best-known capital cities, compelled countless visitors to return over and over again. A lover of our most prolific natural resource, the sea, Chris distinguished himself as a national representative and team captain in the sport of water polo, completed the enviable feat of swimming around the island as part of a relay team in 2003, and made international headlines at the age of 58 as the only Caribbean national to swim the English Channel.

For his successful swim across the English Channel, Chris was awarded the Barbados Service Medal and in 2022 he was conferred with the Order of the Republic.

On behalf of the Government and people of Barbados, I extend sincere condolence to his family and friends and encourage all young Bajans to take a leaf from his book.

May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory.

Reprinted with the kind permission of **Mr. Roy Morris, Prime Minister's Office, Barbados**

CONTENTS

Dedication.. I - II

Contents III

Scope of the ‘International Journal of Carnival Arts: Steelpan, calypso and Mas IV-VII

Editorial Board VIII- X

Editorial: Britain's New Visa Restrictions Threaten Caribbean Artist Participation in UK Carnivals

Haroun N. Shah..... 1 - 5

1. *Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections; Cultural Cadence: Steelpan, Calypso and Mas and the Global Diaspora Connection; Reflections and Overview*
Laila M.N. Shah and Haroun N. Shah..... 6 - 23

2. *Where’s the Vibes At?: Exploring the Experience Economy and Motivations of Carnival Tourists and Festival Goers*
Josephine Torrel-Brown 24-36

3. *Calypso Historiography – Who Wrote What and When*
Roger Gibbs 37-61

4. *Kent Karnival: Re-creation, Recreation, and Relevance*
Janine Tiffe 62-71

5. *Bringing Back the legacy of Dr (Mama) Geraldine Connor back home to Trinidad-Preserving Yoruba culture in the Diaspora*
Sally Omolara Rose 72-87

6. *“Gyal yuh Look Good”: Carnival Influencers’ Creation of Fear of Missing Out on a Carnival (FOMO-AC)*
Kai Barratt 88-103

7. *Steelpan Symphony: Harmonizing Tradition and Theory in Caribbean Pedagogy and Identity*
Paul J. Massy and Josephine Torrel Brown..... 104-119

8. *Caribbean Spirit: Regional and Diasporic Family Ties in Jamaican and Trinbagonian Music*
Byron Jones 120-137

9. *The Duality of Identity in the re (creation) of the mas*
Margaret Nakhid-Chatoor 138-149

10. *Floral – Melissa*
Melissa Lee Foon 150-158

11. *Posters*
Ten Authors..... 159 -171

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

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 Name¹ – Size 14 – Bold

¹Institute/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:

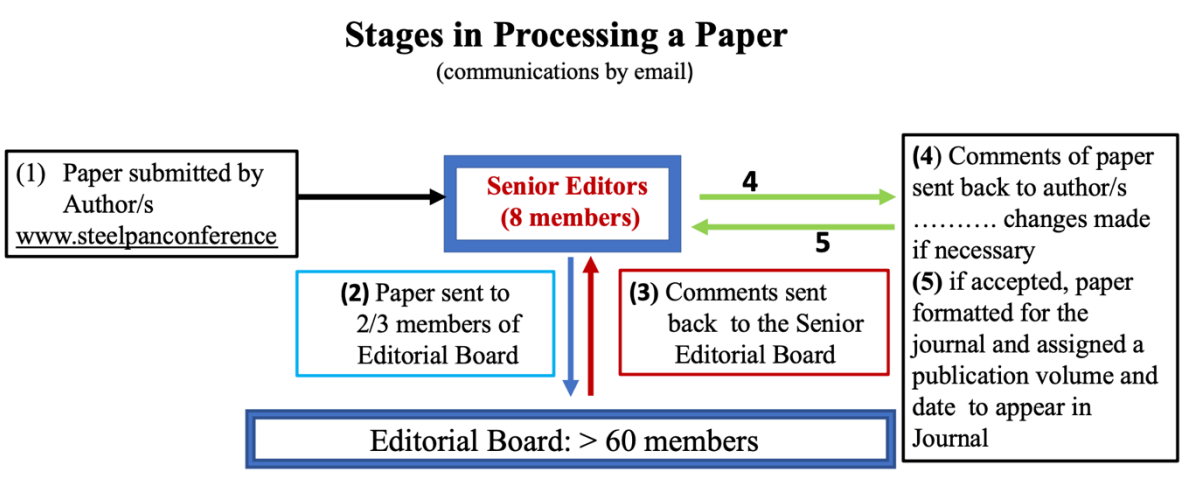
These should be designed as simple as possible. Each table should be numbered consecutively using Arabic numerals and supplied with a heading and a legend at the top of the table. Tables should be self-explanatory without reference to the text. The same data should not be presented in both table and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



Disclaimer: The content on this site, including reports, analyses, images and opinions are contributions by the named authors and are based on sources they personally acknowledge and cite that are believed to be accurate and reliable when submitted. The editors of the *International Journal of Carnival Arts* make no representation of warranty of any kind as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided and accepts no liability for any damage or loss resulting from errors, inaccuracies or omissions affecting any part of the content. Articles may be reprinted on condition that acknowledgement of the original source is made. Responsibility for obtaining copyright permissions and for any associated costs rests solely with the author/s and not with the International Journal of Caribbean Arts (IJCA).

Senior Editorial Board:

Dawn K. **Batson**, PhD, University of Miami, Professor ret. Florida Memorial University, International Cultural Consultant, Arranger, Educator, Lecturer in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Culture as an Economic Force. Email: dkbatt@bellsouth.net

Suzanne **Burke**, B.A. York University, Ca, M.A. Cum Laude - ISS, Netherlands PhD. Essex University, UK. Lecturer in Cultural Studies, Carnival arts, Governance, Strategic Planning, Policy Analysis, Cultural Industry Development, University of the West Indies. Email: imanitt.suzanne@gmail.com

Kim **Johnson**, PhD, University of the West Indies, Historian, Journalist, Researcher, foremost Steelpan Historian in Trinidad & Tobago and Carnival Arts. Email: eshu55@gmail.com

Alexander **Loewenthal**, B.A. (aka Alexander D Great). Classically trained musician. Calypsonian (Association of Calypsonian UK). Lecturer, Educator. Email: adgreat7@gmail.com

Robbie **Joseph**, CISMP, Founder/ Editor of *Pan Podium*, Chair; UK Steelpan Tuners Guild, Executive; British Association of Steelbands. Steelpan Journalist and Analyst. Email: robbie@panpodium.com

Andrew R. **Martin**, PhD, Professor of Music, Inver Hills College. Journalist, Researcher, Author. Prolific writer on Carnival Arts, frequently in the Trinidad Guardian. Email: AMartin@inverhills.edu

Haroun N. **Shah**, FRCP, DSc, PhD, University of London. Current Chairs, Dept. Natural Sciences, Middlesex University, London; School of Medicine and Biosciences, University of West London, London, W5 5RF, Director, Notting Hill Carnival Board, Director, Nostalgia Steelband. Email: harounnshah@gmail.com

Laila M.N. **Shah**, PhD student, Department of Physical & Theoretical Chemistry, University of Oxford. former youth representative Windrush Generation. Committee Member, Carnival Village Trust. Pannist, Leader/Arranger, Nostalgia Steelband. Email: lailamnshah@gmail.com

Stephen **Spark**, MA, University of Westminster, Consulting Editor, *SocaNews*, Freelance Journalist, Publishing, Calypso, History and Current Events. Email: trafton.editorial@gmail.com

Leon 'Foster' **Thomas**, BM, MM, Florida International University and Florida Memorial University. Steelpan and musical arts history, Steelpan-Jazz, percussionist, steelpan drill master, composer, arranger. Currently, PhD student, Royal Holloway, University of London, Email: foster.krossoverjazz@gmail.com

Editorial Board:

Juliet **Alexander**, NCTJ Journalism (National Council for the Training of Journalists), MA Documentary Research. Pioneering UK Journalist, Broadcaster and TV presenter. University lecturer. Effective communications tutor to politicians. Interests: Arts - Theatre, Music, Dance, Politics, Carnival and Writing.

Camille Y.T. **Allan**, BA, MA., University of Manchester. Pannist, Tutored by Sterling Betancourt as a youth. Played with Nostalgia in the UK and abroad. Co-organiser, first steelpan conference 2006. Play piano, trumpet and sing. Lived in Peru for 11 years - keen interest in Caribbean and Latin American music.

Latipher A. Osei **Appiah-Agyei**, PhD. Senior Lecturer, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Education, Winneba. Interest/expertise: Dance studies, Arts and Cultural Studies, events coordination, research, consultancy.

Nikoli Adrian **Attai**, PhD, Provost's Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Toronto, Women and Gender Studies Institute. Women and Gender Studies. Queer Carnival Studies: transgression, sexuality, gender performance, queer tourism, carnival tourism, J'Ouvert, diaspora carnivals.

Darrell **Baksh**, PhD Candidate (ABD), The University of the West Indies at St. Augustine, Trinidad. Caribbean popular culture: Indo-Caribbean popular culture, Caribbean carnival cultures, popular music, identity politics, feminisms.

Zuleika **Beaven**, PhD. Lecturer, Middlesex University London. Arts Management: governance, organisational behaviour, enterprise & start-up, event management and carnival arts.

Ian **Boggan**, MA, Dipl. Management, Assessor and QA qualified., Retired police officer, Adult trainer (DTLLS). Pannist, arranger, musician, pan management, Lead - Spangle steel band (Norfolk). Workshops (Spangle Pans). Promotion of pans in Norfolk.

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

Marcia Burrowes, PhD, University of Warwick, UK, Lecturer in Cultural Studies, Caribbean Traditional Masquerade, Caribbean Festivals and Rituals, Carnival Arts, Identity Studies, Windrush (UK) Studies, Migration histories, Actor, Director, Producer.

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

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

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

Osuaryi Quaicoo **Essel**, B.Ed, MPhil, PhD. Associate Professor. Department of Textiles and Fashion Education. Research interests include African fashion and textiles history, African Beauty culture standards and practices, Fashion decolonization, Textiles, music, festivals; popular culture; art therapy education, art education, and African Aesthetics.

Candice **Falconer**, MChem, B.Ed. Music and Science Teacher. Pannist, youth steelpan tutor, project leader, fundraiser, community worker, STEM Teacher.

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

Harmony **Farrell**, MA Cultural Studies (in prog., BA (Hons) Theatre and Performance w/ Creative Writing, Interest/expertise: Drama in Education, Postcolonial Performance Studies, Arts & Culture Journalism

Janice B **Fournillier**, PhD (Educational Psychology). Associate Professor, Research Measurement and Statistics, Educational Policy Studies, College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University. Interest/Expertise. Teaching, learning practices in non-school contexts like Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival was' camps, Qualitative Research Methodologies: Theories and practices. Teacher Education

Kela N. **Francis**, BA, PhD. Assistant Professor. Lecturer in Caribbean History, calypso composition, academic writing and Communication. University of Trinidad and Tobago. masquerade, calypso, secularized ritual. Research interests include African diaspora Literature, music, festivals; popular culture; cultural studies; and human spirituality.

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.

Jenny **Gilberg**, BA (Fine Art), Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Multi-Instrumentalist, Musical Director, North Tyneside Steel Band, musician and artist, steelpan soloist, tutor, arranger and composer. Email: Jenny.gilberg@btinternet.com; www.jennygilberg-steelpan.co.uk

Shareen **Gray**, BA (Hons) Business Publishing, Director Steel Pan Trust Business Owner Steel Pan Agency. Provides steelpan performances and workshops for all age and abilities, specialises in teaching people with special needs and learning difficulties. Tutor, training accessories and qualifications.

Malika Rachelle **Green**. BA Music. Director, Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra. Pannist, arranger, tutor, composer, community music engagement and promoter. Currently based in Trinidad.

Maica **Gugolati**, PhD. Social and visual anthropology. Researcher at Institute of African Worlds, School of Advanced Studies In The Social Sciences (Ehess), Paris, France. Visual and performative art and carnival production. Photography and film, creative industries focused on the Caribbean region, insular and continental, and its diaspora. Postcolonial and decolonial theories and practices.

Rachel **Hayward**, MA. (Music Performance). City University, London. PhD. Author of several books. Leader, Euphoria Steelband. History of steel band, pan-round-neck, worldwide dissemination of pan, repertoire development and arrangement/transcription for pan, pan solos, pan with "conventional" instruments.

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

Nesreen N. **Hussein**, BFA, MRes, PhD, AFHEA. Lecturer in Contemporary Theatre, Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries, Middlesex University. Music, theatre and street theatre. The socio-political history of carnival arts and steelpan, legacy of carnival arts and steelpan as a form of resistance, art and activism, connections with global cultures, diversity, multiculturalism, colonialism, relation to the history of empire.

Nicole Joseph, Graphic designer, multi-disciplinary designer & artisan, and craft educator. 25 years practice in digital publication design & editorial support, project management, and sustainable craft workshops facilitation (adults & children). Interests: mas making, community empowerment and capacity building through arts and crafts, micro-entrepreneurship, sustainability, continuous learning and innovation. Currently, CVQ Level 2 - Masquerade Design & Production

Kal **Juman**, Toronto Caribbean Carnival, Digital Marketing, Sponsorships, Partnerships and New Business Opportunities. Carnival Arts, innovative methods of modernising Toronto Caribbean Carnival including management corporation sponsorship and partnerships.

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.

Anna **Lawrence**, BA, MPhil – PhD. University of Cambridge. Steelpan and mas: history, geography, culture, Caribbean diaspora, cultural appropriation, politics of music and race, multiculturalism, (post)colonial Britain.

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.

Emily Zobel Marshall, PhD. Course Director for English Literature and Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Literature. Leeds Beckett University. Caribbean Carnival Cultures, Traditional Mas, Gender and Carnival Studies, Carnival and Plantation History, Carnival Poetry and Literature, Trickster Figures in Carnival, Carnival and Folklore.

Lionel McCalman (PhD), a Guyana-born cultural historian, educator, and steelpan musician, served as a Senior Lecturer in Education and Community Development at the University of East London (UEL) for 22 years. Based in the UK, he led Nostalgia Steelband and has advanced steelpan and carnival arts through performance, education, and scholarship. He co-organised the first steelpan conference at UEL in 2006.

Patrick McKay, Coordinator, St Michael Youth Project. Pannist, arranger, youth steelpan tutor, project leader, fundraiser, community worker

Aneesa Oumarally, Lawyer, Public Policy and Administration, MBA, University of Toronto. CEO, Festival Management Committee. Board of Directors, Toronto Caribbean Carnival. History of Carnival Art culture; Growth and change of the culture over time. Vibrant member of the Caribbean Community, carnival arts, Toronto Caribbean Carnival performer, organiser, administration and promoter.

'H' Patten, PhD. Artistic Director Koromanti Arts, choreographer, dancer, storyteller, visual artist, filmmaker. Lecturer in African Peoples' dance. Caribbean arts and culture, popular culture. carnival staging, Caribbean History and genealogy, carnival production, dance, music and choreography.

Jimi Philip. NIHERST- Science of Steelpan. Pannist, numerous awards, steelpan tutor at schools and universities, musician, steelpan innovator, performer, promoter and tuner.

Anthony Pierre, BA. Computer Science, Minor, Ethnomusicology York University, Toronto, Canada. Arranger, campus-based Yorktones Steelband and Invaders Steelband, Trinidad. Toronto: Founding Member: AfroCaribbean Theatre Workshop and Three Trinis, Film Group; Member, Theatre Fountainhead and former Board, CARIBANA; Bandleader and percussionist with the KALABASH Jazz Sextet.

Lamar Pollard. MA (Carnival Studies), Production Manager, The University of Trinidad and Tobago Academy for the Performing Arts. Cultural Management, Public Policies for Culture, Cultural Policy, Technical Design and Implementation for Carnival.

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.

Sally Omolara Rose, PhD. Yoruba Culture, Carnival and Contemporary Art, Sculptor, & Creator of the Geraldine Connor Aworan Civic Statue, Visual Artist, Anthology Author - Peepal Tree Press, Singer/Songwriter. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Rep. for Leeds Council, museums, universities & ITV, GCF artist associate.

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.

Janine Tiffe, PhD Musicology. Associate Professor, Kent State University. Teaching, research interests, and expertise include ethnomusicology, steelband, African Ensemble, world and popular musics, music of the United States, dance, Africa and the diaspora, gender, race and ethnicity, pedagogy, and community music-making.

Josephine Torrel-Brown, BA Musical Arts; MPHIL, PhD. Cultural Studies. Assistant Professor, Academy for Arts, Letters, Culture, and Public Affairs; Master of Arts in Carnival Studies, The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). Interest/expertise: Arts and Cultural Studies, Music/Arts education, Arts-in-Education, curriculum planning and development, artistes' and competition adjudicators' training/coaching (former Chief Adjudicator for the International Soca Monarch Competition), consultancy.

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

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.

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.

Editorial

Britain's New Visa Restrictions Threaten Caribbean Artist Participation in UK Carnivals

On 10th March 2025, the UK observed Commonwealth Day with a service at Westminster Abbey, led by King Charles III. The event emphasised unity across the Commonwealth during uncertain times and was themed “*Together We Thrive.*” It featured cultural performances and marked the public return of the Princess of Wales, Catherine, following her cancer treatment. Official statements reaffirmed the day’s role in celebrating the shared values and diversity of the 56 Commonwealth member nations. However, in a move that drew significant criticism, the UK government announced shortly after - on 12th March 2025 - the end of visa-free travel for several key Caribbean nations including Trinidad & Tobago, casting a shadow over the spirit of Commonwealth solidarity. The authors (L.M.N. Shah and H.N. Shah) share their personal reflections on its impact on Carnival Arts in the Editorial below:

For over six decades, since the inception of Notting Hill Carnival (NHC) in the mid-1960s, a transatlantic cultural exchange has flourished between the Caribbean and the United Kingdom. It became standard practice for artists based in Trinidad and other parts of the Caribbean to travel to London at short notice to lead, mentor, perform, or participate in Calypso Tents, Mas bands, and Steelbands, enhancing the development, quality and authenticity of UK-based Carnival celebrations. NHC, now recognised as one of the largest street carnivals in the world, annually attracts close to two million participants. UK steelbands, comprising over 100 Pannists for events such as Panorama, have historically benefited from this exchange. Caribbean musicians would frequently join major ensembles such as Mangrove or Ebony steelbands, fostering collaborative networks that also enabled UK artists to travel to the Caribbean for performances and cultural immersion.

These reciprocal engagements have been foundational to the growth and enrichment of the Carnival arts in Britain. A notable personal example is the longstanding partnership between Nostalgia Steelband and the celebrated arranger, Mr Ishmael “Luxy” Zackeralli, from the legendary Southern All Stars in Trinidad, who would travel to London for several months each year - entirely self-funded - to provide musical direction and mentorship. His leadership skills facilitated the band’s historical performance for carnival in Trinidad in 2018 (Shah, L.M.N., Shah, H.N., 2020). The technical skill, cultural knowledge, and creative expertise imparted through these visits have had a lasting impact on the development of UK-based arrangers and musicians. However, in 2025, this vital exchange for NHC has been abruptly disrupted due to the UK’s new restrictive visa policies and mounting bureaucratic hurdles.

The implications of these new restrictions extend beyond individual artists or bands. They signal a broader threat to the UK’s cultural ecosystem and its long-standing ties to the Caribbean. The tightening of immigration policies is poised to significantly curtail the participation of international artists in festivals and community-led events that rely on cultural authenticity and transnational collaboration. Of particular concern is the exclusion of Caribbean artists whose creative leadership and heritage are central to the continuity and legitimacy of events such as Notting Hill Carnival.

The End of Visa-Free Travel for Key Caribbean Nations

On 12th March 2025, the UK Government announced the end of visa-free travel for several Caribbean countries, citing, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago a sharp rise in asylum claims and alleged visa overstays. This was robustly contested in the islands and provoked an outcry. The reality is that citizens of this twin-island nation, home to one of the world’s richest Carnival traditions, must now apply for a visa to

enter the UK for any purpose, including short-term cultural engagements. This decision has sparked concern among artists and cultural advocates who see this as a punitive measure that undermines long-standing cultural ties between the UK and the Caribbean.

For artists and performers, many of whom are invited to the UK for specific events, the new requirement introduces financial and bureaucratic barriers that are prohibitive. Travel costs are already high; adding visa application fees, the help of visa agents, biometric data appointments, proof of earnings, and supporting documentation only compounds the challenge. These burdens are especially acute for independent or emerging artists who lack institutional backing or regular income from overseas work.

In terms revenue generated for the UK, a study commissioned by *The Voice* in August 2024 offered a new perspective on NHC's societal contributions. Conducted by JN Bank, economist James Williams's revealed that NHC generates an annual economic impact exceeding £396 million (Motune, 2024). Key contributors to this total include visitor spending on accommodations, food, shopping, entertainment, and travel. According to Williams, NHC supports approximately 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs and attracts around 160,000 international tourists each year, making it a substantial economic force for London's economy. This study, the first in-depth analysis of NHC's economic impact since 2003, highlighted the discrepancy between the financial benefits and the negative portrayal NHC often receives in mainstream media (Shah, L.M.N.; Shah, H.N., 2024)

Confusion and Limitations Under the Standard Visitor Visa

The abolition of the Permitted Paid Engagement (PPE) visa and its merger into the Standard Visitor visa framework has added another layer of complexity. While artists are still technically allowed to undertake paid performances under this

route, the new rules specify that the engagement must take place within the first 30 days of their arrival - despite the visa being valid for up to six months. This stipulation will trip up performers attending festivals that fall outside that narrow window, especially those participating in touring events or cultural seasons that span several months. It has also created confusion among artists and promoters alike, with many unsure whether their activities are considered permissible or if they risk falling foul of immigration enforcement.

Furthermore, applicants must prove their professional status and provide formal invitations from UK-based organisers, requirements that, while seemingly straightforward, can be extremely difficult to fulfil in practice, especially when grassroots organisations operate on tight schedules and limited resources.

Financial and Administrative Hurdles for Artists and Organisers

Under the UK's points-based immigration system, long-term work visas are virtually inaccessible to most carnival artists, who are unlikely to meet the salary threshold of £25,600. Even short-term engagements now demand sponsorship or formal documentation, which places a considerable administrative strain on both the artist and the UK-based hosts.

Small arts organisations, especially those rooted in community work, often lack the infrastructure to support visa sponsorship. Nostalgia Steelband exemplifies the community-centred ethos and cultural significance of Caribbean musical ensembles in the UK. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the band played a critical role in supporting vulnerable members of the community, particularly elderly individuals living in isolation, while also performing at hospitals to help reduce vaccine hesitancy - a contribution recognised by media outlets such as the BBC and broadcasted on its national news (Shah et al. 2021). As a self-sustaining community group, Nostalgia Steelband relies on performance

engagements to fund its operational costs and maintain its annual participation in NHC. However, these modest income streams are insufficient to cover the formal recruitment and sponsorship of expert Pannists from the Caribbean to provide instruction and artistic direction for newer members or to arrange full-scale Carnival performances across the UK.

As a result, the informal and ad hoc model, wherein seasoned musicians voluntarily travel from the Caribbean and offer their expertise purely out of passion for the art form, is now untenable. The cumulative effect of financial constraints, exacerbated by restrictive immigration policies and a post-pandemic economic environment, poses a significant threat to the continuity, quality, and intergenerational transmission of steelpan music within the diaspora. Without structured support mechanisms and accessible funding or visa pathways, grassroots bands such as Nostalgia Steelband will find it impossible to fulfil their cultural missions and sustain their contributions to the UK's rich Carnival tradition. For Calypsonians and Soca artists, the risk is that organisers who run Calypso Tents will simply stop inviting overseas artists, or shift their focus to UK-based talent, inadvertently narrowing the cultural scope and global reach of events that have traditionally been inclusive and celebratory of diaspora identities.

Cultural and Community Consequences

Caribbean Carnivals in the United Kingdom represent far more than festive celebration - they are dynamic manifestations of cultural identity, historical memory, and resistance. Events such as the Notting Hill Carnival, Leeds West Indian Carnival, and parallel celebrations in Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Bristol, Oxford and fifty-six other carnivals serve as critical platforms through which diasporic Caribbean communities assert their presence and heritage.

These events depend profoundly on the participation of mas bands, musicians,

dancers, and costume designers from the Caribbean. The presence of these cultural practitioners is essential not only for authenticity but for maintaining the integrity and depth of the Carnival tradition. Their absence, because of restrictive immigration and visa policies, threatens to dilute the artistic and historical fidelity of these iconic celebrations.

The implications extend well beyond performance. International artists play a vital role in knowledge exchange and intergenerational mentorship, particularly through workshops, school residencies, and community outreach. These engagements cultivate cultural confidence among young people within the UK's Caribbean diaspora, empowering them to reconnect with ancestral practices and sustain traditions that are increasingly at risk of erasure in the face of globalisation and assimilation pressures. Such cultural transmission is foundational to the long-term vitality of the Carnival arts and their role in shaping diasporic identity.

The national significance of Caribbean cultural expression has been publicly acknowledged in some of the United Kingdom's most historic events. The London 2012 Olympic Games, the Millennium celebrations, and the late Queen Elizabeth II's Jubilee celebrations viz. Gold (2002), Diamond (2012) and Platinum (2022) each integrated Caribbean performance traditions on a grand scale. Notably, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee featured an unprecedented full-day Carnival celebration that began at Buckingham Palace with a 100-member steelband - UK All Steel Percussion Orchestra (UKASPO) - composed of Pannists from London's four major steelbands (Thomas et al. 2022). The celebration culminated in a carnival parade led by Trinidadian-born master artist Clary Salandy of Mahogany Carnival Design, based in Harlesden, London. This event, broadcast to a global television audience, placed Calypso, masquerade (Mas), and Steelpan, the three core elements of

Caribbean Carnival, at the heart of a national moment of reflection and celebration.

Such moments underline the critical role Caribbean Carnival plays not only in Britain's cultural life but in shaping its global cultural image. To preserve this legacy, it is imperative that cultural policy recognises and facilitates the continued transnational flow of artists and ideas that sustain it. Without meaningful support, including accessible visa pathways and funding mechanisms, the cultural and community consequences will be profound - eroding the very authenticity and vitality that make Caribbean Carnivals invaluable to Britain's multicultural fabric.

Conclusion: A Call for Cultural Commonsense

Britain played a central and profitable role in the transatlantic slave trade, orchestrating brutal voyages across the Atlantic and enforcing inhumane conditions on plantations throughout its empire. The formal abolition of slavery between 1834 - 1838 marked the end of one of the most exploitative chapters in British imperial history. Yet, from this legacy of oppression emerged enduring forms of resistance and cultural expression - most notably, Carnival. The masquerade traditions of J'Ouvert, with their evocative and often subversive portrayals, serve as living archives of emancipation, vividly re-enacting the traumas and triumphs of this period. Calypso music too has historically chronicled social struggle and resistance, providing not only the sonic backbone for mas bands but also a means of articulating collective memory - despite colonial attempts to suppress its performance. Out of these resilient grassroots expressions, the steelpan was born: a revolutionary instrument forged in defiance, now taught across UK schools and celebrated as a symbol of Caribbean ingenuity.

Britain's vast wealth was, in no small part, built upon the extraction of resources and labour from its colonies, including the Caribbean (see Melissa Lee Foon, page 151

of this issue). This imperial entanglement formed the basis of a long-standing responsibility toward those communities. Commonwealth citizens - including Caribbean men and women - fought alongside Britain in World War II, later heeding the call to assist in post-war reconstruction. They arrived *en masse*, laying the foundations of vibrant diasporic communities whose descendants have since excelled across education, science, medicine, politics, sports, and the arts. These communities, rooted in transatlantic connections, contributed immeasurably to the cultural and economic fabric of Britain. Indeed, the Caribbean's global influence has long been recognised, not least in the arts: at the height of Beatlemania in the 1960s, the band visited Trinidad and Tobago and met Prime Minister Eric Williams, acknowledging the formative influence of Trinidadian Calypsonian Lord Woodbine (Harold Phillips), their initial mentor on their music (McGrath, 2020). Calypso also inspired a generation of American performers, including Nat King Cole, Robert Mitchum, and Frank Sinatra. The UK's new visa restrictions risk becoming a silent erasure of these cultural contributions under the guise of immigration control. By making it more difficult for Caribbean artists to enter the country, the government is inadvertently disrupting a vibrant and globally respected cultural ecosystem. If Britain is to remain a global hub for creativity and multicultural expression, it must revisit these policies with a more nuanced and culturally informed lens. Flexible, low-cost visa pathways for cultural exchange - especially for artists from Commonwealth and diaspora-linked nations - are urgently needed. Only then can we ensure that events such as Caribbean Carnivals continue to thrive as authentic, inclusive celebrations with a shared heritage and artistic excellence.

Haroun N. Shah

References

McGrath, J. (2020). Steelpan Lord Woodbine, The Beatles & Hamburg. *International Journal of Carnival Arts*. **2**, 53 - 70.

Motune, V. (2024). Carnival [NHC] Generates £396 million for London's Economy. *The Voice*. <https://www.voice-online.co.uk/news/uk-news/2024/08/02/carnival-generates-396-million-for-londons-economy/>

Shah, L.M.N.; Shah, H.N. (2020). The Memory of TASPO Lives On; Lineages of this Legendary Steelband Team up to Play on the Streets of Trinidad for Carnival 2018. *International Journal of Carnival Arts*. **1**, 30 - 42.

Shah, L.M.N.; Shah, H.N. (2020). Editorial: The Economic and Cultural Significance of Notting Hill Carnival Amid Continuous Controversial Media Portrayals. *Inter-national Journal of Carnival Arts*. **9**, 1 -3

Shah, L.M.N., Razak, Y., Mensah, E., Loewenthal, A., Goodman, A., Shah, H.N. (2021). CarniVAX' - Steelpan and Calypso at London Hospitals to Boost COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Vaccinations. *International Journal of Carnival Arts*. **3**, 27 - 45

Thomas, L.F., Shah, L.M.N., Shah, H.N. (2022). Trinidad & Tobago's Carnival Arts Illuminates the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations. *International Journal of Carnival Arts*. **5**, 115 -135.

Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections; Cultural Cadence: Steelpan, Calypso and Mas and the Global Diaspora Connection

11th Steelpan and Carnival Arts Conference

Reflections and Overview

The Legendary Shell Invaders Illuminates the 11th Steelpan/Carnival Arts Conference in Trinidad

Laila M.N. Shah^{1,2,3} and Haroun N. Shah^{1, 4, 5}

¹Nostalgia Steelband, 2a Maxilla Walk, London W10 6SW

²Mangrove Steelband, 35 Powis Square, The Tabernacle, W11 2AY

³Department of Physical & Theoretical Chemistry, University of Oxford, Oxford, OX1 3QZ

⁴Natural Sciences, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT and

⁵School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, University of West London W5 5RF

Abstract

The 11th Steelpan and Carnival Arts Conference marked a significant continuation of a thematic and scholarly tradition that began in 2006 by Nostalgia Steelband at the University of East London. Designed as a space to interrogate, celebrate, and document the dynamic intersections of Steelpan and diasporic identities, the series expanded to include Carnival Arts and has become a vital forum for cultural practitioners, academics, and artists from around the world. This 11th iteration, organised in partnership with UTT and the newly formed ICCC, was especially momentous. Not only did it represent a symbolic and literal homecoming, but it also marked the first time the conference was held on Trinidadian soil, reuniting regional and international communities in a spirit of intellectual kinship and creative exchange. With the global *famalay* present, the gathering echoed the diasporic rhythms and reconnections that energise Caribbean cultural expression. Hosted over 3 days at the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA), a landmark of architectural genius and cultural prestige on the edge of the historic Queen's Park Savannah in Port of Spain, the conference embodied a return to the birthplace of Carnival's most iconic art forms. NAPA, whose design draws inspiration from the chaconia flower, Trinidad and Tobago's national bloom, stands as a contemporary shrine to the nation's artistic legacy. Its striking glass-and-steel silhouette, paired with world-class acoustics and expansive interior spaces, made it an ideal venue. More than a backdrop, NAPA encapsulated the spirit of the conference itself: rooted in tradition yet attuned to global innovation. The academic programme was both robust and diverse, featuring over fifty scholarly papers, ten poster presentations, four plenary lectures, two workshops, and two curated film screenings. Topics included the evolution of steelpan innovation, the poetics of calypso, the politics of Carnival masquerade, and the role of cultural production in diasporic identity formation. The discussions were intellectually rich and deeply resonant, contributing to an expanding archive of critical thought on Caribbean cultural arts. Among the many highlights was the narrated documentary "*Ellie Mannette: A Destiny in Steel*," an evocative portrait of one of Pan's most visionary pioneers. The authors chronicled Mannette's extraordinary contributions to the development of the instrument while underscoring the broader narrative of steelpan as a medium of resilience, invention, and cultural pride. This powerful tribute was followed by a live performance from the legendary Shell Invaders Steel Orchestra, one of Trinidad's oldest and most treasured ensembles. Their appearance was more than a performance; it was a sonic invocation of history, heritage, and the enduring power of

Pan. Enhanced by NAPA's acoustics, their repertoire rang out with electrifying clarity, echoing through the auditorium as both reverent homage and joyful celebration. The event's visual dimension was equally compelling. A large-scale floral installation, designed and assembled just hours before the opening by local artist, Melissa Lee Foon, framed the stage in a vivid celebration of natural beauty and artistic spontaneity. The ephemeral yet impactful nature of the installation served as a powerful metaphor for Carnival itself, fleeting in form, yet enduring in resonance.

Key Words: Carnival Arts Conference, Diaspora, Identity, Innovation, Culture, Performance

Welcome Ceremony

Dr. Kela Francis, UTT

The 11th Steelpan/Carnival Arts Conference was opened by Dr. Kela Francis, University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), who expressed her gratitude to the members of the International Carnival



Figure 1. Dr Kela Francis delivering her personal opening remarks on 6th March 2025. Photo credit: UTT

Conference Committee (ICCC) - Prof. Haroun N. Shah (UK, Chair), Prof. Dawn K. Batson (USA), Ms. Laila M.N. Shah (UK), Mr. Alexander Loewenthal (UK), Mr. Roger Gibbs (Canada), Mr. Anthony Pierre (Canada), and Dr. Latipher A. O. Appiah-Agyei (Ghana) - for collaborating with UTT to bring this event to Trinidad and specifically to UTT (Fig.1). This initiative originated from the previous conference at the University of Education Winneba (UEW), Ghana, where Dr. Francis delivered the closing keynote on 8th December 2023 (Francis, 2024). She outlined the conference programme, internal arrangements for the upcoming days, and extended a warm welcome and heartfelt thanks to all participants, marking

the significance of hosting the event in the cultural heartland of Trinidad and Tobago.

Professor Clement A.C. Imbert, Chairman of the Board of Governors at UTT (Fig.2), followed with a chuckle and a nod, admitting he felt a bit overdressed, teasing that he must have missed the memo - while everyone else came dressed for carnival-related event, he showed up ready for a



Figure 2. Prof. Clement Imbert during his formal opening of the conference on 6th March 2025. Photo credit: UTT

board meeting! However, he soon spelled out some of the uniqueness of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival as the most distinctive and culturally rich among global pre-Lenten festivities, surpassing even the renowned celebrations in Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. While the main street parades occur just before Ash Wednesday, the season begins soon after Christmas and encompasses a vibrant array of events, including calypso concerts, steelpan performances, and numerous competitions. This triad of Carnival, Calypso, and

Steelman - interconnected yet distinct - constitutes the Carnival Arts, a uniquely Trinidadian contribution to global culture. The influence of this model is evident in derivative festivals such as Notting Hill in London, Toronto's Caribbean Carnival, and Brooklyn's Labour Day parade, though these take place later in the year and over a shorter season. Notably, Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival engage all strata of society, including children and local communities, reinforcing its role as a national cultural phenomenon. He ended by stating that it is therefore apt that scholarly attention turns to this birthplace of Carnival Arts, recognising it as a seminal cultural gift to the world.

Professor Haroun N. Shah

In his opening presentation, the author reflected on the previous conference held in Ghana in December 2023, where the powerful cultural connection between the Caribbean and Africa was immediately evident in the memorable welcome by 40 drummers at Kotoka International Airport - evoking the rhythms of Trinidad and Tobago's steelpan, calypso, and mas (Shah, H.N. and Shah, L.M.N. 2024). He emphasised the importance of "Interconnections," "Reconnections," and "Connections" between the Homeland and the Diaspora, framing them as one global *famalay*. Shah highlighted the international impact of Caribbean creativity, citing figures such as Peter Minshall (Trinidad) and Keith Khan (Britain), and noted how Caribbean culture has increasingly taken centre stage at major international events, including the Olympics and British Royal festivities. He stressed the need for deeper collaboration and more structured efforts between the Caribbean and its globally influential diaspora, proposing the formation of a global network to strengthen these cultural ties and foster unity - echoing the spirit of solidarity once symbolised by cricket in the West Indies and now embodied in Caribbean Carnivals.

Opening Session

Professor Dawn Batson



Figure 3. Prof. Dawn Batson, prior to delivering the first Plenary Lecture to open the conference programme on Day 1. Photo credit: UTT

Following a brief introduction by H.N. Shah, Prof. Dawn Batson opened the conference programme with the first plenary lecture, titled "*Forged in Fire: The Steelpan's Transformative Power Across Generations*" which explored the transformative role of the steelpan in fostering personal and communal development across all stages of life, with a special focus on seniors (Fig.3). Drawing on over 50 years of teaching, advising, and observational research, Prof. Batson illustrated how learning and playing the steelpan enhanced technical skills, mental acuity, emotional well-being, and social connection. While previous work has largely focused on youth education, her presentation highlighted the often-overlooked benefits for seniors - demonstrating improvements in memory, self-esteem, motor skills, and community cohesion. Ultimately, she presented the steelpan as a powerful tool for lifelong learning and a global model for creative aging and community enrichment. At the end, Prof. Batson introduced the first session of the conference which she also chaired.

Day 1 Thursday 6th March 2025 - Sessions 1 -3

Session 1: (Chairs: Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon and Josephine Torrel-Brown)

celebrating cultural heritage in the face of modern erasures. Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon turned her attention to the narrative power of Soca music, analysing how intergenerational and familial stories conveyed through Caribbean Creole



Figure 4: A snapshot of a conference panel in progress - from Session 2, “*Carnival Unbound: Exploring its Cultural Migration and Transformation.*” From left to right: Byron M. Jones Jr. (UWI, Trinidad), Dexter Khan (Cocoyea Mas Band, London), Caron Bitter-Phinney (Toronto Metropolitan University), and Josephine Torrel-Brown (UTT). The session also featured a skilled sign language interpreter (standing), kindly provided by Toronto Metropolitan University. Melissa Lee Foon’s *Floral Pan* installation adorns the stage throughout the conference (see text, pp 151 - 159).

- ***Cultural Identity in the Carnival Tradition: Resistance in Motion*** - the papers presented in this first session collectively explored the multifaceted ways in which Trinidad and Tobago Carnival functioned as a transformative cultural arena for the expression and negotiation of identity, memory, and resistance. Through varied disciplinary lenses and methodologies, each contribution highlighted how Carnival operated not merely as a festive event, but as a living archive of historical memory and a stage for socio-political agency. Margaret Nakhid-Chatoor examined the complex duality of identity within the act of masquerade, emphasising how the practice of masking facilitated emotional liberation and allowed participants to embody ancestral connections, thereby preserving and

evoked shared emotional resonances, using language and rhythm as vehicles to construct and reinforce communal bonds. Danielle Skinner centred her analysis on the iconic jab figures - devilish characters who subverted fear and colonial representations through performative defiance. She demonstrated how these masqueraders reclaimed stigmatised imagery to assert agency, transforming Carnival into a space of diasporic empowerment and historical redress. Concluding the session, Kristin Snoddon presented a phenomenological exploration of how deaf individuals engaged with Carnival, foregrounding the sensory richness of tactility, vibration, and spatial awareness. Her work challenged auditory-dominant norms and colonial legacies of exclusion by illustrating how deaf participants crafted inclusive modes of

belonging through embodied experience. Together, these papers offered a compelling portrait of Carnival as a dynamic and contested site where memory was re-enacted, identity was performed and reimagined, and inclusive cultural practices were forged in resistance to dominant hegemonies.

Session 2: (Chair: Byron M. Jones Jr.) - *Carnival Unbound: Exploring its Cultural Migration and Transformation* brought together a series of papers that examined the rich, multidimensional landscape of Caribbean carnival culture and its evolving significance across various domains, including tourism, education, identity, and diasporic belonging. The papers revealed Carnival as a dynamic cultural force that travels and transforms across geographies and generations. Josephine Torrel-Brown examined the motivations and emotional investments of carnival tourists in Trinidad and Tobago, highlighting the importance of the 'experience economy' in shaping meaningful cultural engagement. Her work showed how tourism supports Carnival's sustainability while deepening visitor connection. Caron Bitter-Phinney focused on Toronto's Caribbean Carnival, emphasising its role in fashion education as a form of cultural pedagogy. She illustrated how young people used costume design to reconnect with heritage and challenge Eurocentric norms, positioning Carnival as a space of identity and creative resistance. Dexter Khan offered a personal and historical reflection on London's Notting Hill Carnival, tracing its origins in post-war migrant struggles. He highlighted Mas as a symbol of resilience and cultural pride, showing how it evolved to reflect the socio-political realities of Black British communities. Byron M. Jones Jr. analysed how Caribbean music - Reggae, Dancehall, and Soca - reinforced familial and cultural bonds across regional and diasporic spaces. His study underscored music's role in maintaining identity and memory through migration. Together, these papers emphasised Carnival's ongoing

transformation as a cultural, educational, and socio-political force (Fig. 4). They demonstrated how Carnival sustains identity and community across borders, enabling diasporic Caribbean peoples to reclaim space and narrate their histories through performance, pedagogy, and sound.

Session 3: (Chairs: Roger Gibbs and Alexander Loewenthal) - *Lyrics of the People: Calypso as a Mirror of Society* explored the rich history, transnational journey, and evolving identity of calypso music, rooted in the cultural, political, and social landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. The panel highlighted how calypso, long regarded as the lyrical voice of the people, functioned as public discourse, social critique, and creative resistance, while continuing to evolve across generations and geographies. Roger Gibbs opened with a historiographical overview, tracing calypso's development from oral storytelling traditions to its recognition within academic and cultural institutions. He emphasised its role as a vehicle for social commentary, especially during colonial and post-independence periods, when calypsonians challenged authority and voiced community concerns. Alexander Loewenthal focused on calypso's migration to the United Kingdom, particularly London, where it found new audiences and adapted to diasporic life. He examined the role of icons and institutions like the London Calypso Tent in preserving cultural identity, underscoring the importance of performance spaces, mentorship, and collective memory in sustaining the artform abroad. Richard C. de Lima presented a strategic framework to revitalise calypso globally. He advocated for regional and international collaboration to promote innovation and education, proposing digital platforms, youth engagement, and cross-genre partnerships to ensure the genre's continued relevance. Though unable to attend in person, Cutty Marchan shared a recorded video highlighting the overlooked

Guitar Combo era of the 1960s and 1970s. He reflected on how this fusion of calypso with jazz, blues, and Latin styles helped shape early Soca and contributed significantly to Trinidad’s musical legacy. Together, the presentations illuminated calypso’s historical depth, diasporic reach, and ongoing relevance as a medium of cultural expression. The session affirmed its enduring capacity to reflect social realities, foster connection, and inspire cultural resurgence.

Workshop presented by UTT’s staff Gillian Moore, Kela Francis and Krisson Joseph

In a powerful and provocative finale to Day 1 of the conference, a one-hour masterclass by UTT’s scholars, Gillian Moore, Kela Francis, and Krisson Joseph plunged deep into the soul of calypso, dismantling the constraints of authorial intent to unearth the layered, elusive, and often subconscious meanings embedded within this ancestral African diasporic artform. Rooted in a West African tradition of oral critique, where praise, derision, and blame were encoded in song, proverb, and story, calypso has long been a vehicle for social commentary, but this panel asserted that its power cannot be fully grasped through the lens of intention alone. The presenters argued that dominant approaches to calypso criticism too often privilege what the calypsonian may have meant to say, rather than engaging with what the song actually does in the world: how it speaks through its lyricism, humour, rhythm, and performance; how it resonates with the audience; how it channels both conscious and unconscious responses to lived experience. Through the application of post-structuralist theory, they explored the fissures between artistic intent and audience interpretation, revealing calypso as a fertile discursive field where meaning is produced communally, collaboratively, and even cosmically. Crucially, they positioned community not merely as a collection of listeners, but as a complex network of human and inhuman forces,

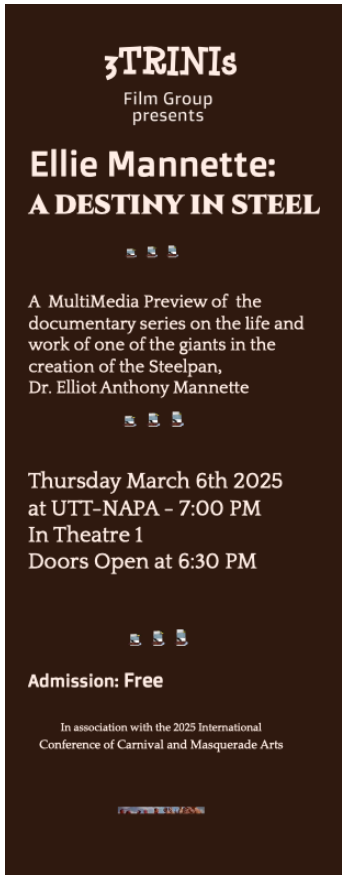
ancestral, spiritual, historical, invoked in the act of performance. Gillian Moore, in her paper “Kitchener’s Diaspora Women,” applied an intersectional feminist lens to Lord Kitchener’s lyrics, revealing how his calypsos simultaneously reflect and complicate notions of diasporic femininity, desire, and power. Kela Francis, in “Reading Spoiler’s Humour as Acts of Subversion,” examined how comic calypsos operate as instruments of resistance, using wit to undermine authority and disrupt hegemonic narratives under the guise of entertainment. Meanwhile, Krisson Joseph’s “When the Chantuelle Calls, Who Really Responds?” interrogated the participatory structures of call-and-response in calypso, asking whose voices are activated or silenced in the imagined community of the performance, and suggesting that calypso, as a post-structural artefact, performs community as much as it reflects it. Collectively, their interventions called for a radical rethinking of carnival’s expressive bounds, reframing calypso not merely as entertainment or cultural tradition, but as a living, breathing archive of struggle, spirit, and survival - a site where language fractures, multiplies, and dances to the rhythm of collective memory and creative force.

‘Ellie Mannette: A Destiny in Steel’



Figure 5. The 3 Trinis Film Group. From Left, Gregory Christmas, Anthony Pierre and Ivor Picou during a lecture.

Day 1 concluded with a 90-minute film/documentary titled ‘*Ellie Mannette: A*



Destiny in Steel’ by Anthony Pierre, Ivor Picou and Gregory Christmas, the 3 Trinis Film Group from Ontario, Canada (see the front-page event flyer and Fig. 5). The authors carried out research and extensive interviews for over twelve years and showed snippets of it Ghana (Picou et al 2023). It delved into

Ellie Mannette's pivotal role in expanding the steelpan "famalay" of instruments beyond his well-known innovation of concave sinking and note bubbling in 1941. It traces how this technique led to the "Single Pan Expansion Era," that span the end of the 1940s and into the early 1950s. The evening was enriched by the performance Ellie’s former band, Shell Invaders (Youth and Stage Sides, Figs. 6a, 6b)) - facilitated by Elizabeth Namsoo, Invaders Steel Orchestra C.G, Manager, Marketing and Communications and Michael Dinchong, Chair, Invaders Steel Orchestra and Lecturer, UTT. Their performance added a profound dimension to the event with a repertoire that was impeccably attuned to the evening’s atmosphere and resonated deeply with the audience. The sheer musicality and emotive power were such that even veteran pannist

and plenary speaker, Ray Holman was inspired to join the band for a remarkable rendition of Ben E. King’s ‘*Stand By Me.*’ The warmth and splendour of this arrangement and the many others ignited a collective response, transforming the event into an immersive, joyous celebration, with attendees dancing and singing along - an ambiance that only a steelband can truly evoke.



Figure 6A. Shell Invaders Steel Orch. (Youths) performing at NAPA - 6th March 2025.



Figure 6B. Shell Invaders Steel Orch. (Stage Side) performing at NAPA - 6th March 2025.

Day 2 Friday 6th March 2025 – Sessions 4 – 6

Session 4: (Chairs: Laila M.N. Shah and Haroun N. Shah) - *Traditions Alive: The Enduring Legacy of Carnival* explored the rich history and evolving narratives of Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival and steelpan culture through four compelling papers, each highlighting significant aspects of this cultural heritage. The paper, by Shah et al., recounted the groundbreaking 1951 journey of TASPO, the first steelband to perform internationally, which marked a pivotal moment in the global recognition of the steelpan. The paper

emphasised TASPO's impact on the perception of steelpan, transforming it from a local folk instrument to an international symbol of Caribbean creativity, today simply referred to as 'Pan.' It also called for deeper documentation and commemoration of this milestone in cultural history. The presentation, by Michelle Mohamed, focused on her father Bobby Mohammed's journey from a child prodigy to a Panorama legend with the Guinness Cavaliers Steel Orchestra. She highlighted his emotional triumphs and the lasting influence he had on steelband performance, particularly in shaping the modern style of steelband music in the prestigious Panorama competition. Allison Noriega-Clarke's paper examined Trinidad Carnival as a dynamic cultural force shaped by creativity, community, and collective expression. She also discussed the challenges Carnival now faces from commercialisation, which threatens the traditional mas-making artistry that has long been at its core. In a burst of spontaneous creativity, Allison, a master of traditional Mas design and performance, not only delivered a captivating presentation but also transformed the entrance of the conference room into a vibrant tribute to the spirit of Carnival. She handcrafted a series of intricate Mas figures that adorned the doorway, and conjured a striking two-meter insignia of 'Famalay,' echoing the fiery yellow and orange of the cover art-summoning the soul of Carnival itself to dance through the auditorium in a blaze of colour, culture, and power (Fig.1)

Session 4 concluded with the second plenary lecture by the gifted orator, Dr. Christopher Laird titled *Lost Memories, The Banyan Archive* which unearthed the vast and vivid record of Carnival arts. For over fifty years, cameras rolled across the Caribbean, capturing the living, breathing soul of a region in motion - from which the Banyan Archive was born: 3,000 videotapes, over 1,000 hours of footage, now meticulously digitised and transformed into 15,000 searchable records,

each a heartbeat of history. This archive, curated by Laird, is not just a database, but a vault of cultural memory: Lady Trinidad breaking barriers as the first female calypsonian to grace a tent stage; Lord Shorty recounting the birth of Soca; Lord Melody recalling a fateful encounter with Harry Belafonte; David Rudder on a spiritual quest for the Bahia Gyal; and the voices of pioneers such as Sterling Betancourt and Dr. Anthony Williams echoing the genesis of Pan and the legacy of TASPO. Across islands - Martinique, Barbados, St. Kitts, Grenada, St. Vincent-steel sang, Mas danced, and culture bloomed. Minshall's own narration of *Paradise Lost* (1976) and the untamed joy of Carnival on the streets now live again, preserved against the cultural erosion of imported beats and shifting tastes.

Together, these papers celebrated the achievements of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival and steelpan culture while urging greater preservation, reflection, and renewed cultural pride. The session underscored the importance of safeguarding these traditions for future generations.

Session 5: (Chair: H. Patten) - *Roots of Rhythm: African Influences in Carnival Rituals* traversed the enduring legacy of African cultural expression within carnival



Figure 7. Catching up during breaks - the organising trio (from left, Laila Shah, Kela Francis, and Haroun Shah) engages in discussion during the conference. In the background is the installation, 'Famalay,' by Allison Noriega-Clarke in the yellow and orange hues of the conference's emblem and (right inset) one of Allison's many miniature (30 cm) figurines of a 'Pan Man'

traditions across the diaspora, examining how African-derived practices shaped contemporary rituals, performance, and resistance. George Asabre Maclean highlighted the vital role of brass band music in Ghana's Winneba Masqueraders Festival, showing how musical performance shaped the artistry, energy, and competitive spirit of the masquerade. His research revealed how these sonic elements sustained intergenerational participation and community pride, linking local traditions to broader diasporic celebrations. William 'Lez' Henry examined the political and cultural power of Jamaican sound system culture in the Notting Hill Carnival. He demonstrated how DJ lyricism, patwa, and sound clashes functioned as social commentary and cultural resistance, fostering diasporic unity and affirming Black identity in postcolonial Britain. His analysis positioned the sound system as a radical cultural technology of protest and belonging. Sally Omolara Rose centred her work on preserving Yoruba culture in the diaspora, tracing the legacy of Dr. Geraldine Connor through sculpture and performance. Her research reclaimed Yoruba aesthetics and philosophy within a decolonising framework that empowered diasporic narratives. The project culminated in the first statue of a Black woman in Leeds, a tribute to Dr. Connor, marking a powerful intersection of memory, public art, and heritage - which formed a central part of the author's PhD thesis, first presented in Ghana (Sally Omolara Rose, 2023). Together, these papers affirmed the African rhythms, philosophies, and creative practices that continued to animate carnival spaces across the diaspora. The session underscored carnival's enduring role as a living archive of memory, resistance, and cultural regeneration, rooted in African cosmologies and expressive traditions

Session 6A (Chairs: Dawn Batson and Anthony Pierre) - designated *From Oil Drums to Symphony: Music, Innovation,*

and Identity offered a dynamic exploration of Pan as both a musical instrument and a cultural force.

In his stirring plenary lecture *Pan on the Move*, scholar and celebrated steelband composer Ray Holman reflected on his remarkable journey from a teenage prodigy to a global ambassador for steelpan music. Holman recounted how, by age 13, he was already making a name for himself with the Invaders Steel Orchestra, composing his first piece, "Ray's Saga," recorded in 1961. At just 20, he became the youngest winner of the Tenor Pan solo competition in the 1964 Trinidad and Tobago Music Festival. As an arranger, he boldly introduced classical compositions to the Pan repertoire and later found success with Starlift Steel Orchestra in both Panorama and the inventive "Bomb" competitions, with hits like "I Feel Pretty" and "Penny Lane" enduring across generations and diasporas. His 1969 Panorama victory with Kitchener's "The Bull" marked a pinnacle, and he went on to arrange for elite bands such as Phase II Pan Groove, Exodus, and Pandemonium. Choosing the composition '*Pan on the Move*' as the title of his talk, Holman infused the presentation with the cultural vitality, resilience, and international evolution of the Pan. His narrative portrayed Pan as both a literal and symbolic vehicle - carrying the heartbeat of Trinidad and Tobago and Carnival to the world, while asserting steelband music's rightful place in the global musical canon. Edward N. Peters followed with a call to action in '*A Strategic Plan for Steelpan Innovation*,' charting the history of Pan craftsmanship and stressing the urgent need to integrate scientific principles such as acoustics and material science, with traditional methods to reignite innovation in Pan design and tuning. The technical and cultural value of steelpan is further underscored in the paper by Martin Raymond and colleagues, '*Recording Live Steel Orchestras at the Trinidad & Tobago National Panorama Competition*,' which outlined the logistical and technological

challenges of capturing live Panorama performances and affirmed the importance of archiving these events for posterity. Andrew R. Martin, in video-recorded presentation, *‘Artificial Intelligence, Oral History, and the Future of Traditional Caribbean Music,’* interrogated the impact of digital technologies and AI on the preservation and transformation of Caribbean cultural practices, questioning whether AI might alter or even replace the lived, communal “experience” of Pan and Calypso. Paul Massy and Josephine Torrel-Brown’s *‘Steelpan Symphony: Harmonizing Tradition and Theory in Caribbean Pedagogy and Identity’* shifted the focus to pedagogy, championing the Panyard model of steelpan education. It was argued that memorisation and embodied learning in community contexts are not only effective but deeply reflective of Caribbean identity and innovation, especially when blended with theoretical instruction. Finally, internationally renowned Pan virtuoso, Yuko Asada’s *‘Echoes of Hope: Japan’s Fantastics Steel Orchestra And Its Impact’* transported the audience to Japan, where the Fantastics Steel Orchestra demonstrated steelpan’s global adaptability and its role in community healing post-disaster. Through education and outreach, Fantastics exemplified the steelpan’s ability to build bridges of resilience, emotion, and international solidarity. Together, these papers affirm steelpan’s extraordinary journey from a repurposed oil drum to a sophisticated, symphonic instrument and cultural emblem with global resonance.

Session 6B continued after the Coffee Break at 4.00 pm with three presentations that offered a rich and interconnected exploration of the evolution, globalisation, and institutional support of Caribbean cultural expressions, with a strong focus on steelpan music and carnival. Nickey Deane shared his deeply personal journey as a self-taught Pannist in 1960s Trinidad, beginning with an Invaders-style Tenor Pan at home

and drawing early inspiration from the film *The Sound of Music*, particularly the Desperadoes Steel Orchestra’s rendition of its soundtrack. Deane transitioned from informal performances in his secondary school to joining established bands such as Rogues Regiment and Teenage Symphony in San Fernando and eventually becoming a member of the renowned Guinness Cavaliers in 1969. Under the mentorship of legendary arranger Bobby Mohammed, Deane honed his skills and witnessed an historic collaboration with the renowned calypsonian Lord Kitchener and proficient steelpan arranger Bobby Mohammed, which concluded in the composition of *‘St. Thomas Girl’* - specifically composed for the Cavaliers. His account illustrated how self-taught musicians could thrive within formal band structures and later contribute internationally, including performances in the USA after his migration in 1997. Jimi Phillip’s presentation shifted the focus to the technical and artistic dimensions of steelpan craftsmanship, particularly his lifelong commitment to the tuning and innovation of the instrument. Starting at age six, Phillip’s work as a master tuner took him across Trinidad and Tobago and into diasporic communities in Canada and the UK. He described the intricate and intuitive process of tuning pans - balancing technical precision with musical artistry - and highlighted the challenges of maintaining high standards outside Trinidad, often without adequate tools or facilities. His efforts were recognised with the NIHERST Gold Award in 2013, underscoring the scientific and cultural value of his contributions (Phillip, 1981, 2016). Meanwhile, Alpha Obika’s paper examined the transformation of Jamaica’s Carnival into a significant cultural and economic force. Since 2016, the event had grown rapidly, attracting attention from both local and international Carnivalists. Drawing on six years of ethnographic research, interviews, and Caribbean cultural theory from scholars such as Keith Nurse, Rex Nettleford, and Stuart Hall, Obika assessed

the Jamaican government's role in facilitating this growth through strategic partnerships and supportive policy frameworks. He also analysed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the event's suspension in 2020 and 2021, and its subsequent resurgence post-2022 with increased economic returns. Obika's presentation made a case for continued and enhanced policy engagement to ensure the sustainable development of carnival as a vital part of Jamaica's creative and cultural industries. Collectively, these presentations demonstrated how personal agency, technical mastery, and public policy have shaped the past, present, and future of Caribbean cultural traditions, both within the region and across its global diasporas.

Film Screenings and Discussion

Two films were screened that were designed to connect global audiences with the richness and vibrancy of Caribbean culture. The first, *Upside Down*, directed by Neisha Agostini, delves into the vibrant and enigmatic world of Dragon Mas, one of the most dynamic and visually striking elements of Caribbean carnival. Rooted in histories of resistance, transformation, and cultural expression, Dragon Mas serves as both a performance and a powerful ritual that channels ancestral memory and social commentary. Agostini weaves together intimate interviews with seasoned Mas practitioners, captivating visuals of performances, and reflective narration to uncover the layers of meaning behind the costume, movements, and symbolism. The film not only captures the theatricality and energy of this masquerade art form but also honours the deep personal and spiritual connections that drive its custodians. *Upside Down* is a compelling tribute to the resilience of Caribbean cultural traditions and their continued relevance as tools of identity, protest, and storytelling in today's world.

The second screening of *The Steelpan: Promoting Our Caribbean Spirit*, though presented in absentia by award-winning

filmmakers Charysse Tia Harper and Keith Musaman Morton, delivered an inspiring and immersive portrayal of the steelpan as a powerful emblem of resilience, creativity, and Caribbean identity. The documentary traces the origins of the instrument from its historical roots in Trinidad and Tobago to its growing global presence, emphasising its role not just as a musical innovation but as a powerful cultural and educational tool. Audiences were taken on a journey through performances, personal reflections, and community stories that underscored the steelpan's unique ability to unite people, preserve heritage, and promote a vibrant Caribbean spirit on the world stage.

These powerful films brought day two of the conference to a close, with smaller



Figure 8. Informal group discussions captured during the conference highlight the importance of unstructured exchanges that occur in-between formal sessions. Such interactions frequently foster new collaborations, research initiatives, and professional networks. Notably featured is Mr. Ray Funk - a distinguished scholar and prolific author on carnival arts - whose presence drew considerable engagement from participants eg. Above, Laila Shah whom he met in London at aged 12 and below with Prof. Clement Imbert.

groups lingering afterward to reflect on both the screenings and key presentations from earlier in the day. While there was talk of an impromptu calypso jam, the spirited performance was held back and saved as a fitting finale for the final curtain on day three.

Workshops: Thursday 6th & Friday 7th March 2025

Calypso Performance (Thursday 6th March) - Krisson Joseph,

This interactive workshop was thoughtfully designed for both beginners and those with some prior experience in song writing and live performance. Centred on the vibrant traditions of Calypso, Soca, and Rapso, the session provided a culturally rich and musically dynamic environment for learning and exploration. Participants were taken through the essential stages of crafting an original song - from selecting meaningful themes and writing impactful lyrics to exploring rhythm, arranging melodies, and developing a distinctive stage presence that reflects their artistic identity. Special emphasis was placed on vocal delivery, performance techniques, and audience engagement, elements that are crucial for captivating live performances. One participant, a seasoned calypsonian based in the UK, praised the workshop for its comprehensive and accessible approach, remarking on how effectively it covered key aspects of performance art in a short space of time. By the end of the workshop, each of the dozen participants had composed and confidently performed at least two original verses and a chorus in front of the group. The atmosphere remained supportive and energizing throughout, helping individuals unlock their creativity, build confidence, and take bold steps in their artistic journey.

Movement and Memory Workshop (Friday 7th March) Sonja Dumas

The *Movement and Memory Workshop* was convened at the University of Trinidad and

Tobago's Dance Loft and engaged nine participants from the broader conference. The session aimed to facilitate an embodied exploration of African-Caribbean history, memory, trauma, and resilience, fostering a deeper awareness of the soma - the self-perceived, sensate body. Drawing on the cultural phenomenon of J'Ouvert as a conceptual and experiential anchor, participants were invited to move as though participating in a J'Ouvert band, with attention directed toward the somatic sensations elicited by the experience. To deepen the introspective engagement, participants were prompted with questions related to memory, designed to evoke personal and collective resonances. These reflections were then externalised through visual expression using drawing materials provided. Working in pairs, participants interpreted each other's drawings through movement, generating kinesthetic responses that were subsequently witnessed and discussed in relation to bodily awareness and narrative.

The workshop concluded with a collective dialogue, during which participants reflected on their experiences across the various stages of the process, considering how the interplay of movement, memory, and visual expression informed their understanding of embodied historical consciousness.

Day 3 Saturday 8th March 2025 - Sessions 7 & 8 and Closing Remarks

Session 7 (Chairs: Marcia Burrowes and Janice B. Fournillier) - titled *Bridging Heritage, Identity, and Sustainability in Caribbean Traditions*,

explored how traditional and contemporary practices converged in Carnival and the creative industries to promote cultural pride, innovation, and sustainability across the Caribbean diaspora. Susan Jones-Benjamin, focusing on Grenada, showed how African heritage was expressed through language, food, dance, and storytelling. She emphasised the role of formal education in preserving these

traditions, noting that integrating arts into school curricula supported cultural awareness and sustainable development. At the same time, the global creative economy - the “Orange Economy” - expanded rapidly, with digital technologies allowing Caribbean industries to amplify their visibility and participate more fully in global markets. Carnival and Dancehall cultures provided marginalised communities with embodied practices of self-expression and resistance. Through ritual and performance, participants expressed identity and transformed social pain into celebration (H. Patten). Sonja Dumas highlighted J’Ouvert as a ritual of resistance rooted in Canboulay, enabling historical remembrance and healing through communal movement and rhythm. Annette Fitzpatrick examined how competitions such as Panorama and Soca Monarch drove innovation in Trinidad Carnival but also raised concerns about sustainability and cultural continuity. Christine Phillip showed how Minstrels Mas reclaimed colonial stereotypes to offer bold social critique, with characters used to confront issues such as HIV/AIDS. Marcia Burrowes discussed Father Harcourt Blackett, a radical Barbadian priest who challenged norms in 1978 by joining the ‘Crop Over’ parade dressed as Desmond Tutu. His provocative performance questioned class boundaries and celebrated marginalised expression through dance and masquerade. Janice B. Fournillier concluded the session by reflecting on Mas’ making traditions in Trinidad Carnival. Using oral histories and archival research, she traced the legacy of foundational Mas makers while advocating for the documentation of emerging practices to ensure cultural continuity, in line with the Sankofa philosophy. Together, these papers demonstrated how Caribbean cultural practices continue to shape identity, memory, and community through innovation, education, and embodied tradition.

Ad Hoc Speakers:

Several participants who were not originally included in the programme expressed a desire to contribute to the discussion. Due to the constraints of a tightly scheduled agenda, only two additional speakers could be accommodated. Among them was Samuel Sanka, who delivered a presentation on his recent appointment to a leadership role in organising festivals and carnival events both in his home country of Trinidad and Tobago and internationally. Sanka elaborated on the objectives and scope of these cultural initiatives, which were strategically designed to showcase and promote the rich artistic traditions and cultural heritage of Trinidad and Tobago. He highlighted the importance of these events not only as platforms for artistic expression but also as vehicles for cultural diplomacy and national branding. He underscored the collaborative nature of these initiatives, which involved partnerships with corporate sponsors and close coordination with the Ministry of Tourism. These efforts aimed to enhance the visibility of Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural offerings on the global stage, attract tourism, and stimulate economic activity through creative industries.

The other was author Ian Isidore Smart who gave a synopsis of his book “*Ah come back home: Perspectives on the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival*”. He described it as an exploration of the cultural, historical, and



Figure 9. David Boothman at the conference. Ian Smart’s new book ‘The Caribbean Renaissance and Carnival’ is a tribute to him. Credit: UTT. (ISBN: 9781496854018)

political dimensions of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. Smart delved into Carnival as a dynamic performance space that reflects resistance, identity, and postcolonial expression. In the book, he analyses its African diasporic roots, syncretic nature, and its evolution into a site of both cultural affirmation and contestation - Carnival not merely as festivity, but as a deeply symbolic practice that navigates issues of race, class, and national identity. Soon after the conference his new book *'The Caribbean Renaissance and Carnival'* was published by the author and stands as is a tribute to composer, musician, artist and educator David Boothman and his late brother musician Roger Boothman (Smart, 2025). David actively participated in the entire conference, offering help to many participants as a local resident living near NAPA and as a part-time lecturer at UTT. Author Ray Allen presented a poster in absentia and sent a few copies of his book *'Frankie McIntosh and the Art of the Soca Arranger'* which explores the influential career of Frankie McIntosh, highlighting his pivotal role in shaping the sound of Soca music through innovative arrangements (Allen, 2023). The book examines McIntosh's collaborations with major calypsonians, his impact on Caribbean music production, and the artistry involved in Soca arrangement during its golden era.

Session 8 (Chairs: Kenny Attai and Ansel Wong) - *Unpacking Carnival Histories and Charting New Direction* comprised six diverse papers yet with interconnected perspectives on Carnival as a dynamic site of cultural expression, identity, resistance, and innovation across the Caribbean and its diasporas. Kai Barratt revealed how social media influencers created a digital "Fear of Missing out on a Carnival" (FOMO-AC), demonstrating how curated content and aspirational self-presentation reinforced idealised carnival identities, especially through the lens of Carl Rogers' concept of the "ideal self." This phenomenon,

amplified by social comparison and digital marketing strategies, helped commercialise the mas and fete experience, promoting a bikini-and-beads aesthetic targeted at affluent audiences. Melissa Lee Foon in her presentation focused on her floral tribute to Pan but extended her thoughts in her abstract which examined the historical exclusion of floral displays from Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival, arguing for their symbolic reclamation through a deeper understanding of botanical imperialism. Drawing links between British colonial botanical trade and Caribbean plantation economies, she proposed that integrating floral artistry into Carnival could honour both cultural resilience and the ecological histories that shaped the region. H.N. Shah presented the paper by B. Mirjah, L. Rosenior-Patten and L. M.N. Shah which highlighted efforts to re-integrate senior Carnivalists into Notting Hill Carnival, addressing the marginalisation of foundational figures. The project, funded by Arts Council England, used creative mobility solutions and expanded access to ensure elder participation, celebrating their continued relevance and legacy within contemporary Carnival. In the absence of Rosalind Gabriel, Kenny Attai, also session chair, presented briefly on the developing Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Museum - a living archive, preserving Carnival's



Figure 10. Ansel Wong and his wife, Dorothy, photographed shortly before his plenary address that concluded the conference. Dorothy later commented that this was her inaugural participation in the conference series. She attended all sessions and remarked on the intellectual value and enjoyment she derived from the experience.

development from enslaved resistance to modern global celebration. In their conference abstract, the authors outlined that through costumes, artefacts, and music, the museum aims to foster intergenerational knowledge exchange and cultural pride. Janine Tiffe reflected on the Kent Karnival in Ohio as a diasporic re-creation that reconnected students at a predominantly white institution to African-Caribbean heritage through sailor mas and shared performance. Concluding the session, and conference, Ansel Wong delivered a powerful closing plenary lecture chronicling his six-decade cultural odyssey. He showcased how Caribbean creatives have shaped Britain's cultural identity, advocating for his taxonomy of Mas and highlighting UK Carnivals as global exemplars of artistic innovation. Collectively, these papers emphasised Carnival's global relevance as a tool for cultural affirmation, intergenerational continuity, political commentary, and diasporic reconnection - bridging histories of enslavement and empire with contemporary acts of joy, resistance, and belonging.

Closing Ceremony

Following the brief panel discussion, Laila Shah addressed the audience with detailed guidance on the submission process for authors wishing to contribute papers to the International Journal of Carnival Arts, with Volume 10 specifically dedicated to the proceedings of this conference. She directed attendees to the conference website (<https://www.steelpanconference.com>), which served as an archive for previous volumes and events and offered further submission details. She concluded by expressing gratitude to UTT's support staff, with particular acknowledgment of Dr. Kela Francis and Mr. Ghansham Mohammed, before announcing preliminary plans for the 12th conference, tentatively titled "*TASPO at 75: Reflections and Innovations in Carnival Arts*", scheduled for 23rd - 25th July 2026 in

London. This event would commemorate the historic performance of TASPO at London's Southbank and the exact site (now Jubilee Gardens) where they brought steelpan to the world on 26th July 1951.

The formal proceedings of the conference were then brought to a close by Professor Imbert, who extended sincere thanks to all speakers, participants, organisers, and sponsors. He noted that he had attended all three days of the conference, during which more than fifty papers were presented, and expressed admiration for both the scholarly calibre of the presentations and the efficiency of the conference's organisation. During informal exchanges with attendees, he reported, a strong desire for future conferences to return periodically to Trinidad and Tobago.

Upon closure of the formal proceedings, a spontaneous calypso jam emerged as guitars, string instruments, drums, and other percussion arrived from all directions of NAPA, culminating in an exuberant hour-long performance that offered a celebratory and culturally resonant conclusion to a conference on carnival arts. Together, these elements coalesced into an unforgettable conference experience, one that honoured the legacy of Pan and Carnival Arts while cultivating new dialogues, connections, and possibilities. In returning to its roots, the conference simultaneously charted bold new directions for the global Carnival community.

In the aftermath of the conference, the initial optimism surrounding its outcomes and the anticipation for the 12th Conference, scheduled to take place in London in July 2026, was tempered by subsequent developments. On 10th March 2025, the United Kingdom marked Commonwealth Day with a ceremonial service at Westminster Abbey, led by King Charles III and attended by members of the royal family. The event, held under the theme "*Together We Thrive*," sought to underscore unity and shared purpose across the 56 member states of the Commonwealth, particularly amidst

ongoing global uncertainties. The service featured cultural performances and was notable for the public reappearance of the Princess of Wales, Catherine, following her treatment for cancer. Despite this symbolic reaffirmation of Commonwealth solidarity, the UK government announced, shortly after 12th March 2025, the termination of visa-free travel arrangements for several key Caribbean nations. The implications of this policy shift, particularly its ramifications for the mobility of artists and the future of Carnival Arts, are explored in detail by the authors in the editorial commentary of this volume.

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to Professor Clement A.C. Imbert, Chairman of the Board of Governors; Professor Stephen Joseph (Ag.) and Professor Rean Maharaj, (Ag.) Vice President for Research, Academic and Student Affairs at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), for their unwavering support in facilitating our request to host the 11th Conference at UTT. Their commitment guided our proposal through the necessary administrative channels, ultimately securing the generous use of the NAPA facilities at no cost to the organisers. We are especially grateful to Professor Imbert for additionally securing sponsorship from Angostura, First Citizens, T&TEC, Unipet, Courts and Caribbean Airlines, with the latter sponsoring two tickets to Tobago as a door prize.

We are equally indebted to the members of the International Conference on Caribbean Culture (ICCC – members: Haroun N. Shah, Dawn K. Batson, Laila M.N. Shah, Alexander Loewenthal, Roger Gibbs, Anthony Pierre, and Dr. Latipher A.O. Appiah-Agyei), for gaining their partnership and support at very short notice. Our appreciation extends to the dedicated team at UTT, under the leadership of Dr. Kela Francis, who not only co-drafted the initial proposal but helped us to craft the structure of the three-day programme. Dr. Francis served as our principal liaison at

UTT and was instrumental in designing the conference booklet, promotional materials, and managing local arrangements with exceptional commitment. Special thanks are due to Mr. Ghansham Mohammed, who, in the final four months of preparation, served as the key administrative point of contact. His steady hand and attention to detail ensured the smooth navigation of the extensive logistics involved. We also wish to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of Melissa Lee Foon and Allison Noriega-Clarke, who conceived and executed the decorative installations of NAPA's auditorium, lending an elegant and culturally resonant ambiance to the proceedings. We extend our sincere appreciation to the session chairs for their diligent timekeeping, which ensured the seamless progression of the programme. Their efforts prevented the exclusion of any speakers - an outcome that often occurs in tightly scheduled events.

Our warm thanks go to all presenters, the four plenary lecturers, Prof. Dawn Batson, Dr. Christopher Laird, Dr. Ray Holman and Mr Ansel Wong, CBE., the UTT academic staff, Gillian Moore, Kela Francis, Krisson Joseph, and Sonja Dumas, for their delivery of enriching and thought-provoking workshops. A particular highlight of the conference was the vibrant evening performances by Shell Invaders Steel Orchestra. We are most grateful to Ms. Elizabeth Namsoo, Manager of Marketing and Communications at Invaders Steel Orchestra C.G., and Mr. Michael Dinchong, Chair of the Invaders Steel Orchestra and Lecturer at UTT, for coordinating the participation of both the youth and main stage ensembles at no cost to the organisers.

Finally, we wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the dedicated support staff at UTT whose efforts underpinned the daily operations of the conference: Ms. Bridgitte Garcia at the registration desk, Mr. Sunil Bisnath for IT support, and Mr. Katsunari Imai for audio services. Their behind-the-

scenes work was critical to the success of the event.

References

Francis, Kela (2024), Calypso as Pan African Music. *International Journal of Carnival Art*, **9**, 5-22.

McIntosh, Frankie and Allen, Ray (2024) *Frankie McIntosh and the Art of the Soca Arranger*. University Press of Mississippi. ISBN: 9781496854018

Phillip, Jim (2016). NIHERST - Trinidad and Tobago Icons in Science & Technology. Vol. 4 Pp 49-52. See link: <https://niherst.gov.tt/icons/icon/jim-phillip-tt4/>

Phillip, Jimi (1981). *How to Play the Soprano Pan (from Middle C). An Introductory Book with Exercises on Scales, Chords and Arpeggios*. Contact: panman10jp@yahoo.ca

Picou, I., Pierre A., Christmas, G (2023). *Ellie Mannette - A Destiny in Steel*. School of Creative Arts, University of Education, Winneba(2023). 10th International Conference on Carnival and Masquerade Arts: 'Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation and Decolonisation' - Conference Book, 56- 57.

Rose, Sally Omolara (2023). *The Dr. Geraldine Connor (1952 -2011) Civic Aworan Statue: Yoruba culture and its influence on Artistic Practices in Leeds*. 10th International Conference on Carnival and Masquerade Arts: 'Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation and Decolonisation' - Conference Book, 82- 83

Shah, H.N. and Shah, L.M.N. (2024) *The 10th Steelpan/Carnival Arts Conference in Ghana; Finally a Street Carnival Emerged on Saturday 9th December 2023; 'Rhythms of Unity and a Resounding Carnival Extravaganza in Winneba.'* *International Journal of Carnival Art*, **8A**, 1- 5.

Smart, Ian Isidore (2025). *The Caribbean Renaissance and Carnival*. Published in the United States by Original World Press and available at Metropolitan Book Supplies Ltd.

Where's the Vibes At?: Exploring the Experience Economy and Motivations of Carnival Tourists and Festival Goers

Josephine Torrel-Brown

The University of Trinidad and Tobago

Wrightson Rd, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

1-868-787-8591, josephine.torrel@utt.edu.tt, artistictorrel@gmail.com

Abstract

Have you ever wondered why people travel for entertainment and cultural experiences, and why they are willing to spend money on such activities? The answer lies in the push and pull factors that motivate them to do so. This paper shares insights on the theme of motivation to attend festivals and cultural events, extracted from the broader study entitled "An Investigation into the Feasibility of Cultural Tourism as an Option for Economic Diversification with a Focus on Intangible Culture in Trinidad and Tobago" (Torrel, 2021). It delves into the psychological and cultural factors influencing visitor motivation, emphasizing the role of emotional and sensory engagement in crafting unforgettable experiences, with specific reference to the 'Trinidad Carnival'. Quantitative data from the explanatory sequential mixed methods study, primarily gathered from survey questionnaires distributed to visitors and non-visitors to Trinidad and Tobago, measured sub-themes such as Importance and visitor Satisfaction using the Relative Importance Index. Modern trends such as edutainment and millennials prioritizing experiences over material goods, seeking unique, immersive, and shareable moments, contribute to festival attendance regardless of location. In the dynamic landscape of the 21st century, the Experience Economy has emerged as a transformative force in business and tourism, with Carnival standing out as a vibrant example. These theoretical perspectives help explain why individuals are willing to pay high prices for festival experiences. The study's findings have profound implications for tourism planners, agencies, and Carnival event producers, offering a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the motivations and experiences of Carnival tourists and festival-goers. These insights are crucial for informing practical recommendations for stakeholders, aiming to enhance the overall Carnival tourism experience.

Key Words: Motivation, Satisfaction, Experience Economy, Carnival, Festivals, Tourism, Trinidad and Tobago, Edutainment

Introduction

Despite inflation driving up the costs to participate in Carnival, and reports of crime on the islands, Trinidad and Tobago has seen a steady increase in tourist arrivals for Carnival over the past decade. What then motivates people from around the globe to travel to the twin-island republic for this festival?

Motivation is a key theory in tourism used to explain and predict tourists' behavior, as discussed by many researchers and philosophers (Torrel, 2021: 33). Middleton (2015: 51) defines motivation as the initiator of the decision process in individuals, describing it as "the internal, psychological influences affecting individuals' choices." According to Iso-Ahola (1980), and Dann (1981), motivation comprises psychological and biological

needs and wants that arouse, direct, and integrate a person’s behaviour and activity (qtd. in Park et al., 2008: 161).

Middleton further explains that “in a marketing sense, motivation bridges the gap between a general interest in a product and a decision to go out and buy it” (56).

The theory of motivation is applied to tourism and festival attendance to explain the decision-making process and behavior of travelers and patrons. Other well-known theories, such as Maslow’s (1954) needs hierarchy, Dann’s (1977) and Crompton’s (1979) push-and-pull factors, and Iso-Ahola’s (1982) escape and seeking dichotomy, also contribute to this discourse. In the ever-evolving 21st century, intangible cultural tourism, which focuses on non-physical cultural elements like traditions, rituals, festivals, and performances, has become a powerful marketing force. This is driven by trends within the Experience Economy and people’s pursuit of meaningful and immersive experiences as people seek out where ‘the vibes’ are at. Carnival stands out as a prime example of this vibrant transformation. Another modern trend is edutainment—a blend of education and entertainment— where tourists not only want to enjoy, but have a propensity to learn new things in the process. Additionally, there is a relationship between motivation and satisfaction that influences festivals and visitors’ post-purchase behaviors (Ayazlar and Ayazlar, 2015).

This paper explores the theme of motivation to attend festivals and cultural events, extracted from the broader study entitled “An Investigation into the Feasibility of Cultural Tourism as an Option for Economic Diversification with a Focus on Intangible Culture in Trinidad and Tobago” (Torrel, 2021). It aims to explain

why individuals are willing to travel and pay for festival experiences in the context of Trinidad Carnival.

The Experience Economy

The Experience Economy theory, conceptualized by Pine and Gilmore (1998), suggests that consumers increasingly desire experiences and are inclined to spend more on experiential consumption than material possessions. This theory has two dimensions: customer participation, which can be passive or active, and the connection or environmental relationship that unites customers with the event or performance. At one end of the connection spectrum lies absorption, with immersion at the other (see Fig 1).

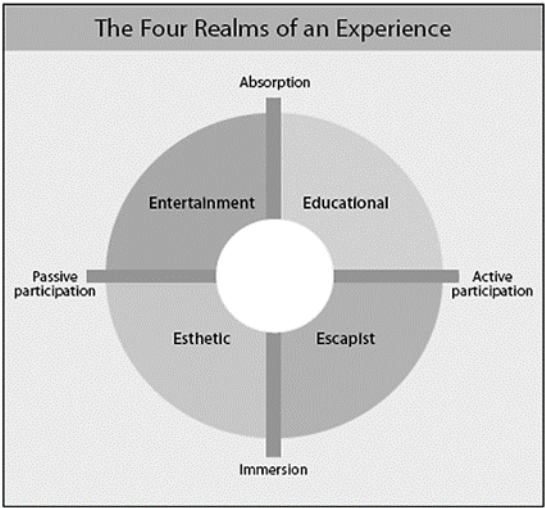


Figure 1: The Experience Economy Model
Source: Pine, J.B. II & Gilmore, J.H. (2014), Harvard Business Review

Though Pine and Gilmore introduced this philosophy, many researchers, particularly in business, have expanded on it. Themes such as active participation, emotions, memorable experiences, satisfaction, and

innovation are central to the theory. Tourism exemplifies the Experience Economy, with tourists emotionally involved and actively gaining experiences at travel destinations. Researchers like Stasiak and Hosany et al. have demonstrated the link between the Experience Economy and tourism.

Event Tourism and the Experience Economy: The Case of Trinidad Carnival

According to Future Markets Insights Inc. (2024), the global event tourism market has experienced steady growth from 2019 to 2024, with its value estimated to reach USD 1.63 trillion by 2024. This upward trend is expected to continue, with projected revenues hitting USD 2.38 trillion by 2034. This growth is largely driven by various events such as festivals, concerts, sporting tournaments, conferences, and exhibitions, which serve as powerful attractions for tourists seeking authentic and diverse experiences. Among these, festivals have emerged as one of the fastest-growing types of tourism attractions, highlighting their significant role in the market.

The concept of 'new tourism' has shifted from the traditional 3S (sun, sea, and sand) to 3xE, where E represents education, entertainment, and excitement (Stasiak, 2013). This shift highlights the growing demand for experiences that blend knowledge and entertainment, known as 'edutainment'. This combination of educational and entertaining elements is becoming a cornerstone of modern event tourism, catering to the evolving preferences of tourists worldwide. Stasiak notes that the primary commodities are consumers' emotions, impressions, and

experiences, marking a transition from passive observation to active participation. This transformation focuses on creating memorable and immersive experiences for visitors. Events such as festivals, concerts, and cultural celebrations offer unique opportunities for tourists to actively engage with local culture, fostering deeper connections and emotional involvement. This shift from passive sightseeing to active participation aligns with the principles of the Experience Economy, where value lies in the experiences and emotions generated rather than material goods. As tourists seek these enriching experiences, destinations that offer compelling events and activities become more attractive, driving economic growth and enhancing the overall appeal of the location.

Carnival, particularly Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival, is a perfect example of event tourism within the Experience Economy. Often dubbed "The Greatest Show on Earth," Trinidad Carnival (for short) is a vibrant celebration deeply rooted in the island's history and culture. This annual event showcases the rich tapestry of Trinbagonian¹ society through music, dance, and elaborate costumes. The infectious rhythms of Calypso, Soca, Chutney-Soca and steelpan music, along with the colorful masquerade parades and energetic performances, make Trinidad Carnival a unique and unforgettable experience that transcends mere entertainment, embodying the spirit and soul of Trinidad and Tobago. These immersive and emotionally engaging events, including fetes (parties), competitions, and exhibitions of various kinds, exemplify the transformative power of the Experience Economy in modern

¹ Trinbagonian – a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago

tourism. For visitors, participating in Carnival is not just about observing; it's about engaging with the culture, feeling the energy – the vibes, and creating lasting memories (Association of Caribbean States, 2021). This active participation underscores the critical role of leisure activities in driving economic growth and shaping tourism trends, as highlighted in Fig 2. Furthermore, Fig 3 details visitor expenditure during Carnival, illustrating the economic impact of these vibrant celebrations.

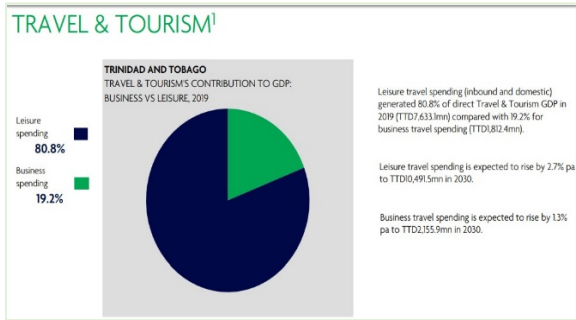


Figure 2: Business and Leisure's Contribution to GDP

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council 2020. p. 6.

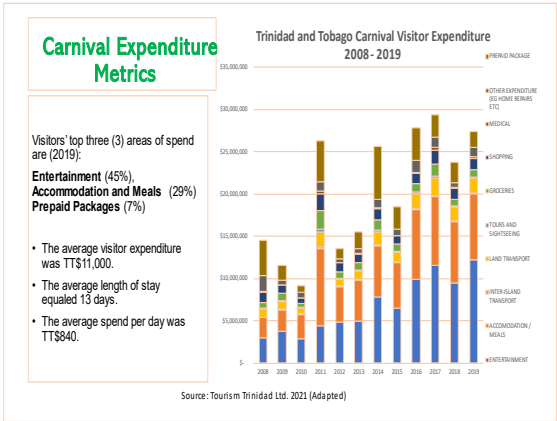


Figure 3: Carnival Expenditure Metrics 2008 - 2019

Traveling to Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival can be costly. The cost of flights during the Carnival season tends to surge due to high demand. Accommodation prices also spike, with hotels and guesthouses capitalizing on the influx of tourists. Additionally, fete tickets, which

grant access to the numerous parties and events that characterize Carnival, can be quite expensive. Despite these high costs, the country consistently sees an influx of visitors during Carnival, underscoring the powerful draw of the Experience Economy (see Table 1).

Table 1: Estimated Visitor Expenditure for the Carnival Period 2013 - 2024

Estimated Visitor Expenditure for Carnival Period 2013 - 2024				
Year	No. of Persons	Ave. Visitor		
		Expenditure TT	Carnival Visitors	Carnival Expenditure
2013	1,852	8,404	36,999	310,939,596
2014	2,472	10,393	36,897	383,470,521
2015	1,872	9,869	38,624	381,180,256
2016	2,903	9,597	35,483	340,530,351
2017	3,286	8,943	37,448	334,897,464
2018	2,541	9,382	33,873	317,796,486
2019	2,508	10,925	35,560	388,493,000
2020	2,139	12,101	37,861	458,155,961
2022	698	8,230	8,711	71,691,530
2023	2,350	15,313	27,375	419,193,375
2024	3,134	14,403	28,700	413,366,100

Source: Central Statistical Office, Survey of Departing Visitors
NB: *Closure of international borders on Sunday, March 22, 2020
* Borders re-opened on Saturday, July 17, 2021
* International flights resumed to Tobago on 10.01.2022
*No carnival activity in 2021 due to the covid 19 pandemic

According to the Immigration Department, Ministry of National Security, Trinidad and Tobago, 2025 boasted of a total of 41,022 visitor arrivals by air, with an average expenditure of TT\$15,336.00 per visitor (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, 2025). Cruise passengers, such as onboard the *EPIC Carnival Experience*, an all-inclusive Carnival cruise, hosting 1200 passengers, also contributed to the estimated total economic impact of TT\$668,060,354.40, as evident in Table 2.

Table 2: Total Estimated Visitor Expenditure for Trinidad Carnival 2025 (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, 2025)

The total estimated visitor expenditure for air and cruise passengers, including the contribution of the Epic Carnival Experience and Socadrome are as follows:

Number of visitors/Event	Average Expenditure TTS	Average Total Expenditure
41,022 (Air)	TTS15,336.00	\$629,113,392.00
13,926 (Cruise)	TTS292.40	\$4,071,962.40
Epic Carnival Experience	-	\$34,000,000.00
Socadrome (3,500) Seated Patron	\$250.00	\$875,000.00
TOTAL		\$668,060,354.40

Source: Tourism Trinidad Limited

Millennials and the Experience Economy

Millennials would have constituted a major percentage of those figures. According to the Tourism Trinidad Limited (2021), young African Americans, in particular, represent the largest volume (57%), of non-nationals arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival on an annual basis. Millennials are the drivers of the Experience Economy with their quest for experiences over material possessions, backed by their spending ability to fulfil it (Torrel, 2021: 227). Research suggests that millennials, defined as Americans born between 1980-1996, particularly prioritize experiences over material goods, seeking unique, immersive, and shareable moments (Forbes, 2023). Eventbrite’s research reveals that millennials crave more experiences, with 82% attending or participating in live experiences in the past year and 72% wanting to increase their spending on experiences (Eventbrite, 2023). Millennials believe attending live events makes them more connected to others, and 78% would choose to spend money on experiences over buying something desirable (Eventbrite, 2023). This concept has become increasingly pivotal in the 21st century, driven by digitization and social consciousness. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) also influences millennials to attend events, with 69% experiencing FOMO (Eventbrite, 2023). Eventbrite explains that the demand for live experiences spans

generations, with consumer spending on live experiences and events increasing by 70% since 1987. Recent data supports these trends. According to Mastercard’s Travel Industry Trends Report, spending on experiences in the United States increased by 65% from 2019 to 2023, driven by pent-up demand from the pandemic (Mastercard Economics Institute, 2023). Additionally, Gen Z and affluent consumers are reshaping the Experience Economy, with 50% planning to visit more attractions than they did in the previous year (Forbes, 2023).

Motivation to Attend Festivals: Cultural and Psychological Factors

The reasons to attend festivals and spend on leisure activities extend beyond millennials and the digital age. Motivation can be subdivided into push and pull types. Push (intangible) motivations include the desire to escape, rest, enjoy relaxation, prestige, health, and fitness (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Pull (tangible) motivations are based on the attractiveness of festivals’ attributes (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2019). Crompton and McKay (1997) suggest that the decision to visit a festival is a directed action triggered by a desire to meet needs such as cultural enrichment, education, novelty, and socialization. The motivations behind why people attend festivals are multifaceted, with event novelty, escape, and opportunities for socialization being the most commonly reported reasons (Little, 2021). Attending festivals with friends, family, and meeting new people fulfils this social need, which is considered a healthy and innate behaviour. According to (Crompton and McKay, 1997: 428), Getz (1991) suggests that the basic needs met by festivals can be classified into

three categories: physical, interpersonal or social, and personal.

The type and quality of the experience are crucial, with tourists increasingly expressing a desire to experience local culture, live like locals, and discover the real identity of the places they visit (Richards, 2009). Tse and Wilton (1988) argue that the actual experience tourists have at a destination is the key determinant of their satisfaction, rather than their initial motivation to visit (Yao, 2010). Emotional involvement is a key component of tourist satisfaction, with tourists motivated by heritage elements feeling more involved and satisfied with their overall experience. Perceived pleasure is linked to emotional involvement, suggesting that tourists feel highly involved when they derive pleasure from their travel experience. Akama and Kieti (2003) emphasize that tourist satisfaction leads to tourist loyalty, which in turn supports economic goals such as increased tourist numbers and revenues (Vérain, 2019). Vérain further notes that satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend the destination or activity they visited to others, enhancing the destination's reputation and attracting more visitors. The expectation/disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1980) suggests that consumers compare pre-purchase expectations with post-purchase performance of goods or services. This theory of satisfaction has a positive effect on festivals and visitors' post-purchase behaviours.

The Research

As mentioned earlier, this paper is an extract from a broader study titled “An Interrogation into the Feasibility of Cultural Tourism as an Option for Economic

Diversification with a Focus on Intangible Culture in Trinidad and Tobago” (Torrel, 2021). The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design with the ultimate goal of promoting economic development in Trinidad and Tobago through intangible cultural tourism. Cultural festivals and events play a crucial role in marketing cultural tourism. Grounded in the theoretical framework of the Experience Economy, the study focused on visitor motivation and experience satisfaction. Understanding travelers' priorities is essential for effective planning and meeting their needs.

Primary data was collected via survey questionnaires administered to visitors to Trinidad and Tobago, as well as individuals who had not yet visited. Four distinct questionnaires were developed for different respondent categories: Visitors, Non-Visitors, Non-Nationals, and Same Day Visitors (cruise ship passengers). The questions covered common themes such as Cultural Awareness, Motivation, Importance, Tourist Behavior, and Satisfaction. The surveys incorporated various assessment strategies, including multiple choice, multi-selection options, Yes/No questions, Likert Scale ratings, and open-ended questions. Additionally, qualitative data was collected through observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. The data obtained are valuable for preparing for cultural tourists and designing a marketing strategy for cultural tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Using direct and snowball sampling methods, a sample of 203 individuals from various regions, including Asia, North America, South America, the Caribbean, and Europe, was obtained. The responses to the questionnaires were initially managed electronically using Google Forms,

compiling the data into Excel files. For analyzing the variables of ‘Importance’ and ‘Satisfaction,’ the Relative Importance Index analysis strategy was employed. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis with participants’ responses to open-ended questions. The researcher manually coded all the data, classifying them according to sub-themes or factors, which were then examined to gain insights and draw conclusions.

Motivation

To determine the push factors of respondents, the open-ended question "Why do you travel to different places?" was asked across all participant categories. The dominant reason for travel in every category was the desire to experience another culture, followed by the desire to learn something new and gain experiences. Regarding pull factors, feedback varied by sample categories. Non-National Visitors were asked to state their major reason for visiting Trinidad and Tobago. The highest percentage, 24.3%, reported their motivation was to participate in cultural events, while 14.3% stated they came to attend cultural events. Carnival was the most popular choice for events.

Importance

Participants rated the importance of various items on a Likert Scale, with eleven variables selected under two categories: General Destination Attributes (six variables) and Cultural Events (five variables). Ratings ranged from 0 (no importance) to 5 (most importance). Four variables—Safety, Enjoyment, Authentic Local Culture, and Learning Something New—were analyzed using the Relative Importance Index (RII) method to determine their significance.

As indicated in Table 3, the areas of Safety, Enjoyment, Authentic Local Culture, and Learning Something New were highly important among the four categories of tourists, with RII values ranging from 0.73 to 0.88, as assessed by Akadiri (2011) criteria.

Table 3: Ranking of Areas of Importance to Survey Participants

Decision and Behaviour: Importance									
Torreal (2021). "An Interrogation Into The Feasibility Of Cultural Tourism As An Option For Economic Diversification, With A Focus On Intangible Culture In Trinidad And Tobago"									
Areas of Importance (Relative Importance Index - RII)									
No.	Areas of Importance to Respondents	Visitors: Cruise Ship Passengers		Visitors: Nationals		Visitors: Non-Nationals		Non-Visitors	
		RII	Rank	RII	Rank	RII	Rank	RII	Rank
1	Safety	0.871	3	0.862	1	0.806	4	0.865	1
2	Enjoyment	0.884	1	0.792	2	0.822	2	0.818	4
3	Authentic Local Culture	0.848	6	0.731	5	0.826	1	0.810	5
4	Learn Something New	0.884	1	N/A	N/A	0.760	7	0.838	3

RII values:
High (H) (0.8 ≤ RII ≤ 1)
High-Medium (H-M) (0.6 ≤ RII ≤ 0.8)
Medium (M) (0.4 ≤ RII ≤ 0.6)
Medium-Low (M-L) (0.2 ≤ RII ≤ 0.4)
Low (L) (0 ≤ RII ≤ 0.2)

Likert's scale in a range from 0 to 5, where
0 = of no importance, 1 = of little importance, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = highly important and 5 = of most importance.

Satisfaction

Quantitative analysis and qualitative reports from visitors indicate that they were satisfied with their experience in Trinidad and Tobago, with 92.4% of survey respondents expressing that were highly satisfied. They were particularly satisfied with *Friendly People* and *Showcase of Local Culture*, except for Cruise Ship Passengers who desired greater exposure to authentic local culture. Compared to the analysis of ‘Importance,’ there was greater variation in the Relative Importance Indices for the indicators of ‘Satisfaction,’ as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Ranking of Areas of Satisfaction of Survey Participants

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS - SATISFACTION							
Torrell (2021). An Interrogation Into The Feasibility Of Cultural Tourism As An Option For Economic Diversification, With A Focus On Intangible Culture In Trinidad And Tobago.							
Aspects of Satisfaction by Visitors - Relative Importance Index							
No.	Areas of Satisfaction	Cruise Ship Passengers	Nationals	Non-Nationals			
		Ril	Rank	Ril	Rank	Ril	Rank
1	Friendly people	0.897	1	0.865	1	0.863	1
2	Availability of information	0.878	2	0.617	8	0.585	9
3	Showcase of local culture (arts & entertainment)	0.806	7	0.731	4	0.800	3
4	Customer Service (service of staff at businesses)	0.847	4	0.591	9	0.709	6

Ril values:

High (H) (0.8 ≤ Ri ≤ 1)

High-Medium (H-M) (0.6 ≤ Ri ≤ 0.8)

Medium (M) (0.4 ≤ Ri ≤ 0.6)

Medium-Low (M-L) (0.2 ≤ Ri ≤ 0.4)

Low (L) (0 ≤ Ri ≤ 0.2)

Likert's scale in a range from 1 to 5, where 1 = very dissatisfied, 2= dissatisfied, 3 = not sure, 4 = satisfied and 5 = very satisfied.

Issues of dissatisfaction with factors such as crime, customer service, lengthy procedures at airport and high costs of goods and services including entertainment were some of the negatives identified, which can be threats to intangible cultural tourism becoming a successful reality. Quality of shows and their related facets like performances, sound and start time were also identified as areas for improvement. Nevertheless, when asked if they would return to Trinidad and Tobago and recommend the destination to others, 92.4% of respondents said 'Yes,' indicating high overall satisfaction with their experience on the islands. Unlike Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival, where the majority of participants are locals and the audience are mostly passive observers, Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival allows anyone to actively participate without prior knowledge or training. This inclusivity attracts a large proportion of repeat visitors, with 7 in 10 arrivals being repeat visitors who stay for an average of thirteen days to enjoy the colorful costumes, lively music, and vibrant atmosphere.

Discussion

The research results confirm the concept of the Experience Economy, suggesting that consumers seek memorable experiences they can actively participate in and connect

with. Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival embodies this model, allowing residents and visitors to engage either passively or actively, immersing themselves in the activities. The survey indicated that Carnival is the cultural event respondents are most interested in. The growing number of visitors to Trinidad for Carnival, especially young African Americans seeking active participation and enjoyment, highlights the event's appeal. This supports Stasiak’s observation that tourists are transforming from passive observers to active participants. It also aligns with research by Eventbrite and others, identifying millennials as drivers of the Experience Economy due to their quest for experiences and spending ability. The study's findings indicate that Trinidad and Tobago's culture and people can fulfill various physiological and growth needs, including love and belongingness, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and transcendence. These factors serve as significant motivators for individuals to visit the country. Additionally, the analysis revealed that Safety, Enjoyment, Authentic Local Culture, and Learning Something New are highly valued by travelers. Notably, Enjoyment emerged as a key factor in the 'Importance' analysis, underscoring its critical role in attracting visitors. This connection highlights how the country's ability to provide enjoyable experiences is integral to its appeal as a travel destination, satisfying both essential needs and the desire for memorable experiences.

Respondents’ desire to ‘learn something new’ fits within Crompton’s novelty and education theoretical classification. Richards (2007) noted that many new types of events involve the active involvement of

creative producers and others in the 'co-creation' of events, referring to creative tourism and orange tourism. However, there is a need to develop orange tourism as an aspect of intangible cultural tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, crime can be the biggest threat to personal safety and motivation to visit the islands, especially Trinidad (Torrel, 2021: 26).

The study's results have significant implications for tourism planners and agencies. Understanding the psychology behind decision-making, such as what motivates individuals to travel and attend festivals and events, is crucial. Destinations have more control over pull factors, such as destination imaging and available tourism products, rather than push factors. People will travel to places where their needs can be fulfilled, according to Kolb's interpretation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

The research underscores the importance of the Experience Economy in motivating Carnival tourists and festival-goers. Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival not only meets the diverse needs of its visitors but also leverages its unique cultural assets to create memorable experiences. By addressing safety concerns and further developing aspects like orange tourism, the country can enhance its appeal and continue to attract a diverse and engaged audience. This holistic approach ensures that the motivations and satisfactions of festival-goers are met, reinforcing Trinidad and Tobago's position as a premier destination for cultural and experiential tourism.

Conclusion

The preceding discourse highlighted the importance of understanding the motivations and preferences of tourists and festival patrons in making a decision to visit

a destination or attend an event. The Experience Economy is a major influence, driving the demand for unique and memorable experiences. This shift from material possessions to experiential consumption is particularly evident in Carnival and tourism, where vibrant celebrations attract visitors from around the world. The motivations of Carnival tourists and festival-goers, including local attendees, are deeply rooted in psychological needs, cultural interests, and the desire for emotional and sensory engagement. Understanding these motivations can help destinations tailor their offerings to better meet the needs and expectations of different visitor groups, enhancing the overall appeal of the event and driving event success and economic growth.

Tourist and local attendee satisfaction is crucial in achieving these goals. Satisfaction contributes to loyalty, return visits, and recommendations, which may result in increased visits to the destination or event, ultimately converting into revenues. The study's results have significant implications for event promoters, tourism planners, and agencies. In the case of Trinidad Carnival, addressing gaps in structured learning opportunities and ensuring safety can enhance its appeal as a destination within the Experience Economy. Implementing strategies for Carnival by event producers and government agencies can further support the development of intangible cultural tourism, driving economic growth and enriching the visitor experience. Ultimately, the vibrant and immersive experiences offered by Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival not only attract international tourists but also resonate deeply with local festival-goers.

Millennials, in particular, are driving this shift towards experiential consumption with their quest for unique and memorable experiences. By continuing to innovate and address key motivators, the country can solidify its position as a premier destination for cultural and experiential tourism, fostering a dynamic and thriving festival environment for all.

This paper adheres to the principle of generalizability, as the findings of the study can be applied to other settings and contexts beyond Trinidad and Tobago. With some adjustments based on the unique conditions of other destinations and events, the insights gained can be valuable for other communities or countries. By leveraging these insights, festival and event promoters,

Carnival stakeholders, and tourism planners can create more engaging and satisfying experiences, ensuring that the vibes are high, thereby attracting a wide spectrum of patrons.

References

Book:

Akadiri, P.O., 2011. Development of a Multi-Criteria Approach for the Selection of Sustainable Materials for Building Projects. PhD Thesis. University of Wolverhampton.

Getz, D., 1991. Festivals, Special Events, and Tourism. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Iso-Ahola, S.E., 1980. The Social Psychology of Leisure and Recreation. Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

Middleton, V.T.C., 1994. Marketing in Travel and Tourism. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Dissertation:

Torrel, J., 2021. An Interrogation into the Feasibility of Cultural Tourism as an Option for Economic Diversification with a Focus on Intangible Culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Dissertation. Trinidad and Tobago: The University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Journal:

Akama, J.S. & Kieti, D.M., 2003. Measuring Tourist Satisfaction with Kenya's Wildlife Safari: A Case Study of Tsavo West National Park. *Tourism Management* 24, 73–81. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(02\)00044-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(02)00044-4)

Ayazlar, G. & Ayazlar, R., 2019. Festival Tourism: An Examination of Motivations and Satisfaction. *Journal of Tourism Research* 21, 45–58.

Crompton, J.L. & McKay, S.L., 1997. Motives of Visitors Attending Festival Events. *Annals of Tourism Research* 24, 425–439. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(97\)80010-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(97)80010-2)

Dann, G.M.S., 1981. Tourist Motivation: An Appraisal. *Annals of Tourism Research* 8, 187–219. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(81\)90082-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(81)90082-7)

Little, J., 2021. The Human Motivation Behind Why We Attend Music Festivals. *Journal of Music and Culture* 15, 1–10.

Oliver, R.L., 1980. A Cognitive Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Satisfaction Decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research* 17, 460–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378001700405>

Park, S., Reisinger, Y. & Kang, H., 2008. Visitors' Motivation for Attending the South Beach Wine and Food Festival, Miami Beach, Florida. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 25, 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400802402883>

Richards, G., 2009. The Impact of Cultural Tourism on the Development of Cultural Heritage. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 4, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17438730802127811>

Uysal, M. & Jurowski, C., 1994. Testing the Push and Pull Factors. *Annals of Tourism Research* 21, 844–846. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(94\)90091-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)90091-4)

Yao, J., 2010. Heritage Destination Attribute Performance and Experience Satisfaction. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 5, 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17438730903469890>

Yoon, Y., Lee, J. & Lee, C., 2010. Measuring Festival Quality and Value Affecting Visitors' Satisfaction and Loyalty Using a Structural Approach. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 29, 335–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2009.10.002>

Online Sources:

Association of Caribbean States, 2021. Carnival: When Culture Attracts Tourism. Available at: <https://www.acs-aec.org/en/news-release/carnival-when-culture-attracts-tourism> (Accessed: 21 April 2025).

Eventbrite, 2020. Millennials Fueling the Experience Economy - PDF Free Download.

Docplayer.net. Available at: <https://docplayer.net/17610128-Millennials-fueling-the-experience-economy.html> (Accessed: 19 July 2020).

Eventbrite, 2023. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) influences millennials to attend events, with 69% experiencing FOMO. Available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/blog/how-to-build-fomo-for-your-events-ds00/> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

Forbes, 2023. How Gen Z and Rich Consumers Are Re-Shaping the Experience Economy. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jefffromm/2023/11/09/gen-z-and-affluent-consumers-are-re-shaping-the-experience-economy/> (Accessed: 18 April 2025).

Future Markets Insights Inc., 2024. Event Tourism Market Insights – Growth & Forecast 2024-2034. Available at: <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/event-tourism-sector-outlook> (Accessed: 21 April 2025).

Mastercard Economics Institute, 2023. Travel Industry Trends 2023. Available at: <https://www.mastercardservices.com/en/advisors/economic-consulting/insights/travel-industry-trends-2023> (Accessed: 18 April 2025).

McLeod, Saul, 2020. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Simply Psychology. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> (Accessed: 16 July 2020).

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Trinidad and Tobago, 2025. Carnival 2025 Report. April 2, 2025.

Pine, J.B. II & Gilmore, J.H., 2014. Welcome to the Experience Economy. Harvard Business Review. Available at: <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy> (Accessed: 10 Mar. 2016).

World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020. Economic Impact Report 2020: Trinidad and Tobago. Available at: [chrome extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://mtca.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WTTC-Economic-Impact-Report-2020-T_TRResearch.pdf](chrome:extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://mtca.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/WTTC-Economic-Impact-Report-2020-T_TRResearch.pdf) (Accessed 22 April 2025).

Vérain, Luc, 2015. Tourists Motives, Expectations and Satisfaction. May 2015.

Lyons. Available at: https://youtu.be/CGvcHGYkJtA?si=gx_oIVfXXqJeUmYZ

Migrations Radio Show, 2010. Disc O Lypso: Oluko Imo – Praise Jah. Available at: <https://youtu.be/1cmRA7b9sAg?si=SC1yIfj1N3U5w7xX>

Nigerian Union Rhythm Group – Topic, 2023. Ojokolobo. Available at: https://youtu.be/1WxerOANsEc?si=b3IvAOVOCfv_2d3E

sonnowak, 2010. La Medicina - Zouk La Se Sel Medikaman Nou Ni. Available at: <https://youtu.be/6Vv1wxZAR1k?si=trMTHy7LBWuE31oK>

Spencer, E., 2013. Blue Boy – Soca Baptist (Classic). Available at: https://youtu.be/_c2wF4M9gnU?si=FWGCpvqME5k0C2zy

StationNoailles Marseille, 2012. Lord Kitchener – London is Good Place For Me (Itw, Live Acapella). Available at: https://youtu.be/7AprO_Z13LM?si=9aY10YO3PQNSnlyQ

TomJ, 2006. Maple Leaf Rag Played by Scott Joplin. Available at: https://youtu.be/pMAtL7n_rc?si=fCUc_R50IRXMNXYZ

TTGoldenAge, 2013. Jules Sims Native Trinidad Kalenda_1914. Available at: <https://youtu.be/2NwC7kqYzhg?si=WwMRq9n3OfyfuyNV>

Websites

- Bennet, M., 2017. The West India Regiments in the Anglo-Ashanti War, 1873–74. Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/west-india-regiment/articles/the-west-india-regiments-in-the-anglo-ashanti-war-1873-74> (Accessed 6 February 2023).
- Bradley, L.. 2016. Calypso and the birth of British black music. Available At: <https://www.bl.uk/windrush/articles/calypso-and-the-birth-of-british-black-music>
- Constance, Z. 2017. Calypso History Month # 28 Soca or Sokah. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/zeno.obl.9/posts/10154775790246065>
- Meschino, P., 2015. The Legendary Lionel Belasco: A Calypso Founding Father. Available at: <https://whensteeltalks.ning.com/forum/topics/the-legendary-lionel-belasco-a-calypso-founding-father>
- Phillips, M., 2011. Windrush - the Passengers. Available At: https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/windrush_01.shtml
- Vincent, R., n.d. Funk. *Available at:* <http://www.britannica.com/art/funk>. (Accessed May 18, 216).

Calypso Historiography – Who Wrote What and When

Roger Gibbs

Caribbean Drum Circle Facilitator, Student - York University,
Lead singer/guitarist -Shak Shak, Director –
Organization of Calypso Performing Artists (OCPA),
Musical Director – Canadian Caribbean Arts Network (C-CAN).
2-418 Merton Street, Toronto,
ON M4S 1B3 (416) 484-6914
Email: rogergibbs.email@gmail.com

Abstract

A chronological summary of the historiography of calypso situated in the broader context of Caribbean social history writing. The paper identifies what circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago gave rise to our knowledge of early oral histories of calypso, how calypso history writing emerged post-WWII and developed over the next six decades, who were the first academics to make formal inquiries on the topic and offers short reviews, their strengths and weaknesses of major works.

Keywords: Calypso, history, books, study, academic, historiography.

Introduction

The history of calypso has attracted significant scholarly discourse over the last forty years, partially because of the genre's steady decline in popularity in Trinidad and Tobago since the mid-1970s. Calypso saw a brief heyday of international recognition in the mid-1950s and as the dominant popular genre of music in the British Caribbean during the 1950s and 1960s. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, artists and their audiences had shifted to soca – a derivative of calypso “with strong bass-drum accents on downbeats, and lyrics that typically shun topical themes to set up a party ambience.” The transition to soca's simpler

lyrics, fresh rhythmic feel and the latest production values captured the spirit of a new

generation. As a result, calypso has been pushed to the margins of popular culture, a shadow of its former prominent role as the “poor man's newspaper” in Trinidad & Tobago. Today, calypso retains a niche market of faithful admirers and aficionados who value the heritage genre for its distinct rhythms and storytelling charm. This paper will review a non-exhaustive list of scholarly literature on calypso in a chronological fashion, discuss the major trends, and offer summary evaluations of how historians approached, discussed, and debated calypso.

Early History

Where and how the art of calypso originated has been a topic of discussion since the word's first appearance was recorded in 1882 in the diaries of a French priest Armand Massé, and first reported in newspaper publications in Trinidad in 1900. The context of the newspaper reports

suggests the word had already been in use for some time. The etymology of the word ‘calypso’ became a subject of debate, with authors proffering a range of sources, the most plausible believed to be a variant of the West African *kaiso*, derived from an *Ibibio*/Efik word meaning “get on” and used as an exclamation, such as “Bravo!” or “Let us join!”. This paper will not go into the details of the debate, but merely note that by 1900, the term calypso was being used by local media to describe the songs sung at Carnival. The debate about origin reflects the complex ethnic make-up of the island, each group asserting their version:

.. as “caliso” it is a Spanish Venezuelan topical song; from French “carrousseaux” meaning “debauch”; as “carieto” it is a song “used to heal the sick, to embolden the warrior, and to seduce the fair”; it comes from a Chinese insecticide called “calypso,” or even that they didn't know what to call it, so they “call-it-so.”

Calypso is considered a form of music and storytelling tracing back to West Africa's *jeliyah* and *griot* traditions. Early on, pioneer calypsonians and commentators voiced their varying opinions about the origins of calypso and its social dimensions, creating an oral history that was subsequently written down by historians of later generations.

However, calypso did not become a subject of interest to history writers until the second half of the twentieth century. Prior to that, general histories of Trinidad in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century dealt exclusively with political and economic history with a focus on the elites and treatment of the island's history, situated within the framework of the British Empire. Early general histories of the

Caribbean rarely mentioned music making, as social histories devoted to the everyday activities of the lower classes did not yet exist. We find occasional reference to the lives of the enslaved Africans and any mention was usually reported in circumstances where rebellions occurred, when maroon communities posed a challenge to local authorities, or when enslaved workers absconded or committed a crime. While genuine interest in the daily lives of the enslaved was a rare occurrence, some accounts do exist. It is from these early written accounts of the daily lives of the enslaved that we are able to obtain our first glimpse of the cultural practices of the labouring classes in emerging Caribbean societies, including descriptions of types of music and dance - practices from which calypso would eventually emerge in Trinidad. As early as the late 1700s, oral histories record the singing of praise songs in Diego Martin (a suburb of the capital Port of Spain) on the plantation of St. Hilaire Begorrat, who employed a servant to entertain his guests. The enslaved bard, Gros Jean, is one of the earliest known singers of what can be termed proto calypso. One report from 1823 gives the words to a song sung on a sugar plantation by workers and another on Carnival in 1840 mentions 'hundreds of negroes yelling out a savage Guinea song,' while an earlier account tells of an Ordinance passed in 1837 restricting the location and time of day various musical instruments could be played: namely 'any drum, gong tambour, bangee, or chac chac.'

Extant nineteenth century written references to proto calypso forms of music played in Trinidad - *belairs*, *calendas*, *joubas* - would have been in passing, usually within the context of personal diaries, local newspaper articles, and official documents containing references to the Carnival masking practices and crowd

behaviour. As is the case today, polite society's engagement with the Carnival was a seasonal affair, captured in comments regarding perennial efforts to control unruly public behaviour.

Prior to full Emancipation in 1838, the early 19th century Carnival masquerade *fêtes* and street parades were the domain of the French Creole upper classes who had established themselves in Trinidad by the late 1700s, and their music was played with guitars, violins, drum and castanets. Public and private correspondences on the Carnival activities from the immediate post-Emancipation period when the freed slaves began to take over the Carnival were characterized with general attitudes of ridicule and disgust towards the African sounding music making of the lower classes.

We will not dwell on all the disgusting and indecent scenes that were enacted in our Streets – we will not say how many we saw in a state so nearly approaching to nudity, as to outrage decency and shock modesty – we will not particularly describe the African custom of carrying a stuffed figure of a woman on a pole, which was followed by hundreds of negroes yelling out a savage Guinea song...

A report from the 1840s describe revellers, ...marching to the sound of well-played music – the violin, the guitar, the castanet, the drum, and the tambourine strike the ear in every direction. Some delight themselves in the emission and production of sounds of the wildest, most barbarous, and most unearthly description imaginable, and their instruments are as extraordinary as the sounds they make.'

Post-Emancipation, Carnival subsequently changed to feature more robust, African rhythm-driven sounds and percussion-led styles of music production and performance using, according to reports, ‘tin kettle, salt box, *banjee* drum, and shak-shaks.’ John Cowley quotes a recollection of the Carnival’s opening night festivity – the *Canboulay*.

The city was in total darkness at night in those days. When they came to some convenient spot the drummers put down the drum and sitting astride it preceded to *batte* tambour, the women who carried the shack-shacks making a vigorous accompaniment whilst the crowd danced Corlindas, the women singing Bel-Airs and *hallé stick* fighting waged among the men.

Trinidad’s rapid economic expansion over the course of 19th century precipitated decades of high immigration from neighbouring islands, Africa, India and Southeast Asia, North America, parts of Western Europe, and nearby Venezuela, fuelling turbulent changes, along with the attendant social and political conflicts that characterize the Jannet Carnival of this period.

Clashes between Carnival revellers and the authorities reached a boiling point by the early 1880s, resulting in riots known as the Canboulay Riots. This brought harsh crackdowns and the passing of additional laws and restrictions on the torch-led processions, the *kalenda* stickfighting, and the use of drums. This gave way to increased middle-class involvement in the Carnival and efforts by commercial businesses and various interested parties to “improve” the Carnival – a trend that would continue into the twentieth century.

The emergence of Trinidad’s multiracial English-speaking middle class by the end of the century gave impetus to calypso to transition from being sung in *Patois* or French Creole to English. The music of the street processions – call-and-response chants, simple four-line stanzas (single tone), calenda and *belair* melodies, expanded to eight-line (double tone) songs of ridicule and bombast, performed in rudimentary concert settings in the Carnival yards. Martin Raymond writes,

It is generally acknowledged though that the first commercial Calypso tent featuring a formal 2-hour show was established in 1921 by Walter “Railway” Douglas (1885 – 1982). Located at 26 Duncan Street, Port of Spain, this tent featured performances solely from Douglas accompanying himself on the guitar. He also provided a sawdust floor, flambeaux for lighting and seating for ticketed patrons.

By the 1930s, a complex of Carnival traditions had sprung up in major towns, completing the move from the Carnival yards and from *chantuelles* leading the bands in street parades, to taking on a more formal mode of production and presentation. A diverse group of calypsonians of various hues but mainly African descent, developed reputations for lyrically expounding on topical issues of the day, often in controversial ways, and their popular songs became important conduits for expression of public opinion.

Calypso Recording

It is necessary to take a brief look at the sound recordings which advanced the development of the genre. Of the Caribbean islands, Trinidad is unique in the number of recordings that were done pre-WWII. The first sound recordings of instrumental

calypso (called *paseos*) were made in 1912 by Lovey's Band, a top-tier, local 12-piece string band that traveled to New York and recorded eight tracks for the Victor Talking Machine Company and fourteen for the Columbia Gramophone Company. The CD liner notes in a book that accompanies the 100-year anniversary reissue by Bear Family Records reveal the interesting fact that,

Their recording sessions precede by eighteen months the first sessions by jazz pioneer James Reese Europe's Society Orchestra and came a decade before North American black instrumental music routinely appeared on records.

The first recording of calypso in Trinidad was made in September, 1914 by a team sent from New Jersey, USA by Victor and was sung by Henry Julian under the sobriquet J. Resigna (a.k.a, Iron Duke / Julian White Rose), along with *calendas* by Jules Sims. WWI interrupted further recordings, which would resume into the 1920s but done exclusively in New York City under band leaders such as Walter Merrick, Cyril Monroe, Gerald Clark, and the prolific Lionel Belasco. By the 1930s calypso had become firmly established in Trinidad as a popular local genre of music, thanks mainly to the production and distribution of 78 r.p.m. sound recordings and the growing private ownership of gramophones to broadcast the music to a wider audience. The culturally dynamic Harlem music scene of the 1920s would prove a fertile space for calypso singers and musicians to exchange ideas within New York's prominent jazz and Black dance music fraternity. The essentially Afro-Latin syncopation of calypso and its exotic sounding lyrical style appealed to New York's cosmopolitan audiences.

The growth of recordings and record sales in Trinidad was also greatly aided by the opening of Sa Gomes' Radio Emporium in Port of Spain, his subsequent importation and distributions of records, and his active role in producing calypso records. Calypsonians' enhanced popularity regularly faced official censorship and condemnation from conservative quarters, which only added reasons for antiestablishment voices in society to come to their defense. The 1930s witnessed a series of widespread labour unrest in the Caribbean, the consequence of the region's stagnant economic growth and unresponsive colonial governments. Although Trinidad had seen a steady rise in oil revenues from the 1910s and 1920s, by the 1930s, the unequal distribution of wealth and resources was an increasingly conspicuous economic blight. This set the stage for calypso to express dissent in creative ways and to voice the concerns of the oppressed even as plain clothed police monitored their performances. Singer's use of *double entendre*, euphemisms and clever barbs attacking the society's endeared calypsonians to local audiences and kept them one step ahead of the censors.

When calypsonians were not pointing their verbal weapons at local high society and political intrigues, they took the opportunity to travel and record in New York City, making significant contributions to the vibrant Black cultural scene of the Harlem Renaissance. Major American and British record labels took a particular interest in the music of Trinidad in the late 1930s, competing for the growing demand for calypso records and by doing so, gave us today a priceless archive of recorded music from this era.

Writing about early calypso discography, Lise Winer expounds on calypso lyrics, its use of dialect, basic African rhythm,

including lapsing into speech rhythm, also notes that,

Most of the classical recordings, made by American recording companies such as Decca and Brunswick, featured a relatively small number of calypsonians including Executor, Atilla, Lion, Tiger, Radio, Growler, Invader, Beginner, Small Island Pride and Houdini. (No recordings have yet been found in this corpus for other famous early singers like King Fanto, Chieftain Douglas or Pretender.

Advances in technology resulted in the opening of the island's first radio station in 1947 - Radio Trinidad on the 730 AM frequency. This development further raised public appreciation of recorded music, including calypso.

Post WWII Scholarship

It is safe to say that what historical knowledge of calypso we have today from the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century is from information in various surviving documents, recordings, and oral history sources. It was not until the post-WWII period that the West Indies saw an increase in the volume of history writing, and the beginning of the professionalization of the discipline in the 1950s. It was in this expanded context of history writing that calypso finally came under the scrutiny of amateur and professional academics. In discussing Caribbean history writing from 1940 into the 1970s Emeritus Professor Woodville Marshall of the University of the West Indies noted a sharp rise in general literature and specialist literature, the two categories occasionally overlapping, as in Dr Eric Williams' seminal tome *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), considered a foundational work in the field of Caribbean

historiography. Marshall noted that pioneer works and those of the imperial historians of the first three decades of the 20th century were expanded and revised by the 1970s, as well as increases in the production and accessibility of regional and island histories. Scholarly Caribbean social history writing as a specialised field emerged only in the 1950s and expanded into the 1960s and 1970s, fuelled by an emerging post-war, nationalist West Indian consciousness and advances in the establishment of academic institutions and forums in the Caribbean. This set the stage for the publication of works which dealt with the topics of Carnival and folklore. Calypso historiography – the topic of this paper – emerged within this subset of literary output.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Caribbean region's exceptional cultural diversity attracted the interest of American and British anthropologists seeking ways to expand their knowledge of folk traditions and the development of theories and methodologies to explain the origin and nature of New World societies. As early as 1947, Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, American anthropologists who studied African cultures and their diaspora in the Americas and who helped establish African and African American studies in American academia, published a 351-page book on family life and religious practices in Toco, a small, remote village in northeast Trinidad. Unlike the views of earlier Eurocentric scholars who interpreted the region's music as peripheral and based on concepts of "primitive" versus "civilized" people, post WWII Caribbean ethnomusicological inquiry concerned itself primarily with identifying the retention of African forms and practices, and in creating a theoretical framework which sought to understand non-European folk music and cultures within their own

context. Visiting scholars to Trinidad and Tobago were ably assisted by local folklorists and educators Andrew Carr, J.D. Elder and others in their studies. Armed with new recording technologies and funded by grants from prestigious foundations and academic institutions, these social anthropologists and ethnomusicologists conducted fieldwork which produced early recordings of traditional and popular genres of music.

Calypso Historiography

The first known book with information on calypso was published in the 1944 by journalists Charles S. Espinet and Harry Potts during WWII, when Trinidad saw a large influx of American personnel onto a military base established at Chaguaramas. The island's dazzling Carnival and its exotic calypso - already fashionable in New York's famed Harlem jazz and Latin American quarters in the 1930s - caught the fancy of visiting Americans. This likely inspired Espinet and Potts to undertake their modest but ground-breaking 75-page summary of Trinidad's Carnival culture. The work introduced calypso to the reader, gave a brief history of its sociocultural context and offered an overview of its origin and development.

1950s

In the 1950s, a series of academic works were published by Andrew Pearse, a British sociologist who came to live and work in Latin America. Pearse's output, some of which is on nineteenth century Trinidad carnival and calypso, were based on research he conducted and on oral histories he collected. Of particular interest here is information Pearse received from Mitto Sampson, a local writer who provided him many stories he had heard from his grandmother. She had received them from her grandmother who kept a journal. These oral histories provide rare and fascinating

glimpses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and give us a feel of the colourful and often violent lives of early practitioners of calypso. One story tells us that,

Another famous singer of Caiso of this period was Papa Cochon, who is remembered perhaps more as a notorious obeah man and finder of hidden treasures. Through his dreaming ability, he is reported to have discovered large quantities of pirate gold for his masters on the Manzanilla beach and at Mucurapo. His powers of divination trebled the wealth of his owners and raised him almost to the status of a relative. They consulted him for everything including the capture of runaway slaves. It is said that when Papa Cochon whistled, the birds flew to him. He prayed snakes to death and the wildest animals grew docile in his presence.

In 1958, Daniel J. Crowley, an American art historian and cultural anthropologist who studied the cultural expressions of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, published 'Trinidad Carnival Songs and Dance' which gave a brief overview of calypso music and dance. He situated calypso as a close relative of Afro-Cuban music, while in another paper he presented the first attempted definition of calypso and probe of its origin. In referring to calypso's explosion in popularity in North America, he noted that, '(D)uring the recent craze, any song with strongly stressed rhythm and words sung in West Indian accent was called a calypso.' Crowley points to the inter-island nature of calypso's origins and development but settles on a definition of the genre as an urban Trinidadian topical song of derision, allusion, and *double entendre*. He writes,

The words tend to take precedence over the music, and employ local lower-class idiom, a Creole vocabulary, and an exaggeration of local stress patterns. Calypsos usually have four verses of eight lines each, except that the first two lines of the first verse are repeated. Verses are separated from one another by a 4-line chorus, and the rhyme scheme is simple. Calypso music is based on perhaps fifty traditional melodies which are revised and reworked constantly to fit new verbal material. They are played in 2/4 or 4/4 time with off-beat phrasing by a small band of ordinary string and wind instruments and shak-shak, but usually without drums. The music of calypsos may be played on tuned steel oil drums, as in the "jump-up" street dancing of Carnival. When used in a ballroom, the "calypso dance" is similar to a fast rhumba.

Later in 1966, Crowley would produce a paper on the first use of the word "calypso" and set down the various positions held concerning its origin, information which would be much referenced by later authors. In general, calypso history writing of the 1950s was done by outside academics seeking to shed light on the music. By then, calypso was experiencing a huge surge in international popularity which led to the first million-selling long-playing album in the history of recorded music titled 'Calypso' by Harry Belafonte (1956). Other mainstream American artists jumped on the bandwagon and recorded many pop versions of calypso songs, creating a body of work that sounded notably different from the calypso of the islands and resulting in binary streams of calypso production. Looking back at this unprecedented period

of international popularity in the United States, Yale a professor of English and African Studies, Shane Vogel, writes,

Almost overnight, calypso became the top-selling music in North America—for a brief time it even threatened to supplant rock and roll, according to *Variety*, *Billboard*, and other trade magazines that tracked its popularity. For a few fleeting months, middle-class US consumers helped turn the novelty of calypso into a mass culture fad. This national sensation presented a spectacle of mid-century popular Caribbeana, standardized a world region, and transformed Trinidadian folk culture into a commodity. Suddenly calypso was everywhere, and black performers took up the opportunities of the fad with wit, energy, and a weary familiarity. The entertainment world quickly crowned Belafonte the King of Calypso.

While the "calypso craze" was short-lived, the phenomenon made a huge impact back in the Caribbean by boosting a wider acceptance and appreciation of calypso in a region still in the grip of colonial attitudes and social apartheid norms. Calypso's newfound prestige and regional popularity was also aided by the availability of a steady stream of high-quality recordings released on the Cook Records label between 1956 and 1962 and the spread of radio broadcasts. The impact of calypso's international popularity outside of Trinidad would emerge as a major theme in calypso writing.

1960s

Calypso in the Caribbean reached the zenith of popularity in the 1960s with the coming

of age of Trinidad and Tobago's post-war baby boom generation. A cohort of outstanding exponents of the art form - too numerous to mention - became local and regional celebrities. Calypsonians' rise to fame was concurrent with the growing sense of nationalism and cultural identity across the region and efforts by the British government and regional leaders to forge what became a short-lived federation out of all their West Indian colonies. Renee Nelson writes in her abstract to an article in the *Journal of Caribbean History*,

The West Indies Federation was an experiment in self-government undertaken by ten of Britain's West Indian colonies between 1958 and 1962. With the aim of achieving independence and economic self-sufficiency as a single unit, the colonies were encouraged to embark upon this path by the British government in the aftermath of the Second World War. Britain, devastated by the war, wanted to reduce its extensive colonial empire. Federal unity seemed the only way for the mostly small, scattered island territories - who already had prior experience in regional collaboration - to survive on the world stage.

Despite the widespread popularity of calypso in the 1960s and a voluminous output of recorded musical work, academic attention was slow to come. Overall, scholarly writing was sporadic – mostly magazine articles and the publishing of collections of calypso lyrics. There was sustained interest in the island's folklore and the period produced one of the greatest contributing authors of works on the folk music and culture, including calypso – Jacob Delworth Elder. Born in Charlotteville, Tobago, Jacob Delworth

Elder (1913–2003) began his distinguished career as a teacher and community development officer. He obtained his Ph.D. in anthropology in the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania in 1965 and lectured at Temple University. He then spent four years in the mid-1970s in Nigeria as a research professor at the University of Ibadan and as dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. Elder, along with Espinet, Carr and others had earlier assisted outside scholars Lomax, Pearse and Crowley in their research. His biography on the website of **the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE)** notes that he conducted,

...(E)xtensive field research on the history of kalinda, pan, calypso, and other aspects of Carnival, as well as steel bands, the Yoruba religion, Caribbean folktales (and their connections with the African continent) helped make the music and cultural traditions of his islands as respectable to the islanders themselves as they were to the world at large. "It was he who introduced me to the incredible culture of Trinidad and Tobago during the two magic weeks I spent there in 1962," Alan Lomax wrote of his longtime comrade and colleague.

Notable among his numerous publications are 'A Study of Aggression in Trinidad with Reference to the Role of Traditional Music', and 'Evolution of the Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago: A Socio-historical Analysis of Song-change'. The former is an exposition of the oppressive socio-cultural conditions of the early Carnival's music and dance and complements the oral histories of Mitto

Sampson, while the latter is his PhD. Dissertation analysing change in the calypso genre. With a deep knowledge of the island's rich folk traditions, Elder presented calypso as a form of popular black lower-class expression of resistance, music which borrowed from various 19th century traditions – the *gayape* (work songs), sea shanties, *bélé* songs, the *bamboula* songs and drumming, the *bongo* funerary chants and drumming, Yoruba *orisha* music, and in particular, the *kalinda* stick fighting drumming and chants. His Ph.D. paper on the evolution of calypso gives us the first detailed look into the working of calypso music. To quote Elder, he sets out in his thesis to,

Analyse and describe variation occurring over one hundred years (1850-1960) in the structure, style and content of the calypso and in organizational features of the calypso tradition.

Following in the footsteps of anthropological inquiry of the day, Elder examines a broad sample of folk music going back to the 1700s and down to calypsos of the 1950s, using a version of Lomax's cantometrics to quantify the amount of African versus European retention in calypso. He identifies major song forms and their variables; he also gives brief descriptions of the various melodic structures, the use of language, rhyme and phrasing. In general terms, Elder writes,

Calypso is the result of cross-fertilization between a number of European and African musical features. What this Study seeks to do is to (a) identify and trace back to their ethnic origins the dominant features of calypso, and (b) show how the selective process which underlies song-change emphasizes

African or European traits at different stages in the development of Negro folk-song in Trinidad.

Elder provides valuable ethnographic history of calypso and the major lyrical themes, laying a foundation for many future authors on which to build. He published several academic articles in this period - "Colour, Music and Conflict: a Study of Aggression in Trinidad with reference to the Role of Traditional Music" (1964), "The Calypso and Its Morphology" (1973), "From Congo Drum to Steelband" (1972), and "Lopinot: A Socio-Cultural Study of Rural Life in Transition" (1973). In 1968, Elder published a paper in the Caribbean Quarterly Journal entitled "The Male/Female Conflict In Calypso," opening a new avenue in the exploration of the impact of gender, a theme that would later attract the interest of a number of female scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s, and informed the work of Rudolph Ottley. He continued to publish into the 1990s - *Folk Songs from Tobago*, a unique collection of early Tobago *bélé* songs, jigs, bongo chants, sea shanties, and other folk material. J.D. Elder stands out as an early academic who understood the intimate connection between calypso and the traditional forms and was able to delve in the technical workings of the music. In the words of Maureen Warner-Lewis,

Supported by the analyses and theoretical viewpoints of such people as Melville Herskovits, Franz Boas, Alan Lomax, and Daniel Crowley, Elder became a crusader for the recognition of the cultural worth and academic potential of the study and preservation of the folkways of the Caribbean.

Warner-Lewis states that Elder was instrumental in securing governmental financial support for the establishment of a National Cultural Council in 1971, but notes that,

...he eventually became disillusioned by the government's failure to develop and sustain a cultural program, relying instead on the promotion of an annual Best Village program that showcased cultural performances. He felt this was an abrogation of a commitment to scientific work and the substitution instead of cultural promotion for its entertainment value and the diversion of competition.

In 1981, Elder was awarded the Humming Bird Medal for his contribution to cultural research and the development of Trinidad and Tobago, and in 1988 the French government named him Officier des Palmes académiques, an award given for the advancement of the image and culture of France abroad.

In 1967, Errol Hill, a Trinidadian-born playwright, actor and theatre historian, and since the 1940s "one of the leading pioneers in the West Indies theatre". weighed in on the calypso topic. Growing up within Trinidad's carnival culture, Hill's paper titled "On the Origin of the Term Calypso" expanded on Crowley's initial etymological findings. Hill suggests that none of the theories are fully established, and states,

I am still unable to account for the strikingly curious fact that none of the nineteenth-century writers, including the few who might be considered partial to Negro entertainments, were familiar with the term kaiso in any of its various forms. At least they seem never to

have used it. The names most frequently employed in alluding to Trinidad Negro songs and dances in this period are bamboula, calinda, and belair (or bélé), while insurrectionary songs form a separate category. All of these and other religious and work songs of the Negroes have left their mark on the calypso of today.

1970

In early 1970, Trinidad and Tobago experienced political and social upheaval when public protests led by mostly trade unionists and students took to the streets and threatened to overthrow the government. In what became known as the Black Power Uprising or February Revolution, left-wing groups protested the colonial systems and racist hierarchies that survived independence. Scholarly writing on calypso seems to have taken a backseat during this decade as writers turned their attention to other matters. The scarcity of academic work in the 1970s can perhaps be explained by calypso's omnipresence in popular culture of the 1960s and early 1970s which may have precluded the detached stance required of professional Caribbean historians of the day and, according to Emeritus Professor of History, University of the West Indies, Sir Woodville Marshall, historians distrust of 'instant history'. There also remained a general dismissive attitude towards calypso as pop culture in the echelons of academia, a subject not yet worthy of serious academic inquiry.

The University of the West Indies at St. Augustine, Trinidad produced a number of booklets documenting popular Carnival calypsos, and the Caribbean Quarterly published an article by Roy L. Austin on the theme of male/female conflict in calypso

lyrics. Austin challenged the earlier findings of J. D. Elder, questioning the validity of Elder's assumptions on which he based his explanations of casual misogyny in calypso lyrics, and suggesting they were not supported by the data. No other major works on calypso are to be found, the exception to this being *The Trinidad Carnival* by Errol Hill, who gives a definitive account of the birth and development of the Carnival, along with the rise of the calypso tents and steelband's birth and development. While not dealing with calypso exclusively, the Trinidadian-born playwright and theater historian did contribute several works on Carnival, one calling for a national theatre inspired by the Carnival Arts. It was in the 1980s when a more sustained output of scholarly writing on calypso started to appear.

1980s

Several important contributions to the history of calypso appeared in the eighties, exploring various themes such as the literary value of calypso lyrics, the effect of changes in calypso's socio-cultural milieu on calypso's themes, and the spread of calypso to diaspora Caribbean communities abroad. The 1980s also saw the steady rise in popularity of soca, a derivative of calypso. Classic calypso, along with the post-WWII cohort of calypso exponents, was gradually being overtaken by soca's broad appeal featuring newer, younger artists.

A sharp rise of calypso and soca productions out of Barbados and neighbouring islands began to capture the imagination of audiences in The Land of Calypso, creating a "Bajan invasion" in the 1990s featuring artists like Mighty Gabby, Red Plastic Bag, Rupee, Alison Hinds and bands Krosfyah, Square One and Coalishun. In addition, The 1980s dramatic increase across the Caribbean in the

popularity of reggae derivatives – ragga and dub – served to diminish interest in calypso. American cultural penetration throughout the Caribbean and the world continued its expansion with its hegemonic control over the mass marketing of music and threatening the ability of local expressive cultures to survive and thrive. The global popularity of Jamaican reggae in the 1970s and its superstar Bob Marley had by then almost completely obscured calypso's international legacy.

The rise in popularity of soca ignited great debate on its merits and whether it represented a new style of music or a simply version of calypso – a vigorous debate that continues to this day. Contributing to the debate in 1981, Trinidadian scholar Selwyn Ahyoung offered a competent ethnomusicological analysis of calypso in a 1981 doctoral thesis devoted understanding the difference between calypso and soca. He concluded that,

The most significant difference that this new form-type brings to the genre, is a change in rhythmic structure. Soca can also be described as the latest paradigm in the calypso genre.

Ahyoung sets out to answer the question stated in his Foreword, "What is soca and its socio-cultural significance?" The writer further tells us that "the factors of stability of form within the calypso genre and the norm of variability in its style are the main concerns of this study." Ahyoung builds on the work of J. D. Elder, whose work identified "variations occurring over one hundred years(1850-1960) in the structure, style and content of the calypso, and in organizational features of the calypso tradition." Ahyoung's paper gave a concise summary of Afro-American (North America) music, e.g. soul, funk, disco,

modern jazz, soul jazz, contemporary gospel, as a major influencer of calypso. Furthermore, noting the lack of scholarly data, he offered a summary of the Indian music of Trinidad, exploring possible contributions to calypso of *bihara*, *chowtal*, and *tassa* drumming - a topic until then the focus of little attention.

A short history of calypso was published in 1983 by one of its early practitioners – Raymond Quevedo, known as Atilla the Hun (1892-1962) from an unfinished manuscript on calypso history which had remained unpublished for twenty-one years. Atilla, along with Roaring Lion, Beginner, Executor, Tiger, Growler and others, was among the top tier of calypsonians of the 1930s and 1940s, and a pioneer in spreading calypso to the USA. His recollections offered valuable information on the early development of the calypso tents, personal details on singers, and the origins of early calypso. Atilla's reflections reveal the many sources from which calypsonians found inspiration, often borrowing melodies from other islands and adapting older *bele*, *kalinda*, *bongo*, *shango*, and *gayap* or work songs at a time when knowledge of copyright was minimal or non-existent. Noting his half-a-century career as a kaiso singer, he tells us,

Kaiso is a particular form of folk song undeniably African in origin which was brought by the African slaves to the West Indies. Conditioned historically by its new environment and by French acculturation, the kaiso developed most distinctively in Trinidad into a form of mass art in song and dance uniquely or typically West Indian.

Atilla adds,

In kaiso two basic verse or stanza forms are identifiable. They are

known traditionally in kaiso parlance as the “single tone” and the “double tone”. The single tone is comprised of four-line stanzas while the double tone consists of eight-line stanzas.

Notably, he was an elected member of the Port of Spain City Council and became Deputy Mayor. He went on to be elected to the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago, an unusually high position for a calypsonian in that era.

In 1982, Keith Warner published *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*, which as the title suggests, explores the themes of calypso's lyrical canon. In her review of *Kaiso!*, Maureen Warner-Lewis writes,

...(H)e emphasises the effect on content of colonialism and political independence in Trinidad, the home of calypso; changes in public expectations, tastes, and educational standards; the interrelation of music and lyric, of lyric composer and singer, of calypso format and the recording industry, and between radio and calypso's limited seasonal popularity.

Raphael de Leon a.k.a Roaring Lion (1908-1999) published a book in which he challenged the African roots of calypso, suggesting its origins in France and the folk songs of Trinidad's aboriginal peoples. As calypso gave way to soca in Trinidad as the music of the Carnival, the topic continued to attract attention from academics abroad. Articles in journals, such as English author John Cowley's 'Cultural 'Fusions': Aspects of British West Indian Music in the USA and Britain 1918-51' examined calypso in diaspora communities and its impact. Susan Campbell, a Canadian who studied at

McGill University in Montreal and lived in Trinidad in the 1970s, explored the popular theme of calypso as the popular voice of resistance in a class struggle. Fellow Canadian, Lise Winer, earned her doctorate in Linguistics from the University of the West Indies (UWI) and contributed a scholarly paper which examined the rich vocabulary of Creole Trinidadian dialect in calypso. Winer was fascinated by the local Trinidadian dialect and through great persistence, eventually produced an invaluable dictionary of the English Creole languages of Trinidad and Tobago, shining light on the island's rich lexical heritage.

Errol Hill continued to publish papers on calypso, contributing in 1989 'Calypso and War' which explored the relationship of calypso's traditional storytelling role in the context of local and international conflicts and struggles. Calypso as a voice of popular resistance, with a focus on its lyrics, continued to be the dominant theme in academic writing. The 1980s witnessed Caribbean governments taking a more active interest in using culture as a tool of forging national identities, investing in cultural infrastructure and programmes in the performing arts and related disciplines. Leaders were quick to recognize the political mileage and economic benefits which could be gained from playing a leading role in the cultural sector. The consequence of this expansion of capacity of the cultural sector was an increase in the number of literary publications on calypso.

1990s

The final decade of the twentieth century saw a steep increase in scholarly publications on calypso, beginning with the publication of the most ambitious work on calypso so far by Gordon Rohlehr. *Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, is

an outstanding tome of over 600 pages. Reviewer Stephen Steumpfle called it 'a wide-ranging exploration of the literary and social dimensions of calypso from the nineteenth century to 1962. Grappling with the idea of defining a Caribbean aesthetic and using music to understand society, throughout *Calypso & Society* Rohlehr emphasises the poetry and artistry of calypso. In addition to writing several books on different aspects of Caribbean culture, Rohlehr came back to the calypso topic regularly over his illustrious career which had begun in the 1960s. He succinctly captured this in his title, *My Whole Life is Calypso: Essays on Sparrow*, published in 2015. His masterpiece, *Calypso & Society*, detailed the development of calypso from its early days down to the year of Trinidad & Tobago's independence, providing readers, as stated in his foreword, a focus on 'factors such as immigration, multi-ethnicity, cultural confrontation, conflict and erosion, cultural formation, gender, class, humour, commercialism, ideological conflict, political development, tradition and change.' Rohlehr demonstrates a firm grasp of the literary value of calypso and offers poignant insights into individual practitioners and the community which supported them. In 1996, he published a paper which bemoaned the decline of calypso because of the commodification of Carnival, the absence of any coherent national cultural policy, and the pressure from external cultural influences powerfully promoted by the foreign media. Not long afterward, a distinguished American cultural anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, Donald R. Hill, published *Calypso Calaloo – Early Carnival Music in Trinidad* in 1993. Hill presented the fascinating story of calypso and its sociocultural impact beyond Trinidad, the 'various contexts and media

environments, including the Carnival streets; Carnival tents where calypsos were sung; phonograph records of calypso and related songs and dances; shows, theatres and clubs where the songs were performed; and films in which calypso was featured.’ His book provides an understanding of how American musical culture embraced calypso and gave it a short-lived international profile. Another significant work from the mid-1990s is John Cowley’s *Carnival, Canboulay & Calypso – Traditions in the Making*. While covering the same historical ground as previous writers, Cowley employed a range of new research methods and sources of evidence. Cowley’s meticulous research of nineteenth-century Carnival brought to light a number of fascinating stories and expanded on existing ones. Later in 2006, Cowley would contribute several essays and a valuable annotated discography of early calypso recordings (1912-1940) for a book included with Bear Family Records’ *West Indian Rhythms* 10-CD compilation. European academic, Andreas Meyer, published an article in German analysing calypso melodies and also contributed a biographical portrait one of the leading calypsonians of the 1940s and 1950s – The Mighty Bomber. The increase in calypso articles published in international journals included Cynthia Mahabir, who presented an interesting comparison of the double-edged function of clever word play or wit in calypso and blues lyrics – the use of caricature and mockery in the former versus irony and absurdity in the latter.

American historian and ethnomusicologist Shannon Dudley authored “Judging 'By the Beat': Calypso versus Soca.” In addition to giving an overview of the sociocultural changes in Trinidad and tracking the recent changes in the music, Professor Dudley took a scholarly look at the technical aspects of the music, as J.D. Elder had done

in the 1960s, by analyzing the rhythms which constitute the distinctive calypso sound. Departure from the traditional approach to focussing almost exclusively on calypso’s literary value and its social and political impact, Ronald Aquí and Rellon Brown (1999) self-published a tutorial-styled book on hand drumming in which showed a range of the traditional Trinidadian drum rhythms including the *kalinda* calypso. This approach of linking calypso to traditional drum rhythms is very relevant in exploring the African origins of the music and explaining the qualities that gives the music its character.

Cultural advocate Rudolph Ottley, who completed his Ph.D. in Cultural Studies at the University of Trinidad & Tobago, wrote an impressive number of books on calypso and the Carnival Arts from the mid-1990s onward, becoming arguably the most prolific contemporary writer on calypso. Notably, he produced two volumes on women in calypso (1992 and 2007), three on calypsonian biographies (1995, 1998 and 2008), and one on the history of calypso tents (2019). The first two volumes were important in shining light of the contributions of women to the genre, while the latter three volumes leverage his diverse experience in calypso tent management, as a producer, calypso judge and an administrator in the calypso community, to compile a who’s who in field. In his calypso tent book, his knowledge of the calypso community and Carnival Arts sector is augmented by his inclusion of copious selection of old photos, newspaper advertisements and reviews, and copies of pertinent correspondence, meeting notes and documents. Ottley rarely goes beyond exposition and descriptions of the wide range of material he covers to offer interpretation or analysis of events, historical trends and changes.

2000s

The turn of the twenty-first century found the Caribbean music under transformative pressures from globalization and the impact of external political and economic influence. The first post-independence generation's ideals of forging cultural identities free from colonial control had by the 1980s given way to even more insidious forms of cultural domination, fuelled by local governments' acquiescent adoption of neoliberal economic policies and its accompanying neocolonial cultural modes and structures. A resulting polarization played out across the social spectrum, on one hand driving forward the commodification of the Carnival and an embrace of popular American culture, and on the other hand, stimulating in some quarters reactions of renewed interest in preserving cultural heritage.

At the dawn of the century, calypso found a champion in one of its own in the works of Hollis Liverpool, a.k.a. Mighty Chalkdust, a nine-time winner of Trinidad's Calypso Monarch competition, most recently in 2017. A highly talented composer in the oratorical or social commentary style of calypso, "Chalkie", as he became affectionally known, used his teaching background to move freely between the world of entertainment and academia. He rose to calypso competition prominence in the mid-seventies and remained a towering figure in the highly competitive calypso arena for over forty years. Earning a Ph.D. in history and ethnomusicology from the University of Michigan, Liverpool was fascinated with the African contribution to Trinidad and Tobago and the region's polyglot culture. In 2001, Liverpool expanded on his 1993 doctoral dissertation and produced *Rituals of Power & Rebellion*, a critical study of the African roots of Trinidad's carnival and calypso. Motivated by a contention that existing scholarly literature did not adequately

credit African contributions to the formation and

evolution of the Carnival arts, Liverpool explores the racial politics, examining the acculturation process involving African and European traditions of music and masquerades. In 2003, he published a socio-cultural history of calypso from 1900 to 2003 titled *From the Horses Mouth*. In it the veteran calypsonian utilized his many close personal contacts in the calypso community to interview elder practitioners, notably Roaring Lion and Lord Pretender, and provides a highly readable and revealing ethnography. Kanchan Gilfillian, freelance writer, explains that the book,

"... gives us an intimate look at some of the personal trials and triumphs of the creators and exponents of calypso, in the context of their individual development as performers and in the broader context of society at large. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the world of calypso through the eyes of those calypsonians that were and are an integral part of the development and evolution of the art form."

In 2002, Louis Regis (1952-2018) used his dissertation "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the post-1970 Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago." Other notable publications of this century's first decade include Kim Johnson's *From Tin Pan to TASPO – Steelband in Trinidad, 1939-1951*, which while not specifically on calypso, is relevant because of the intimate relationship between the invention of the steelpan, the spread of this unique musical instrument, and the huge impact the instrument has had on the musical evolution of the calypso. The steelpan community produced an impressive number of calypsonians, arrangers and musicians, none more illustrious than Aldwyn Roberts

– the Lord Kitchener, also known as “The Grandmaster of Calypso.” Johnson emphasized the dynamic role of the individual pan pioneers as creative souls, as opposed to the standard “music as resistance” approach, and characterized cultural creativity as a reflective response to oppression. Johnson followed up with *If Yuh Iron Good You Is King - The Pan Pioneers* in 2006. The 1950s saw the gradual adoption of elements of “engine room” percussion in the calypso and more amplified sounds in calypso, replacing the earlier more acoustic sound of the 1930s and the even earlier Venezuelan string band and jazz combo and big band instrumentation. Trinidad calypso began to assert a more African percussion-driven sound, perhaps a reflection of society’s movements towards decolonization.

The past two decades of scholarship has continued to treat calypso within the context of Carnival in Trinidad and in the diaspora Caribbean communities. Ray Allen (2019), a professor of music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, who also directs the American Studies Program, wrote a comprehensive account of calypso history in New York City, pointing out the transnational nature of the calypso world. Jocelyne Guilbault, an ethnomusicologist and popular music studies scholar who has been teaching at Berkeley since 1999, examined the sociocultural and political influences of the diaspora communities on competition calypso lyric themes in her paper for *Small Axe* – a Caribbean journal.

Several scholarly works on calypso have come out of the University of Trinidad & Tobago (UTT), a state owned university in Trinidad and Tobago established in 2004 with its main campus located at Wallerfield in central Trinidad. Of note here are Martin Raymond’s 2014 Master’s thesis which presented a concise history of the calypso

tents and an assessment of four of them currently in operation, while Maarten Manmohan’s 2015 Master’s thesis departed from the standard focus of calypso lyrics by offering an innovative look at the changes in electric guitar playing in calypso and soca music over a 20-year period. Manmohan adapted Alan Lomax’s Cantometrics methodology to analyze the winning Calypso and Soca Monarch, and Road March songs. The use of this method to understanding calypso opened new territory for a more granular look at how calypso is played, how it was performed in the past, and how the music evolved. Manmohan’s paper gave a great deal of new information on the different eras from a sound perspective– the combo, the “big band”, the funk/rock guitar and electronic keyboard driven sound of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the impact of new technologies. Calypso, always an eclectic style of music, has many stories to tell and Manmohan’s approach could easily be adopted to look at calypso music’s relationship with other Caribbean and West African dance music genres. Simon Browne, an English scholar who has been teaching at the University of Trinidad & Tobago since, published his Master thesis on calypso between 1912 and 1933. Browne’s study ‘places the string band recordings of Lovey’s Band and Lionel Belasco

within the development of Trinidad’s calypso music.’ He covers the ensembles and the musicians, transcribes and analyses the music for changes in instrumentation, and offers explanations on how African drum rhythms remained an influence despite their absence on recordings.

The topic of women in calypso and soca received a thorough examination in 2016 by Hope Munroe, an associate professor of music at California State University. Titled *What She Go Do: Women in Afro-*

Trinidadian Music. published by University Press of Mississippi and notable as the first full-length book on the topic in the U.S.A., this ethnographic work was an extension of her dissertation. According to reviewer Anjelica Fabro, the author provides a historical account of women in Afro-Trinidadian music from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Pointing out that while calypso in most of the twentieth century has been an exclusively male domain, early on Afro-Trinidadian women were active performers in *calinda* (stick fighting) and carnival. It was not until Calypso Rose's debut in the 1960s that audiences were exposed to female perspectives on social issues, a trend in calypso and soca which has surged in the last thirty years. Munroe's comparing of the upbringings and careers of Calypso Rose, Singing Sandra, and Denyse Plummer offered insights into issues of race and class as they intersect with gender.

In 2015, the late Craig Martin Gibbs (1953-2018), a lecturer at Kyoto University, Japan, published *Calypso and Other Music of Trinidad, 1912-1962 – An Annotated Discography*. As the book's back cover states,

This first-ever discography of the first fifty years of Trinidadian music includes all the major artists as well as many obscure performers. Chronological entries for 78 rpm recordings give bibliographical references, periodicals, websites and recording locations. Rare field recordings are catalogued for the first time, including East Indian and Muslim community performances and Shango and Voodoo rites. Appendices of 10-inch LPs (78 rpm), 12-inch LPs (33 1/3 rpm), extended play (ep) and 7-inch single (45 rpm) listings. Non-commercial field recordings, radio broadcasts

and initially unissued sessions also are included.

The compilation of data is an excellent research tool that expands on the prior calypso compilations of Richard Spottswood and John Cowley, Gibbs being the first to present in detail the first fifty years of calypso recording history.

In 2007, Trinidadian guitarist Michael Low Chew Tung, produced a textbook-style publication that breaks down the musical components of calypso. This much needed treatise looks at the rhythms in the music, a method of inquiry from which this author believes much can be learned. Tung identified the common recurring patterns of the drum kit, percussion and bass guitar, common major and minor chord progressions, and various standardized calypso song forms. The author intersperses beginner level information with more advanced material in a format that may challenge some non-musician readers.

Rhythm in calypso as the defining element has been a focus of this author and to this topic, having devoted to calypso many decades of study. Preliminary findings are given in two journal papers published recently (2020 and 2024).

Recent journal articles include Kevin Burke's "Where Calypso Gone?" in which the author examines the demise of calypso because of the undercutting forces of globalization and post independence government engagement.

Under the British, calypso had been no stranger to controversy. On the contrary, it seemed to thrive on it. But, after Independence, as the agendas of political parties and ethnic groups sought expression through calypso songs, calypso became something of a political football, or a punching bag.

“Calypso Rose: Advocate for a Feminist Perspective” by U.W.I. History professor Gelien Matthews examines Calypso Rose’s role in exposing discrimination against women in both the private and public spheres while celebrating female sexuality and advocating empowerment. Curiously, the issue of Rose’s sexual orientation is never addressed in Matthews’ article or in works on Calypso Rose by other authors. Homosexuality remains an uncharted area of scholarly discourse in calypso.

Conclusion

We know a great deal more today about the story of calypso than we did in the past. As a genre of music which formally emerged in Trinidad around the turn of the twentieth century, akin to ragtime and the blues, calypso had a century-long gestation period of great social change. Calypso became a popular regional art form by the 1930s, going on to reach its height of international recognition in the mid-fifties, and bringing greater social acceptance and respect in its native Trinidad and Tobago. Growing out of an oral tradition of the lower classes handed down from enslaved Africans, calypso was slow to get scholarly attention from the new generation of Caribbean academics who emerged in the post-WWII period. The vast majority of scholarly writing on calypso treated it as a literary genre, with a focus on its value as social and political commentary and as a creative response to oppression. The major works in this category are represented in this historiography. Apart from the short book on Carnival written by journalists Charles Espinet and Harry Potts in 1944, serious writing on calypso did not emerge until the 1950s. The first professional academics who wrote on calypso were either American or British anthropologists who spent time conducting research and

teaching in Trinidad at the newly established University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. Their interest in calypso was part of their Caribbean field of interest and they introduced anthropological and ethnographic methods of the day used in academia. Local academics such as J. D. Elder and Andrew Carr, assisted their research - the former who would go on to produce foundational works on Trinidad and Tobago folklore and on calypso.

Scholarly writing on calypso was sporadic during the 1960s and 1970s, a time that witnessed political unrest and the emergence of soca. Works from this period centred mostly on the broader aspects of Carnival culture, notably that of Errol Hill. The 1980s saw a dramatic increase in the volume and diversity of scholarly publications on calypso - a trend that has continued into the 1990s and this century. Contributions by senior calypso practitioners and local scholars, together with specialist historians from overseas, have now brought to our attention substantial quantities of well-researched data on calypso history and its community of practitioners, including its rise and fall in popularity. While much of the literary output can be described as expositional and descriptive, several authors have made detailed analyses of calypso lyrics and conducted critical examinations of calypso’s role in Trinidad and Tobago’s socio-political environment, while a handful like Elder, Ahyoung, Dudley, Manmohan, and Low Chew Tung, have now looked more closely at the components of the music. There remains the call to calypso musicians to take up Dr. Rohlehr’s challenge to tell their story in its fullest measure. Manuscripts of calypso arrangements are not being preserved and archived in a systematic way; the music manuscripts of pioneer arrangers like

Lionel Belasco and Gerald Clark have been lost. It is time to redouble efforts to collect the works of contemporary arrangers such as Art Decoteau, Leston Paul, Ed Watson, Frankie MacIntosh, and others. A comprehensive textbook on playing calypso music and its sub-genres still awaits.

Since the 1990s, books and journal articles broadened their scope to offer more detailed ethnographic information, while a dominant trend since then has been the debate between calypso and soca. In reviewing the historiography of the West Indies in the second half of the twentieth century, Prof. W. K. Marshall noted that,

The emphasis on colonial policy and imperial system which dominated much of the earlier literature has been replaced to a large extent by an emphasis on the structure and development of the local situation.

This process of historical re-orientation continues today in history writing, including calypso history, as Caribbean intellectuals, artists and scholars grapple with what it means to be Caribbean. The University of the West Indies, and now the University of Trinidad and Tobago, continue to play important roles in the process, as do authors in Caribbean diaspora communities and specialist academics in universities worldwide – the late Craig Martin’s annotated discography being a good example. Scholarly writing on calypso must continue to move beyond expository and descriptive stages to deeper probes into aspects of calypso history and to analyses and interpretations of the wealth of historical data now more widely available. A dilemma posed in writing on calypso is the vagueness of terms used for genres, as Jocelyne

Guilbault notes in a blog article. She gives as an example the use of no less than four different music labels to refer to the music of one artist in a newspaper report and laments,

Given that the terms calypso and soca can seemingly be used as synonymous, it becomes more confusing when one sees that the terms soca and rapso can also at times be mixed,

Guilbault concludes,

Notwithstanding that it is common knowledge in the Caribbean that the terms “kaiso” and “calypso” mean the same thing, the number of terms used in such a short excerpt cannot fail to leave one perplexed.

The preponderance of calypso literature devoted to its lyrics and their literary value suggests we may be missing a part of the story – a story that can only be told thorough a full examination of calypso music. Shannon Dudley wisely observed in the summary of his article titled ‘Judging “By the Beat”: Calypso versus Soca’,

Traditional Western musical concepts have not acknowledged the very important role that rhythmic “feel” – produced by the recurring accents, texture and timbre of interacting parts - plays in characterizing and indeed “measuring” the music in different African and African American genres and styles.

Dudley identified the concept of “interactive rhythmic feel” or “groove” to create a better definition of music in a non-traditional way for not only calypso, but other types of African and African American (including Latin and Caribbean) music.

Australian scholar Higman was critical of the extent to which contemporary historians of the Caribbean have a fixation with the use of metropolitan archives. However, the same does not apply in the case of calypso. The bulk of the existing documentation remains located within the Caribbean: pictorial-visual imagery, oral traditions, and the audio recordings. Access to scholarly work – master's theses and doctoral dissertations – are currently limited at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, creating challenges for emerging calypso writers who must investigate and evaluate to gain better understanding and appreciation. There is a need for increased collaboration and support between Trinidad and Tobago's two universities, as well as the strengthening of links between national and regional educational and cultural institutions, to support the work of calypso academics and practitioners.

It is worth recalling the words of the eminent American anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, Kenneth Bilby,

The story of Caribbean music is a remarkable one. For this relatively small geographical region, ravaged by centuries of European colonial domination and long looked upon as a region of "colonial backwaters," "deracinated" peoples, and societies that supposedly had produced nothing indigenous of any value, has over and over brought forth unique and vibrant musical creations to which the entire world

can dance. That the story is far from finished means that the lives of music lovers in both the Caribbean and other parts of the world will be that much richer in the years ahead.

The role of calypso historians remains critical to recognizing and upholding the value of calypso - one of the Caribbean's great musical genres.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Prof. David Trotman for directing me to write on this topic for his Directed Reading history course. My thanks to Dr. Douglas J. Rahn, and Dr. Irene Markoff for her valuable suggestions and edits. Special thanks to Dr. Chris Wilson for his support and encouragement.

Author's Note:

This paper does not attempt to present an exhaustive list of scholarly publications on calypso but offers a narrative on the main contributions in the second half of the 20th century, along with others I believe are of significance. As a professional musician, I have deliberately given more acknowledgement to scholarly works on calypso music in the overall picture than their numbers suggest, calypso as a literary art being the dominant theme. I apologize to any notable omissions.

References

Allen, Ray. *Jump Up! – Caribbean Carnival Music in New York City*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Aqui, Ronald & Brown, Rellon. PROJECT NEW WAVE - What You Never Knew About the Rhythms of Trinidad & Tobago, with an Appendix by Rellon Brown. Trinidad & Tobago Printing Works Ltd., 1999.

Austin, Roy L., "Understanding Calypso Content: A Critique and an Alternative Explanation." *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3, Essays on Slavery (June - September 1976): 74-83.

Browne, Simon, "String Band Instrumentation and Rhythm in Early Trinidadian Calypso Focusing on Recordings from 1912-1933," MA Thesis, University of Trinidad & Tobago, 2015.

Campbell, Susan. "Carnival, Calypso, and Class Struggle in Nineteenth Century Trinidad." *History Workshop*, No. 26, (Winter, 1988): 1-27.

Cowley, John, "Cultural 'Fusions': Aspects of British West Indian Music in the USA and Britain 1918-51." *Popular Music*, Vol. 5, Continuity and Change, (1985): 81-96.

Cowley, John. *Carnival, Canboulay & Calypso – Traditions in the Making*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Crowley, Daniel J. "Toward a Definition of Calypso (Part I)," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (May 1959): 57-66.

Cynthia Mahabir. "The Rise of Calypso Feminism: Gender and Musical Politics in the Calypso." *Popular Music*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Gender and Sexuality (Oct. 2001): 409-430.

Cynthia Mahabir. "Wit and Popular Music: The Calypso and the Blues." *Popular Music*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan. 1996): 55-81.

De Leon, Raphael, *Calypso from France to Trinidad : 800 Years of History*, University of Texas, 1983.

Dudley, Shannon. "Judging 'By the Beat': Calypso versus Soca." *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 40, No. 2 (Spring - Summer, 1996): 269-298.

Elder, J. D. *Folk Songs from Tobago*, Indiana University, 1995.

Elder, J. D.. "Color, Music, and Conflict: A Study of Aggression in Trinidad with Reference to the Role of Traditional Music." *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (May 1964): 128-136.

Elder, J. D.. "The Evolution of the Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago: A Socio-historical Analysis of Song-change." PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1967. ProQuest (6703066).

Espinet, Charles S., and Harry Potts. *The Land of Calypso - The Origin and Development of Trinidad's Folk Song*, Port of Spain, Guardian Commercial Printery, 1944.

Floyd Jr. Samuel. "Black Music in the Circum-Caribbean." *American Music* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1999): 1-38.

Gelien Matthews. "Calypso Rose: Advocate for a Feminist Perspective." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2020): 50–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2020.1722373>.

Gibbs, Craig Martin. *Calypso and Other Music of Trinidad 1912-1962*, McFarland & Company Inc., 2015.

Gibbs, Roger. "Rhythm in Calypso – Ten Calypso Guitar Strums," *International Journal of Carnival Arts*, Vol. 2 (Dec. 2020): 71-87. www.academia.edu/49001722

Gibbs, Roger. "The Roots of African Rhythms in Early Calypso," *International Journal of Carnival Arts*, Vol. 8A (Feb. 2024): 24-31.

Guilbault, Jocelyne. "Audible Entanglements: Nation and Diasporas in Trinidad's Calypso Music Scene," *Small Axe* 17 (March 2005): 40–63.

Hill, Donald R.. *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad*, University Press of Florida, 1993.

Hill, Errol G. "Calypso and War." *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1989): 61-88.

Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival-Mandate for a National Theatre*, University of Texas, 1972.

Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival*, New Beacon Books, 1972.

Hope Munroe. *What She Go Do: Women in Afro-Trinidadian Music*. University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

J. D. Elder. "The Male/Female Conflict in Calypso." *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1968): 23-41.

Jennifer Thorington Springer, "Roll It Gal": Alison Hinds, Female Empowerment, and Calypso, *Meridians*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Representin': Women, Hip-Hop, and Popular Music (2008): 93-129.

Johnson, Kim. *From Tin Pan to TASPO – Steelband in Trinidad, 1939-1951*, University of the West Indies Press, 2001.

Kevin Burke. “Where Calypso Gone?”¹ *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2020: 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2020.1722372>.

Liverpool, Hollis Urban. *Rituals of Power and Rebellion; The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962*, University of Michigan, 1993.

Liverpool, Hollis. *From the Horses Mouth – Stories of the History and Development of Calypso*, Juba Publications, 2003.

Liverpool, Hollis. *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1763-1962*, Research Associate School Times, 2001.

Low Chew Tung, Michael. *Kaiso Concepts - A Modern Approach to Playing Calypso Music*. Michael Low Chew Tung, 2007.

Manmohan, Maarten. “Kaisometrics - The Influence of the Electric Guitar on Calypso and Soca Music, 1960 – 1980.” M.A. thesis, University of Trinidad & Tobago, 2015. www.academia.edu/15255220

Manuel, Peter. *Caribbean Currents – Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Temple University Press, 1995.

Meyer, Andreas, “Kenny Cooper - The Mighty Bomber, A Musical Career in Trinidad”, *Popular Music*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (1999): 277-290.

Meyer, Andreas. *Der traditionelle Calypso auf Trinidad. 2 Vols*. Verlag der Musikalienhandlung Karl Dieter Wagner, 1991.

Munroe-Smith, Hope. “Performing Gender in the Trinidad Calypso.” *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 2004): 32-56.

Ottley, Rudolph. *Calypso Tent in Trinidad Carnival*. Chunce & Chin Publishers, 2019.

Pearse, Andrew. “Aspects of Change in Caribbean Folk Music.” *Journal of the International Music Council*, Vol. VII (1955):23-36.

Pearse, Andrew. “Carnival in Nineteenth Century Trinidad.” *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3/4 (June, 1956):175-193.

Pearse, Andrew. “Mitto Sampson on Calypso Legends of the Nineteenth Century.” *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. ¾ (June, 1956): 250-262.

Quevedo, Raymond. *Kaiso – A Short History of Trinidad Calypso*. University of the West Indies, 1983.

Raymond, Martin A. "Report on Calypso Tents – Carnival 2014," M.A. thesis in Carnival Studies, University of Trinidad & Tobago, 2014. www.academia.edu/11193056

Regis, Louis. "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Post-1970 Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago" PhD diss., University of the West Indies, 2002.

Rohlehr, Gordon, "We Getting the Kaiso That We Deserve: Calypso and the World Music Market." *The Drama Review/TDR*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, (1988): 82-95.

Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, Gordon Rohlehr, 1990.

Stuempfle, Stephen. *A Scuffling of Islands: Essays on Calypso*, Lexicon Trinidad, 2004.

Vogel, Shane. *Stolen Time - Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*, University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Warner, Keith. *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso - a Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*. Review by Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No.1(March 1983):72-75.

Warner, Keith. *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of the Calypso as Oral Literature*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1982.

Winer, Lise. "Socio-Cultural Change and the Language of Calypso." *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids / New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 60, No. ¾ (1986): 113-148.

Kent Karnival: Re-creation, Recreation, and Relevance

Dr Janine Tiffe

Associate Professor, Ethnomusicology
Director, African Ensemble
Director, Steelband
Kent State University

Abstract

In fall semester of 2017, a Kent State University student had an idea for the annual homecoming parade – coordinate something akin to Trinidadian Carnival. Very quickly, collaborative plans were made among three student organizations: World Music Society, the Student Organization of Caribbean Alliance (SOCA), and Afrobeats/Afro-Caribbean dance team Asé Xpressions. From 2017 through 2023, a similar format was followed: colored powder, somewhat coordinated outfits, sound truck playing soca music, and choreography for one designated musical selection. However, Kent Karnival 2024 was significantly different. I spent the first six months of 2024 in Trinidad and Tobago, and as the advisor of two of the aforementioned student organizations, I decided it was time to re-create Kent Karnival. During my time in the Advanced Pan Fellowship Programme at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, I was learning about and playing sailor mas, and in time I decided to bring sailor mas back to my students in the USA. I had some minor trepidation as to whether or not my students would embrace a more meaningful version of Kent Karnival since we are physically, and most are culturally, distant from Trinidad and the Caribbean. In the 2024 homecoming parade, we became Americans imitating Trinbagonians imitating Americans across two and three generations of time and space. This discussion considers Kent Karnival as an instrument of re-creation, recreation, and relevance for students, especially students of African descent, in the U.S. at a Primarily White Institution, questioning to what extent shared and differing ancestries and experiences have influenced visual and sonic characteristics of the parade, and moreover for all involved, how Kent Karnival reconnects us to who we are, who we have been, who we want to be, and what we have to say.

Key Words: Kent Karnival, Kent State University, sailor mas, homecoming parade, Caribbean diaspora, Carnival diaspora

Introduction

In the fall semester of 2017, Kent State University music student Denise Dupree² (image 1) had an idea for the annual homecoming parade – the student organization she led, World Music Society, should coordinate something akin to Trinidad’s Carnival.

“I wanted the pan [and] African side of [our] World Music Ensembles to be [equally] represented. I wanted a way to make Caribbean culture more visible. You were teaching us about J’ouvert morning in steelband and cool cultural things that go with it, and I thought we could put that in a parade. And selfishly I thought it seemed like a really wonderful cultural experience, but didn’t have thousands of dollars to go get on a plane and experience [it for myself]. So how do I bring that to MEEEE...?!?! I also remember thinking it would be fun and wanting us to be more hands-on as World Music Society - to bring different musical cultural experiences to people and make it accessible.”³



Image 1 – Kent Carnival founder Denise Dupree

Very quickly, collaborative plans were made among three student organizations: World Music Society, the Student Organization of Caribbean Alliance (SOCA), and Afrobeats/Afro-Caribbean dance team Asé Xpressions.⁴ SOCA president and Kittitian Kareem Rogers suggested the name Kent Karnival with two Ks. From 2017 (image 2 & 3) through 2023



Image 2 – Banner holders for Kent Karnival in 2020

² A student from Florida of Jamaican heritage.

³ WhatsApp correspondence with Denise Dupree. 7 November 2024.

⁴ Including a student leader of Jamaican heritage.



Image 3 – Student organization flags for Kent Karnival in 2017, including Kent Karnival founder Kareem Rogers with S.O.C.A. flag



Image 4 – Kent Karnival 2017x



Image 5 – Kent Karnival 2018



Image 6 – Kent Karnival 2019



Image 7 – Kent Karnival 2021

(images 4-9), a relatively similar format was followed: colored powder (image 10), sound truck playing soca music (image 11), and choreography for one tune in high rotation on the DJ’s playlist – typically the Road March



Image 8 -Kent Karnival 2022

winner of that year⁵. However, Kent Karnival 2024 was quite different. I spent the first six months of 2024 in Trinidad and Tobago, and as the advisor of Asé Xpressions and director of the Caribbean Steelband course,⁶ I decided it was time to recreate Kent Karnival through the lens of sailor mas.



Image 9 – Kent Karnival 2023

While enrolled in the Advanced Pan Fellowship Programme at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, I began learning about and (casually) playing sailor mas. In time, I discussed history, costuming, and dance with expert sailor Mr Keith Simpson (image 12), and after consultation with – and encouragement from – Dr Kela Francis through my Carnival Studies coursework, I decided to bring sailor mas back to my students at Kent State University in northeast, Ohio, USA. During WWII, the United States engaged in a military agreement with England in which England and the Allies received submarines, and the U.S. received a tract of land in Trinidad to create a naval base. While sailor mas is

older than WWII, these wartime cross-cultural interactions significantly impacted what we now see within the sailor mas tradition of Trinidad & Tobago, which is a Trinbagonian interpretation of the U.S. Navy and U.S. sailor during that historical period. Given this history, Dr Francis expertly noted that perhaps these cross-cultural components would be attractive, or at least relatable, to my students in the U.S. I had some minor trepidation, however, in bringing a new concept to our annual Kent Karnival celebration: to what extent would my students embrace a more “serious” version of Kent Karnival – a version that would carry real meaning? Could I appropriately explain and translate the history and energy of carnival, specifically traditional mas and sailor mas well enough for it to make sense in the USA – to my students and parade spectators? Would they embrace relevance over recreation? Would we have the technical skills to craft traditional mas outfits and move like sailors? In the 2024 homecoming parade, we were Americans imitating and interpreting Trinidadians imitating Americans across two and three generations of time and several locations. This discussion considers Kent Karnival as an instrument of re-creation, recreation, and relevance for students, especially students of African descent, in the U.S. at a Primarily White Institution, questioning to

⁵ Annual choreography has included “Full Extreme” in 2017, “Savannah” in 2018, Famalay! in 2019, “Boss Lady” in 2021, “Mind My Business” in 2022, and “Hard Fete” in 2023.

⁶ Over the years, Asé Xpressions has gradually become the primary organization to organize Kent

Karnival. Unfortunately, S.O.C.A fell apart after Kareem graduated in 2018. During academic year 2022-2023, there was a similar organization called Kent Caribbean Student Organization, but it too folded after its president graduated.

what extent shared and differing ancestries and experiences have influenced visual and sonic characteristics of the parade, and moreover for all involved, how Kent Karnival reconnects us to who we are, who we have been, who we want to be, and what we have to say.



Image 10 – Kent Karnival traditionally features colored powder.



Image 11 – Kent Karnival sound truck

Background & History

When Kent Karnival started in the fall semester of 2017, it was about a year and a half since I first played mas of any kind. In 2016 I played J'ouvert with Powder Raiders, and Monday and Tuesday mas with Ronnie and Caro. I wanted to replicate

those experiences as much as possible in those early days of Kent Karnival, while also allowing the students a certain level of creative license. With our three Caribbean students/students of Caribbean descent leading the way, (one in each of the organizations I initially mentioned, although none of Trinbagonian heritage) we had a pretty good framework: sound truck, soca, flags, rags, powder, color, and dancing. Dance movements for Kent Karnival, however, has commonly utilized African and Afrobeats movements more so than Trinidadian wining, chipping, or jump and wave.

To keep things “authentic” that first year, I suggested those of legal drinking age should meet at 6am to partake in some light libations before the parade; we certainly could not drink on campus nor on the road. Years following, we discontinued the early morning libations for doughnuts and juice. Those marching along with (images 13 & 14) handheld instruments have waxed and waned from year to year and have commonly been members of the university steelband. Sometimes members of other student groups have participated, but for the most part, Asé Xpressions has been the core student organization leading the way with their outfit and dance sensibilities.



Image 12 – The author learning from Mr Keith Simpson



Images 13 – Handheld percussion utilized in Kent Carnival



Images 14 – Handheld percussion utilized in Kent Carnival

Each year I have spoken to my steelband and Asé Xpressions about the history and meaning of carnival, but I hardly felt it was appropriately sinking into their beings. It has felt more like a distant overview than an embedded understanding. We have periodically had students of Jamaican or Trinbagonian heritage on Asé, including Trinidadian Laura-Lee Downes who joined Asé Xpressions in fall 2023, and that seemed to help in translation at those times. Furthermore, members of Asé have been almost exclusively African or African-American women and non-binary individuals, which I feel has bridged some cultural gaps.

On the other hand, I am regularly asked by members of Asé if we can add Afrobeats or dancehall to the playlist, and/or can the choreographed selection of the year be something other than the Road March winner. I feel it is important to keep the Road March winner prioritized for

educational purposes, even though mas bands in Trinidad independently decide their tune to cross the stage to ultimately create the Road March winner that year. Without the students spending adequate time listening to ‘socas of the season,’ it is hard for them to effectively pick their own. However, some years I have narrowed it to three for them to vote.

The parameters of the homecoming parade have been another adjustment: we have to “keep it moving” with the pre-determined pace of the 1.2 miles parade, so the choreography must always travel forward. The dancing and outfits must be “family friendly” by U.S. standards. To some extent, the music must be a “radio edit” or non-explicit version, but honestly, parade attendees in Kent, Ohio tend to be so unaware of soca music, vocabulary, and accent, they really have no idea what is being said. And if someone *does* know what is being said, that is probably because they are aware of the culture, and therefore, happy for the original version. In the main, we have needed to strike a balance between adapting to our surroundings (re-creation) while remaining culturally driven (relevance). Otherwise, what is the educational point?

2024 – Year of the Sailor

In the fall of 2024, however, we came with a very different presentation (image 17). Kent Carnival was re-created through the lens of sailor mas. Students designed and crafted their own outfits (images 15 & 16),

and learned and executed some basic sailor steps to older calypsos – a genre we have never used in our playlist prior to 2024. Moreover, my cultural presentation was much more in-depth than in years past, and students were interviewed on the history and purpose of sailor mas, which revealed their educational retention. One steelband student played ‘pan round the neck’ on the road while another participated in political protest through a version of ol’ mas.⁷ Asé Xpressions still developed their usual set choreography, to Mical Teja’s “DNA.”



Images 15 (above) & 16 (below) - Students creating their own sailor mas outfits

⁷ [Kent Carnival Recap Video](#). This video is currently set to private to protect a student and their

political viewpoints. However, the video can be shared discretely upon request.



CONCLUSIONS

If the student interviews, reflections, and energy seen in the recap video are any indicator, Kent Karnival 2024 was a success regarding re-creation, recreation, and relevance. Did my students experience the same level of carnival energy, particularly freeing up, as they would have in Trinidad? Not likely, because we were the only ones providing that energy in the parade. Was their energy good and genuine? Yes. Was the history and traditional/ol'/sailor mas effectively translated through the parade participants? I believe yes.⁸ Firstly regarding ol' mas, my student who wore a keffiyeh while using a conch wrote to me, "Thank you again for being supportive of protest. I really

appreciate it; it's a weight off my chest," to which I responded, "I'm happy to keep [Kent Karnival as] rooted in tradition as possible."⁹ Secondly, although not every detail from my lecture was perfectly repeated by students in the recap video interviews, I think the overall concepts of process (DIY mas outfits – images 15 & 16), processional (parade), and protest were there.

Homecoming parade spectators likely understood the general notion of dressing up like a U.S. Navy sailor, but the deeper, historical meaning? No. Is that deeper, historical meaning understood by the majority of carnival spectators in Trinidad? I cannot say for sure, but I would guess not – 80 years on. Did Kent Karnival paraders have the skills to move like Mr Keith Simpson? Unlikely, but we did our best to emulate the few videos I had of him doing sailor dance. As previously mentioned, the set choreography for "DNA," and general improvisatory movements on the road, were more African and Afrobeats than Trinbagonian. We also did not quite have the materials needed to be too fancy with costuming, but again, I felt the DIY aspect was a most critical aspect for their experiences.

After a year of sailor mas activities,¹⁰ students in Asé Xpressions are ready for something different. Kent Karnival 2025

⁸ After giving my initial traditional mas cultural presentation to Asé Xpressions in the fall of 2024, one member stated to the team president, 'Janine is ALL the way white and really knows her stuff!' As an educator of European descent, it is imperative that my students of African descent are able to recognize I have a certain level of knowledge, skill, and respect for cultural activities and traditions that

are not part of my ethnic background nor upbringing.

⁹ WhatsApp correspondence with student. 27 September 2024.

¹⁰ Students also performed sailor mas at the steelband's 2024 fall semester concert, as well as for the Ohio Music Educator Association conference in Cleveland, Ohio in February 2025.

will be an interesting indicator. First, will members of Asé want to return to contemporary/t-shirt/feathers mas? Will they want to try a different type of traditional mas? Second, three of my steelband students participated in Trinidadian Carnival in 2025. If they jump up for Kent Karnival 2025, will they help bring and translate appropriate vibes and energy? How will Kent Karnival 2025 compare to Kent Karnival 2024 for them? What observations will they have between Kent Karnival and proper Trinidadian Carnival? Perhaps this fall I will require wine, chip, and jump and wave to be part of the set choreography for Asé Xpressions. Ultimately, I think we have brought a sense of Trinbagonian-ness and Caribbean-ness to our small college town and campus – particularly through outfits and music, and adjacently through movements which all essentially link back to West and Central Africa. Kent Karnival students have been re-creating, recreating, and inherently engaging with the relevance of this activity for eight years now. And as we move forward in what promises to be a complicated racialized environment on our wider campus, state, and nation, we hope that activities such as Kent Karnival help ground our students in who they are, where they come from (broadly and specifically), and help them amplify what they have to say. (image 17)

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank Dr Kela Francis, Mr Keith Simpson, and Mr Nicholas Deabreau for their tutelage and assistance on my sailor mas journey. I also wish to thank Dr Mia Gormandy-Benajmin and all who helped me find my way at the University of Trinidad and Tobago while pursuing the Advanced Pan Fellowship Programme in 2024. Lastly, I thank Calil Cage for creating the Kent Karnival 2025 recap video used in this presentation, which so fantastically captures the essence of the experience.¹¹

¹¹ Homecoming Parade Livestream 2024.



Image 17 – Kent Karnival 2025

References:

Interviews:
Denise Dupree. Personal correspondence. 7
November 2024.
Student. Personal correspondence. 27
September 2

Bringing Back the legacy of Dr (Mama) Geraldine Connor back home to Trinidad-Preserving Yoruba culture in the Diaspora

Dr Sally Omolara Rose

Leeds School of Arts,
Leeds Beckett University Alumni,
Leeds, England.
Email: lararosephd@outlook.com

Abstract

Yoruba culture endured rupture, fragmentation, and disjunction in the diaspora after colonisation and the transatlantic slave trade. Yoruba artistic aesthetics were often described by colonial outsiders as primitive, uncivilized or simply decorative. British Trinidadian, ethnomusicologist and theatre director Geraldine Connor utilised Yoruba culture in her phantasmagorical Carnival Messiah stage production, despite colonial prohibitions, censorship and anxieties surrounding Yoruba culture. In conversation with Connor and on her discovery of the author's Yoruba heritage, Connor admonished the author to tell her Yoruba story through her art practice. This PhD project contributes new knowledge on the influence of Yoruba culture in the Diaspora and brings the legacy of Dr Geraldine Connor (1952-2011) back home to Trinidad. Overall, the project asks: How has Yoruba language, art and sculpture been censored and how can it be retrieved? Where does Yoruba thinking, language and making continue in UK culture.

In her first experience of Connor's multicultural Carnival Messiah, the author felt a sense of home and belonging amidst the blend of Yoruba culture with European oratorio. Her PhD project utilised a Practice as Research methodology, including reflecting on her experience in Carnival Messiah via autoethnographic case study. The practice is underpinned by consideration of Yoruba scholars such as Oluwole, Abiodun and Lawal who, like Connor, advocate the need to let the Yoruba voice speak and these are explored within a contemporary decolonising/BLM context. Connor's Third Space for creative empowerment is explored and the embracing of Afropolitanism has enabled the Yoruba voice to manifest freely alongside British culture resulting in the rediscovery, retrieval, and resurrection of the ancient *Aworan* practice of venerating elders in Yoruba communities. The author's sculptural practice produced the joyous 1.7m life-size ultramarine-blue Dr Geraldine Connor Civic Statue, the first statue of a black woman in Leeds. In Feb 2025, drawing inspiration from Connor, the author's artistic journey, and debut Tedx Talk, *'Finding my Yoruba voice'* inspires others to reclaim the lost cultures and parts of themselves. This is now followed up with bringing Connor's monumental legacy back home to Trinidad.

Key Words: Yoruba, Carnival, Carnival Messiah, Geraldine Connor, Aworan, Oriki, Orisha, statues

Introduction

Esu gbaragbo mo juba...

I cried at the left exit of the University of Trinidad & Tobago NAPA auditorium, my voice crescendoed, reverberating around the room to the surprise and delight of the delegates;

Yeye yeye o! Osun, Osun o, are mi, Osun wa, Se kumere...

I continue walking up the aisle to the front of the auditorium carrying a small, framed photo of Geraldine's statue on my head, turn around to face the audience, singing, and now dancing holding the picture in my hands towards the delegates.

Mama wa, Mama wa, Dr Geraldine

Connor,

Ethnomusicologist, carnivalist, theatre director, mother to many....

I continue singing Geraldine's accolades, her verbal *Oriki* (praise song) and dancing and make my way to the stage to start my presentation. This performance of visual and verbal *oriki* is a mix of Yoruba and English, both inspired by observing Yoruba culture and the art of singing *oriki* to honor people and balancing objects on the *ori* (head). Involvement in *Carnival Messiah* observing Yoruba mixed with English and other cultures coupled with Geraldine's encouragement to tell my Yoruba story in my art allowed me to start to overcome my anxiety about Yoruba culture. Subsequently, retrieving and allowing Yoruba culture to sit alongside my art practice resulted in my creation of the first statue of a black woman in Leeds, that of Geraldine. In Feb 2025, I gave my debut

TEDx Talk (Rose, 2025), '*Finding my Yoruba voice*' at Leeds Beckett University, UK. I also make my entry with the performance as above albeit carrying a grey maquette statue of Geraldine on my head (Fig 1.) and then introduce Geraldine (Fig 2.). I continue my presentation in Trinidad with the opening words;



Figure 1. Lara Rose carrying the Geraldine Aworan statue maquette and singing Oriki

This is Dr Geraldine Roxanne Connor, and she changed my life and set me on a path of homecoming and belonging. I am here today to bring Geraldine's legacy back home to Trinidad and inspire you on your own journey of homecoming & belonging! My name is Dr Lara Rose, I was born in Leicester, in the UK and was taken to Nigeria at age 5 but was forbidden to speak my mother tongue Yoruba...



Figure 2. Dr Geraldine Connor - her joyous face captured in the statue.

I shared three key points in my presentation, including a short trailer (Geraldine Connor Foundation, 2017) for the *Carnival Messiah* movie in which we see and hear Geraldine speaking amidst parts of the *J'ouvert* scene. The excerpt video showcases a brief auto-ethnographical account from Geraldine heralding her legacy that I am bringing back home to Trinidad. This article captures Geraldine's words from the video in which she explains how *Carnival Messiah* is a culmination of her artistic journey. I also include autobiographical reflections from my presentation - Firstly, how I lost my Yoruba voice; secondly, how I am reclaiming it; and finally, I invite everyone to reclaim the lost parts of self (so we can ALL belong), and conclude by asking, 'who is the Geraldine in your lives'?

How did I lose my Yoruba voice?

We are committing suicide by not speaking our language – Prof Sophie Oluwole

I spent the first five years of my life growing up with a foster family in the UK, learning English as my first language. On accompanying my biological parents to Nigeria and firstly living with my grandma, a schoolteacher, communications naturally continued in English. I fondly remember my grandma conducting her own elocution classes in her home in Yaba, Lagos, after school where I had to walk with a book on my head and learn deportment. We were also not allowed to speak Yoruba at home or school in Nigeria, indigenous languages including Yoruba were classed as uncivilized and vernacular. I would ask my classmates to teach me Yoruba words and was often mislead and was once told a derogatory term when I asked how to say, 'how are you?!' I recall the dire consequences for speaking vernacular, punishments such as "face the wall," "stand on one leg," "stoop down," "kneel down," or writing out multiple lines:

"I will not speak vernacular languages at school... I will not speak vernacular languages at school... I will not speak vernacular languages at school..."

The late Prof Sophie Oluwole (1935- 2018), the first female Nigerian Philosopher and Practitioner of Yoruba philosophy, testified about her own school experience in the interview, *Importance of the Mother Tongue - 'Oro Isiti'*, Oluwole (2016, 0.14 - 1.14 secs) explains;

The credibility of your being a civilized person is that you must speak English, you are

enlightened ...because English is the language of the civilized people ...vernacular is the language of the primitive people which is not structured... I remember I paid fines with my money for breaking school rules ...you're not allowed to speak vernacular to show yourself as an educated person...

Oluwole (2014) also stressed her reason for writing *Socrates and Òrúnmìlà: Two Patron Saints of Classical Philosophy*: “They said Africans could not think, that we were not thinkers, that we were primitive. I felt challenged and said I was going to find out if truly we could not think. I wanted to prove them wrong.” Sadly, Professor Oluwole passed away in December of 2018, barely a month after I discovered her during my preliminary literature search for my PhD, I thus feel the baton has been handed to me. There is an even more urgent need for insider research coupled with a zeal to embrace the Yoruba language and culture. I need to heed the call of the elders and ancestors (Connor & Oluwole) to tell my Yoruba story redressing the balance to all the negative narratives that plague Africans post slavery.

I had often wrestled with a sense of loss of Yoruba consciousness and identity; however, serendipitously, I rediscovered Yoruba culture in Connor's *Carnival Messiah* and the Caribbean community in Leeds. It is unfortunate to have often been subjected to buffeting voices about my identity both in Lagos and on my return to Leeds. In Lagos, I would be called ‘*Oyinbo*

(slang for white person) *England girl*’ and told to go back to England, whilst back in Leeds, one was called *coconut* or *bounty bar* (white on the inside, black on the outside). Connor (2005, pp12-13) explains that Franz Fanon (1986) in *Black Skins, White Masks* described this fractured identity as a *psychic split*, a kind of racial and cultural schizophrenia as the most damaging legacy of colonisation and cites Gilkes (1986):

that wrestling contradiction of a white mind in a black body, which is still a notable characteristic of Caribbean culture today. (Gilkes 1986: 2)

Nevertheless, I have begun to heal myself and repair some of the damage, as seeded in me by Geraldine both in her use of Yoruba culture in *Carnival Messiah* and her urging me to tell my Yoruba story. It is my desire that that the fruit of Geraldine's legacy, my new sense of belonging that I have brought back home to Trinidad & Tobago, will inspire everyone to reclaim the lost parts of themselves.

How am I reclaiming my Yoruba voice

As stressed by Oluwole, and as a matter of urgency, I am on an ongoing journey of reclaiming my Yoruba voice (Fig 3) through my music and art and even a whole PhD, but it started with Geraldine and her *Carnival Messiah*.

The late Dr Geraldine Connor was a Trinidadian British ethnomusicologist, singer, musician, mentor and lecturer at the

old Bretton Hall, University of Leeds. As part of her PhD project, she pioneered the multicultural theatre production *Carnival Messiah* - a rework of Handels *Messiah* which featured Yoruba culture alongside carnival culture, Caribbean culture & European classical music. Connor (2005) supported *Carnival Messiah* with a thesis entitled, ‘!HalleluliaH!: excursions into a Third Space: ‘Carnival Messiah’ as an instrument of postcolonial liberation’. Connor (2005, p63) stresses the need for an inevitable embracing of multiculturalism as exemplified in *Carnival Messiah*, so we can all belong, and writes;

Carnival Messiah demands that the focus is shifted toward embracing and examining the diversity of the black, and, by extension, the Caribbean, British experience in a bid toward looking for a future which could offer a new multi-stranded cultural alternative at its heart, an alternative which could offer an arena within which we could all belong and live: a common home, a shared heritage.

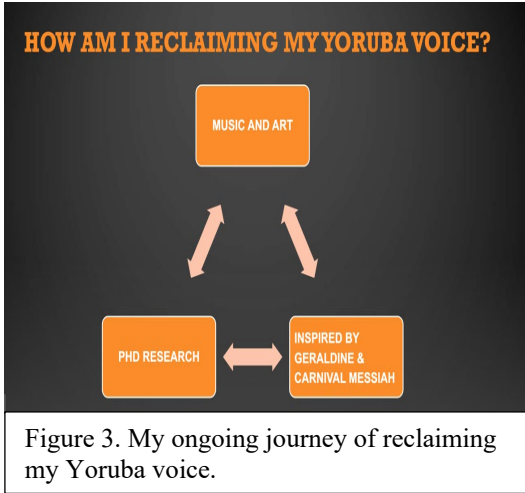


Figure 3. My ongoing journey of reclaiming my Yoruba voice.

I had the opportunity to take part in *Carnival Messiah*, where I sang Yoruba songs blended with English. I felt so at home, though I didn’t understand why at the time. Geraldine - whom we affectionately called Mama G, as mentioned earlier - discovered my Yoruba heritage and encouraged me to explore it more deeply in my music and art. She said, “Child, you need to tell your Yoruba story!”

Excerpt from Carnival Messiah Film Trailer

Ella Andall’s sonorous voice opens the video with the *opening of the way* chant to Esu, *Esu gba ra gbo, mo juba* and the company responses, *lagbanda*, Geraldine appears and her voice fades in;

Carnival Messiah is a culmination of my journey, my artistic journey through life, having grown up in two cultures, a western European culture and a West Indian culture. It’s about bringing together all the artistic influences that I have had in my life – and because I have been a recipient of Handel’s Messiah for practically the first third of my life, it was only natural that I could mix both genres, as it were – that is the genre of carnival and the genre of oratorio. It’s about bringing people together of all nations and races. It’s about celebrating through art as an empowerment tool. The message is about joy and spirituality, it’s about integration, it’s about coming together – and I think it’s a message this world really needs to take on board – and it’s one of the most enjoyable ways I know of, of creating Art.



Figure 4. The company at the Royal Albert Hall showcase (2008), the cast are mainly in J'ouvert costumes by Clary Salandy of Mahogany Carnival, London, UK.

Ella's voice fades down, whilst the video pans to the *J'ouvert* morning scene, *J'ouvert, J'ouvert...*, loud clanking bells, cymbals keep the rhythm, *J'ouvert morning*, Alyson Brown's voice announces (also playing the role of a griot), dressed as a *Pierrot Grenade* character, *it means the opening of the day*. The company continues to sing and start to appear on stage; *...la la la...*, *Cambule le le le le hoi, one boy one girl*. A riotous colourful display of an assortment of carnival characters – *Judah...* screams Alyson... *You can be a red dragon or a midnight robber...*

Indeed, *Geraldine* includes a host of Trinidadian Carnival costumes as shown

above (Fig 4) for the *J'ouvert* scene. I recall feeling a sense of home on the streets of Port of Spain watching as the Carnival went by in March 2025, I saw what looked like familiar faces. I also recognised carnival characters *midnight robber, moco jumbie, red dragon, jab jab blue devils, fancy sailors, dame lorraines*, etc and started to feel the same ecstatic joy as when I was in *Carnival Messiah*. Was it the sun, was it the Soca, Steel pan, calypso...? I had found out growing up that my mother's family were mocked as Saro or Creole (Krio) peoples in Nigeria. On digging further, I discovered her family had migrated from Sierra Leone to Nigeria and were possibly

Africans that were returned to Freetown, Sierra Leone from London (post war) and after slavery was abolished in 1807. So, could my feeling of home be because I was amidst long lost family members separated by the transatlantic slave trade?

I had always just stuck to singing in the choir during the *Carnival Messiah* shows both at the Leeds Playhouse (2002) and at Harewood House in 2007. After the success at Harewood House, *Carnival Messiah* excerpts were performed at the 2008 annual Business Awards Ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall (Fig. 4 above) in London. This would start preparation to bid for funding to stage *Carnival Messiah* in the West End. I was feeling much more confident about the dance aspect as it was not a whole show; we were simply going to perform the *J'ouvert morning* combined with the *Halleluiah Jubilation* (Fig. 5b) finale scenes and sing along to *My Redeemer Liveth*. I paid attention to every detailed step and move, as I was receiving instructions directly from Geraldine. I was quite surprised by the one-to-one coaching; I didn't know that Geraldine had earmarked a new large *Carnival Messiah* Queen costume (Fig 5a) for me. This was to compliment the *Carnival Messiah Sun King* costume in the special '*J'ouvert morning/Halleluiah Jubilation finale*' excerpt. Little did I know, it was a coveted queen costume, and I feel so honoured to have had the opportunity to redeem myself from all the times I fled rehearsals to stay within the comfort zone of the choir. This was me, a brown-hued British African girl attempting to make sense of conflicting cultural expressions

within herself. I nevertheless found resonance and confidence by simply partaking in the singing and vocalising which in turn allowed me to observe the show in its entirety and witness the fusion of varying cultures. Finally, in some sense at the Royal Albert Hall, I felt retrospectively, that Geraldine fulfilled with me and fuelled within me as with most other cast members, her exploration of allowing free artistic expression within her coined creative, artistic space, the Third Space of which she says (2005, p29):

This new cultural space then becomes a tool or space of liberation for all, because it establishes its own unique ideological interpretation of reality, built upon a balanced combination of universal value systems and norms that sometimes converge and sometimes diverge.

On the coach back to Leeds, I noticed one of the music directors (a Christian possibly nervous of the Yoruba songs?!) hushing a few cast members who tried singing the opening libation song in call-and-response. Was this due to the anxiety about the song being in reverence to *Esu* and *Osun* the Yoruba deities, or out of respect so as not to sing the songs recklessly, or because it would have been noisy? It is sad that negative narratives and anxiety about Yoruba spirituality persists, Connor (2005, p39) states: "The Third Space of *Carnival Messiah* is concerned with shifting away from essentialist and negative ideas about any particular cultural identity." I

investigated the word Orisha and who *Esu* and *Osun* really were to try and understand more about them and Yoruba spirituality. I discovered a video of Prof Sophie Oluwole (TK ÒPÓMÚLÉRÓ, 2016) ‘*Do Yoruba Serve One God Or More? Prof Sophie Olúwolé throws more light on the Pantheon*’ in which she explains that *Orisha* or deities (*Esu, Sango, Oya* and *Osun, etc*) were people of note amongst Yoruba people who were deified just as you would with saints in Christianity. Oluwole asks, ‘was St Paul a god? No, likewise *Orishas* are human beings that we remember who did something outstanding to the development of the Yoruba people’. Oluwole elaborates that, if we know who the fathers and mothers of the *orisha* were, and where they were born, why will we call them ‘gods’ and worship them?

Indeed, the motives for translation of Yoruba language for evangelical purposes and the writing and studying of Yoruba kept some aspects of the culture intact, however, this inadvertently gave opportunity for misinterpretation too. For example, *Esu Elegbra*, also known as *Esu, Eshu*, the deity of the crossroads, (or opening of the way), was controversially and wrongly depicted as the devil in the Bible. Olu-Osayomi (2017, p.137) in *Decolonising Myth: From Traditional To Euro-Christian Perceptions of Esu Elegbara*, states that:

One of the stigmas of Colonialism is the mechanistic transposition of Christian concepts into African traditional religion. By virtue of this umbrage, *Esu Elegbara* of the

Yoruba pantheon became demused, his spiritual essence derogated.

Oluwole explains how the Yoruba language is quite self-explanatory and often words are shortened sentences, thus *Orisha/Orisa* – *Ori* (your destiny) *sha/sa* (picks you out). Derived from the longer sentence - *Awon ti ori sha* – those who’s destiny or inner head picks them out, or *awon ti Olorun (God) fun ofe lati se e ko kon-* Those who God gave the grace/gift/providence to do something/a great task.

Overall, my participation in singing Yoruba songs and chants in *Carnival Messiah*, coupled with research started to help me to overcome my anxiety about Yoruba culture and greatly enriched my art practice. This led to the creation of the Geraldine statue (Fig 5c).

It is miraculous to note that despite the slave trade and colonisation, Yoruba culture spread as far as the Caribbean and South America, including Trinidad and Tobago. In my very first experience of *Carnival Messiah*, I was very shocked to hear Ella Andall singing in Yoruba, a language I was prohibited from speaking growing up. Connor (2015) explains that Yoruba culture has been syncretised with Christianity and retained in the Caribbean and writes that

I explore spiritual cultural consciousness by examining and juxtaposing the parallels that exist between worship in all the religious practices that live side by side in Trinidad and Tobago. These

parallels include those within Christian theology (specifically the Roman Catholic religion and the

alongside playing stripped down versions accompanied by a guitar (Fig 6) and coined the term ‘Afropolitan melodies’. Just like



Figure 5a – left – Lara Rose in the *Carnival Messiah* Queen costume at the Royal Albert Hall, London
Figure 5b – middle- Carnival Messiah Community cast in Halleluiah Jubilation finale
Figure 5c – right- Geraldine Connor 14” inch maquette, displaying her joyous face

Oresha traditional Yoruba cult/religion/ritual), Middle Eastern and Asian theology, and aspects of Trinidadian cultural and carnival practices.

I felt like Geraldine was giving me permission to explore a once forbidden Yoruba culture, thereby, I gave myself permission to speak, sing and use my limited Yoruba vocabulary within my art, music, and my academic writing.

How am I telling my Yoruba story in my art and music?

In my music, I started to think about what Yoruba culture I knew – nursery rhymes, greetings, ‘*E Karo ma (Good Morning ma)*’ *E kale sir (Good Evening sir)*’ and Yoruba folk songs. I would explore my Yoruba voice by reworking Yoruba folk songs

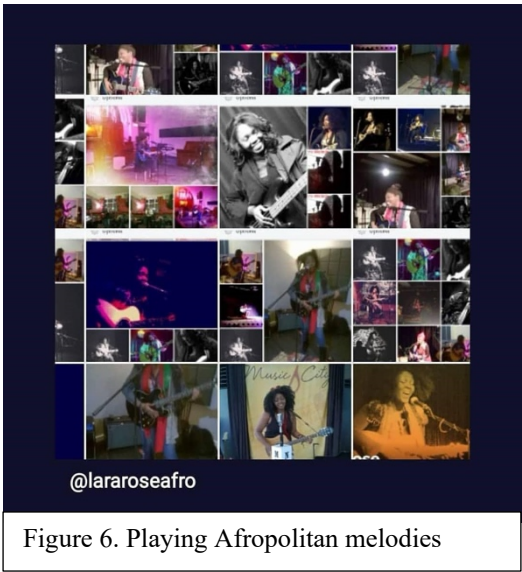


Figure 6. Playing Afropolitan melodies

Geraldine, I would then re-work the songs alongside English lyrics. I did this because it felt safe to explore the Yoruba I already knew, but I needed to challenge some of the myths, taboos and superstitions within Yoruba culture.

The song below is a nursery rhyme about children playing under the trees, making them happy and content;

Abe igi oron bo, ibe lagbe sere wa [Under the tree, is where we play]

Enu wa dun, ara wa ya [We are happy, we feel good]

Abe igi oron bo [under the tree]

Apparently, we were allowed to play under all the trees except for the *iroko* tree where it was believed spirits gather!! I challenged the taboo of playing under the *iroko* tree as an innocent girl from England, in my rework of the above song, so I inserted the *iroko* tree into the Yoruba lyrics. I also wanted to reflect on my feeling of rejection and homelessness;

Abe iroko o, ibe lagbe sere wa [Under the iroko tree, is where we play]

(that's where we play our game)

I wanna fly away, and be free from this pain

Motherland why did you push me away

In my overall Art Practice, I needed a way to represent difficult subjects such as the slave trade, abuse and displacement, but I also wanted to portray the lost treasures of Africa including Yoruba culture. My *Windrush treasure chest* installation (Fig 7) was my way of representing my lost Yoruba heritage that I found again in the Caribbean community. Sadly, by this point, Geraldine had passed away and I wanted to honour her in my artwork. I remembered that the *Eyo* Masquerade in Lagos came out to honour departed kings and elders in

the community, so I created the *Eyo Carnival Messiah* installation (Fig 8). Utilising assemblage art methods I would take fragments of Yoruba culture mixed with Caribbean culture to create the art installations.



Figure 7 Windrush Treasure Chest

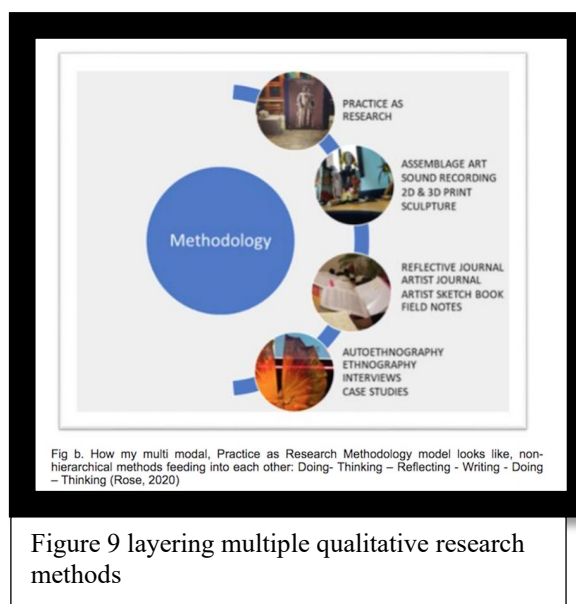


Figure 8 Eyo Carnival Messiah

Practice as Research PhD study

My PhD research methodology was *Practice as Research*, a non-hierarchical multi-modal design, imbricating and layering multiple qualitative research methods (Fig 9). It investigates how Yoruba culture has migrated, despite prohibitions and anxieties surrounding it, and influences art practices in the diaspora. I combined multiple research methods, which included my art practice itself as research, autoethnography, interviews and reflective journals. I recalled conversations and interviews with key practitioners and reflected autoethnographically on participating in various aspects of Carnival and Yoruba culture in Leeds such as costume creation, participating in Leeds West Indian Carnival founder, Arthur France AAA Carnival troupe as a Carnival Queen. I also explored my participation in Connor's *Carnival Messiah* and her incorporation of Yoruba deities syncretised with Christianity. These cumulated into two autoethnographic case studies on me as Carnival Queen *Winnie Mandela* and participation in *Carnival Messiah* respectively. I linked my sculptural practice to the above aspects, Yoruba culture and kept reflective notes and logs to critically evaluate my practice within a doing – thinking – reflecting - doing feedback loop (Nelson, 2013). This allowed Yoruba culture to sit alongside my artistic practice. At the start of my PhD, I recalled, still life drawings I had done in the past, including creating a *papier-mâché* replica of a Yoruba head at school in Lagos. I thus began the creative process by making studies of Yoruba head sculptures and

creating still life drawings from photographs. My aim was to match the skills of my past Yoruba ancestors in the present day with what I now know as *Aworan* (visual representative) sculptures. I also started work on a clay representative head sculpture in the 3D studio before the COVID-19 lockdown period commenced.



Yoruba Aesthetics

Prof. Rowland Abiodun (2014), a Nigerian American Yoruba scholar and author believes that the starting point in studying Yoruba art aesthetics is *iwà* (*character of the subject to be represented or qualities a person possesses*), which will not only show through, but influence an artist's work and its execution. Abiodun further explains how conceptually, Nigerian Art historian Babatunde Lawal asserts that 'in man, *ewà -inú* (the intrinsic worth of things) is frequently implied in the word *iwà* or character,' in his work on Yoruba aesthetics. In other words, I realised that the intrinsic worth of things, or identity, or

essence or *ìwà* need to be fully realized in Yoruba art aesthetics when I was making artwork – and indeed this could be both verbal and visual. Abiodun (2014) in *Yoruba Aesthetics: Ìwà, Ìwà Is What We Are Searching for, Ìwà in, Yoruba Art and Language - Seeking the African in African Art (Chap 8)* stresses the importance of verbal and visual *oriki* in recognising *ìwà*, stating:

The verbal and visual *oriki* of an *òrìsà*, human beings, and things play a vital role in the recognition of this *ìwà*. The *oriki* constitute a powerful vehicle in the identification, expression, and realization of the essence of everything known to the Yorùbá. When a person or sculpture expresses the qualities they possess (that is, their own *ìwà*) in the *oriki*, they have fulfilled the most important prerequisites of *ewà*.

I thus delved more into the writings of Babatunde Lawal to deepen my understanding of Yoruba art aesthetics, especially to decipher why there were so many bronze sculptures of heads and discovered that the head (*ori*) was very important in Yoruba culture. In *Ori: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture*, Lawal B. (1985) reveals in the abstract that,

... the Yoruba regard the head as the locus of the *Ase* (divine power) of the Supreme Being (*Olodumare*)

in the individual, constituting the person's life- source and controlling personality and destiny. Three different modes of representing the head are identified in Yoruba sculpture: the naturalistic, which refers to the external, or physical, head (*ori ode*); the stylized, which hints at the inner, or spiritual, head (*ori inu*); and the abstract, which symbolizes the primeval material (*oke ipori*) of which the inner head was made.

Lawal (1985, p94) explains that naturalistic (*aya jora*) modes, exemplified in ancient Ife terra cotta and bronze heads, were used in second burial ceremonies and are usually indicative of persons of note in the community saying:

However, given the fact that the ceremony is performed mainly for individuals who have attained respectable positions in life and who have been survived by children prosperous enough to sponsor such an expensive undertaking, the second-burial ceremony could also be seen as an indirect celebration of a destiny fulfilled, an indication that the deceased had chosen a good *ori*.

Geraldine, or Mama G as we fondly called her was survived by many 'adopted' children, of which I am one. I desired to appropriate some elements of this ancient Yoruba tradition in a contemporary afropolitan manner to celebrate her legacy.

Geraldine attained a respectable position in life and thus qualified for memorialisation, using a naturalistic mode of sculpture – the life size ultramarine sculpture (Fig 10). Lawal (2001) in *‘Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art* writes that:

Among the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, the word *aworan* commonly refers to any two- or three-dimensional representation, ranging from the naturalistic to the stylized.

I adopted the word *Aworan* for my naturalistic 3D visual representation of the Geraldine Connor statue and others. I also decided to embrace the full Yoruba aesthetic of *ìwà* to honour Geraldine. This is the opening performance I do when I sing the verbal *oriki* (praise singing), carrying the naturalistic visual *oriki* (*Aworan*) statue of Geraldine on my head.



My PhD journey

Over the course of my PhD journey, I continued to allow Yoruba culture to sit side by side with my art practice and discovered: Verbal *Oriki* - Praise songs like the song from Carnival Messiah that I sang at the start of my talk - Ancient naturalistic Visual *Oriki* (*Aworan*) or ancient Yoruba visual representation practices including naturalistic (*aya jora*) statues - Ancient Yoruba practices of honouring elders in the community. The culmination of my PhD was my creation of the first statue of a black woman in Leeds (Pandey, 2022), the 1.7m life size ultramarine-blue *Aworan* statue of Dr Geraldine Connor. Blue to represent the *Carnival Messiah* character *Mama God*. Blue to represent *Olokun* the Yoruba ancestor, goddess of the sea. Blue to represent Joy like waves on the mighty ocean, the earth, home, the pale blue planet, or the pale blue dot as Carl Sagan would say, to which we all belong!!

To reiterate, Mama G, said I need to tell my Yoruba story in my art - I don't feel as anxious as I used to be and I now fill a new sense of homecoming and belonging with Yoruba culture. My new sense of homecoming and belonging, in reclaiming my Yoruba voice inspired by continuously retrieving Yoruba culture has empowered me:

1. I feel more at home and a sense of belonging with Yoruba culture and not as anxious as I used to be about it, embracing my dual British and Yoruba cultural heritages!

Figure 10. (left) The 1.7m life size ultramarine blue *Aworan* statue of Dr Geraldine Connor at the Leeds School of Art, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds

2. I now can sing verbal oriki/ praise songs in a mix of English and Yoruba lyrics just like we did in *Carnival Messiah*.
3. My Art practice has been greatly enriched, and I have created the first statue of a black woman in Leeds, the 1.7m life size ultramarine-blue *Aworan* statue of Dr Geraldine Connor.

In conclusion, this article captured my sense of homecoming, belonging and retrieval of my Yoruba voice inspired by Geraldine Connor and her *Carnival Messiah* who said to me, '*child you need to tell your Yoruba story*'. Come full circle on the streets of Trinidad on Carnival Tuesday enjoying the parade - *play de Mas*, I felt the same sense of home as I did when I participated in *Carnival Messiah*. I had a sense of familiarity with some of the costumes too – *fancy sailor*, *moco jumbie* (stilt walkers), *dame lorraines*, *midnight robbers*, etc. Now I bring back Geraldine's legacy both embodied and including creating a statue to honour her. I had lost my Yoruba voice, and I am finding it once more. I am finding the lost part of myself within myself, and I have come home to myself. Of course, I am not advocating that everyone need undertake extensive PhD research, but I am planting the seeds from the fruit that flourished from my journeying into Geraldine's third space, her admonishment and mentorship - and be a source of inspiration. Geraldine Connor's (2005, p.377) words, highlighted the importance of creating art from within the Third space (blueprint/paradigm), and what

Carnival Messiah meant to her, and why I believe her legacy needs to live on for humanity as a whole:

This Third Space encourages sight from new perspectives, the elimination of boundaries between margin and centre, subversions, transgressions, and the creation of a new universe where all difference is to be affirmed and celebrated. *Carnival Messiah* thus becomes the embodiment of aspirations toward achieving integrity of being, collapsing entrenched and negative notions of difference, whilst guiding its participants and recipients towards the attainment of a critical consciousness which can only be achieved through self-discovery and self-recovery. From within this Third Space *Carnival Messiah* strives to exemplify notions of forgiveness, reconstruction, self-affirmation, healing, and unification as an allegory for enabling transformation and enlightenment.

Equally, the Yoruba proverb *A kì í júbà afimò sínúkú*; means 'there is no honour for anyone who died with his or her knowledge, in other words to bless others with one's endowments is honourable and ultimately rewarding. Mama G you blessed us with your knowledge, with *Carnival Messiah* and you empowered us!! I honour you and your legacy!

I end this article with these three questions to ponder on:

Where have you had parts of yourself
banished or what parts of yourself have
you lost?

Which parts of you need to come home?

Who is the 'Geraldine' in your life?

Acknowledgement

This article is dedicated to the memory of Geraldine Connor inspiring me to tell my Yoruba story. I am forever grateful for your motherly support to me emotionally, artistically, and spiritually. Words cannot express my gratitude to my supervisory team, Dr Alan Dunn and Dr Tenley Martin for believing in me, and their painstaking continuous support throughout my PhD journey. I greatly appreciate their patience, understanding, motivation, attention to detail, swift feedback, meticulous editing, and encouragement especially through the

very challenging COVID-19 lockdown (artistic retreat) period. I am also grateful to Leeds Beckett University and the Leeds School of Art, including all academic, administrative, communications, estates and technical staff who were sympathetic to my multi-disciplinary research project offering tremendous support at every turn.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Dr Haroun Shah, Laila Shah, Dr Kela Francis, Ghansham Mohammed, The University of Trinidad and Tobago and the International Carnival Conference Committee for the great opportunity, support and esteemed honour to give my presentation at *Famalay! The 11th Steelpan & Carnival conference* and bring Geraldine Connor's legacy back to Trinidad.

References

Abiodun, R (2014) Yoruba Aesthetics: Ìwà, Ìwà Is What We Are Searching for, Ìwà in, Yoruba Art and Language - Seeking the African in African Art (Chap 8) Downloaded from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Leeds Beckett University, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107239074.011> (Accessed: April 08 2021).

Connor, G. (2005) !HalleluliaH! : excursions into a Third Space: 'Carnival Messiah' as an instrument of postcolonial liberation. University of Leeds [online] Available at: <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.551240> (Accessed: November 16, 2018)

Geraldine Connor Foundation (2017). Carnival Messiah: The Film (Trailer). [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RewFKMSFjk8> [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Fanon, F. (1986) Black skin, White Masks; London: Pluto Press.

Gilkes, Michael. December 1986. 'Creative Schizophrenia: The Caribbean Cultural Challenge', The Third Walter Rodney Memorial Lecture (Warwick: University of Warwick Centre for Caribbean Studies)

Lawal B. (1985) *Ori: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture*, Journal of Anthropological Research, Spring, 1985, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 91-103, The University of Chicago Press. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3630272> (Accessed: December 12, 2020).

Lawal, B. (2001) 'Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art', Art Bulletin. 83. 498-526. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2001.10786994> Published online: 09 May 2014. (Accessed: July 4, 2021).

Nelson, R. (2013). Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Olu-Osayomi, O., 2017. Decolonising Myth; From Traditional to Euro-Christian Perceptions of Esu Elegbara Babcock University Publication Portal: Home. [online] Publication.babcock.edu.ng. Pan-african University Press. Ed 1 (137-148) Available at: https://publication.babcock.edu.ng/Publications/publication_type/3 (Accessed: April 13, 2022).

Oluwole, S. (2015). Socrates and Òrunmila: Two Patron Saint of Classical Philosophy. 1st ed. Lagos: Ark Publishers.

Oluwole, S. (2016) Importance of the mother tongue - 'Oro Isiti' with prof. Sophie Oluwole #1, [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://youtu.be/KYZyDrx0Rh8> (Accessed: February 6, 2023).

Pandey, G. (2022) "New sculpture unveiled in tribute to Dr Geraldine Connor thought to be first honouring a black woman in Leeds," Yorkshire Evening Post, 18 November. Available at: <https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/arts-and-culture/art/new-sculpture-unveiled-in-tribute-to-dr-geraldine-connor-thought-to-be-first-honouring-a-black-woman-in-leeds-3924338> (Accessed: November 20, 2022).

Rose, L (2025) Lara Rose, TEDx Leeds Beckett University Finding My Yoruba Voice [video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrMGgxqPIJw> (Accessed: April 27, 2025)

TK ÒPÓMÚLÉRÓ (2016) Do Yoruba Serve One God Or More? Prof Sophie Olúwólé throws more light on the Pantheon, YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch>

“Gyal yuh Look Good”: Carnival Influencers’ Creation of Fear of Missing Out on a Carnival (FOMO-AC)

Kai Barratt, PhD

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Technology, Jamaica

Abstract

For the Trinidad Carnival product, using digital marketing strategies through social media is not just a choice, but a necessity to create hype around the festival beyond traditional marketing methods. Consequently, discourses on social media created by carnival influencers about *looking good* generate FOMO (fear of missing out) among their followers. However, this article extends the concept of FOMO to FOMO-AC (fear of missing out on a carnival). Using psychologist Carl Rogers’ theorization of self-concept, it can be argued that self-presentation on social media involves portraying the ideal self. The ideal self is the self one aspires to be and wants others to see. FOMO and FOMO-AC thrive on social comparison, and social media increases social comparison. And through an ethnographic lens, specifically digital ethnography, the paper focuses on discourses about looking good on TikTok between 2023 and 2025, created by carnival influencers. It contends that consuming content on TikTok that concentrates on looking good while enjoying the carnival experience creates FOMO-AC that aims to influence followers to consume more carnival content and products. However, it also argues that there is room to challenge the standards that characterize looking good in carnival, which makes the discourses on social media more nuanced.

Keywords: FOMO, FOMO-AC, Trinidad carnival, carnival influencer, social media, TikTok, looking good, digital ethnography

Introduction

Traditional advertising of the Trinidad Carnival depends heavily on print media, posters, billboards, radio, and television to promote its events, concentrating on the festival’s visual spectacle. These media typically use high-impact visuals, particularly images of costumed masqueraders, while emphasizing corporate sponsorship. Therefore, using social media in a digital marketing era to promote the carnival is not just a choice, but a necessity for creating hype around the festival beyond traditional marketing methods. The article argues that

discourses on social media created by carnival influencers about Caribbean carnivals, including the Trinidad Carnival, generate FOMO (fear of missing out) among their followers. However, this paper extends the concept of FOMO to FOMO-AC (fear of missing out on a carnival) to encapsulate the anxieties that result from witnessing influencers on digital media platforms enjoying themselves at carnival events, which results in wanting to attend these events.

The commercial motives in carnival are not new and must be constantly examined as

business models change. Jo-anne Tull (2022) conceptualizes the Trinidad Carnival's most recent model as an economic ecosystem involving various stakeholders, all contributing to a broader cultural and economic network. She stresses the importance of strategic branding to preserve the distinctiveness of the Trinidad Carnival amid global imitations, advocating for its integration into long-term national tourism planning. In newspaper reports, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts in Trinidad and Tobago estimated that visitors spent approximately US\$94.2 million during the festival in 2024. In one of these reports, Tull advises that, "What is also needed is a diversification in the strategy, on how the product is marketed, as the same method done in previous years cannot be adopted" (Perez-Sobers, 2025, para. 10). The Ministry's estimation and Tull's advice shows that promoting the festival using diverse strategies in an age of digital marketing is needed to boost product demand.

In this regard, the paper focuses on how carnival influencers activate FOMO-AC to boost the demand for the carnival product. In their social media content, carnival influencers define what a carnival participant *should* look like, and this representation is incorporated into digital marketing strategies used to promote the Trinidad Carnival. Through an ethnographic lens, specifically digital ethnography, the article examines discourses on TikTok between 2023 and 2025 about carnival participants' physical appearance created by Caribbean carnival

influencers and how these representations activate FOMO-AC.

Tracing FOMO-AC through Digital Ethnography and Discourse

Although carnival influencers are visible across all platforms, the discussion will center on TikTok, a social media platform that facilitates the creation and dissemination of short-form videos. TikTok emerged from three different Chinese apps: Musical.ly, ByteDance, and Douyin. In 2018, ByteDance purchased Musical.ly and merged it with Douyin, resulting in TikTok (Tidy & Smith-Galer, 2020). The app's algorithm introduces content to users, predicting what they like based on what they have already viewed, making it a useful platform for examining users' engagement. In addition, with 1.12 billion monthly active users worldwide as of March 2025, and where adults spend an average of 53.8 minutes per day (Backlinko, 2025), the platform is valuable for ethnographic observations about how users interact with content and each other. Its algorithm further allows TikTok to function as a cultural actor by actively shaping how users perform identity, engage with social norms, and participate in meaning-making practices within a digitally mediated environment. Rather than serving as a neutral platform, TikTok's algorithmic infrastructure curates and amplifies specific trends, aesthetics, and forms of expression, effectively determining what is culturally visible or valuable (Bucher, 2018). TikTok does not simply reflect cultural expressions, but produces them by structuring how attention

is distributed, how trends emerge, and how identities are mediated in response to what the platform privileges. As such, TikTok plays a central role in contemporary cultural production where identity is increasingly shaped through platform-mediated visibility and engagement.

To ground assertions, the paper relied on examining content in the digital space from 2023 to 2025, particularly TikTok, one of the social media platforms primarily used by carnival influencers. TikTok posts related to carnival by two influencers - Achsah Henry and Shan the Brand between 2023 and 2025 were considered. As traditional advertising struggled to maintain engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, influencers filled the gap by leveraging their perceived intimacy and niche connections to promote products and lifestyles. This led to a shift in the post-pandemic marketing landscape in how brands build trust and visibility using influencers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2021). The trend has continued and intensified, with brands increasingly relying on influencers offering niche reach and higher engagement rates than celebrities or traditional marketing strategies. The period then represents a full resumption of the festival after the COVID-19 pandemic and thus, an increase in promotional content as carnival businesses sought to reclaim their audiences.

Social media influencers play a significant role in reclaiming consumers by shaping their behaviour, lifestyle aspirations, and cultural trends. Among the psychological strategies influencers employ, using FOMO has emerged as a tool for driving

engagement. FOMO, characterized by the anxiety that others enjoy experiences or access from which one is excluded, is often triggered by curated content that highlights exclusivity, urgency, or lifestyle ideals.

This article analyzes how two specific influencers- Achsah Henry and Shan the Brand use FOMO-AC in their content strategies on TikTok. Purposive sampling was used to select the two influencers whose carnival content consistently engages large audiences and demonstrates clear use of FOMO-related strategy, such as exclusivity and aspirational lifestyle promotion. These influencers were chosen based on their relevance to the research focus, platform visibility, and frequency of content that aligns with FOMO-inducing patterns.

Observations on social media within a digital ethnographic framework involve a systematic and immersive monitoring of users' interactions, content production, and communicative practices across digital platforms. The paper's observations involved tracking posts, comments, hashtags, visual aesthetics, and engagement patterns to gain insight into how communities form, negotiate identity, and express meaning in digital contexts, specifically TikTok. This form of observation was non-participant, which entailed observing without engaging. Rather, it examined patterns, language, and imagery that contribute to constructing FOMO-AC in the selected influencers' TikTok content through a comparative analysis of their posts, captions, stories, and promotional materials.

Building on Hine's (2008) assertion that the internet is not detached from reality, it can be argued that social media platforms are deeply embedded in and embodied within everyday experiences. This perspective highlights the interconnection between online interactions and offline life. And as such, these interactions provide rich data for analyzing the online discourses on festivals like Caribbean carnivals.

Discourse analysis was employed to analyze the data collected. Discourse analysis is a qualitative method focused on how language, images, and semiotic content produce meaning and shape social reality (Fairclough, 1992). It is especially useful for interrogating how carnival influencers' content constructs narratives of exclusivity, desirability, and social comparison, which are central features of FOMO-AC. Through a close reading of captions, hashtags, and visual aesthetics, the analysis focuses on how influencers discursively position their followers in relation to idealized lifestyles, carnival experiences, and consumption practices. It also incorporates what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) call multimodal discourse analysis to account for influencers' visual and textual interplay in their posts. Influencer culture is not merely about what is said, but how curated visual storytelling and strategic use of authenticity generate affective responses, including FOMO (Abidin, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012).

By combining digital ethnography with discourse analysis, the examination provides a nuanced understanding of how influencers operate as cultural producers who shape digital subjectivities and

consumer desires through platform-specific discourses. With this in mind, the discussion will analyze how two influencers harness TikTok to create FOMO-AC by concentrating on representations of how the carnival participant should look. It contends that consuming content about carnival experiences, especially those centered on women presenting themselves in conventionally attractive ways or, as the paper terms it, *looking good* on social media platforms, creates FOMO-AC.

FOMO and FOMO-AC

Simply put, FOMO is "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1841). The psychological idea of FOMO describes how a feeling of self is formed and how human motivation works. According to Carl Rogers' (1959) theory, congruence is achieved when individuals' self-image and ideal self agree. In addition, having a positive self-image is necessary to reach self-actualization. In this sense, presenting oneself on social media means showing the ideal self. FOMO thrives on social comparison, and social media exacerbates avenues for comparison.

In an era dominated by digital communication, the advertising and marketing industries use FOMO to reach target audiences. In the context of the Trinidad Carnival, social media makes a wide range of carnival-related content available, and constant exposure to this content may initiate FOMO-AC. In this version of FOMO, carnival consumers

often compare themselves to others, that is, the carnival influencers, which may induce a feeling of being left behind and, thus, influence consumer choices.

Pretty mas costumes and high-end fetes largely define the Trinidad Carnival depicted on social media. The pretty mas carnival is a consumerized packaging of carnivalesque fantasies centered on pleasure, release, and visual appeal (Bettez-Halnon, 2010). The apprehension that initiates FOMO-AC arises from consumers feeling that they may be missing out on carnival experiences, which are presented as enjoyable moments of release featuring attractive people in pretty mas costumes or attending fetes. It is proposed that constant consumption of this kind of carnival content produced by carnival influencers induces FOMO-AC among their followers.

Carnival Influencers: Like Us, but not Like Us

The social media influencer is “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). On social media, they depict a lifestyle that people can identify with, inspiring followers to aspire to this kind of idyllic life (Watkins, 2021). Influencers’ relatability and authenticity make them a trustworthy source of information to many online followers, and ultimately, a source of FOMO. Although not all content creators function as influencers, all influencers engage in content creation, leveraging audience attention as a necessary resource

for accumulating social capital (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019).

Since the mid-2000s, influencer marketing has become a powerful strategy for brands to engage consumers by shaping followers’ attitudes and purchasing behaviors (Duffy, 2020). Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements that target mass audiences, influencers are leveraged to access niche markets. Their perceived authenticity, or being *just like us*, and their relatability enhance their persuasive impact (Duffy, 2020).

Carnival influencers are a specialized group of digital content creators whose carnival content targets specific audiences to initiate FOMO-AC. In addition to featuring their experiences at various carnivals and carnival events, their content is also driven by partnerships with carnival brands and other businesses. Their persuasive elements also lie in the perceived authenticity and legitimacy associated with carnival knowledge, experience, attendance, and appearance or *looking good*, which this discussion will focus on. And as such, the authenticity of their marketing skills is evident in their visual content, which conveys conventional beauty standards, demonstrating that although they want their followers to believe they *are just like us*, *they are not like us*.

Gyal yuh Look Good

Looking good in the commercial carnival model refers to being of a specific race or a mix of races, having a lighter skin tone, displaying a slim body type, and wearing adornments, all of which are tied to hegemonic beauty standards. These

characteristics can be traced to the nineteenth-century female masqueraders of the Trinidad Carnival who gravitated towards “dressing up” and “looking good or pretty,” writes Pamela Franco (2001). However, the construct of looking good or pretty did not apply to the Black, lower-class *jamettes*, who the carnival influencers broadly do not represent today. This is where the nuances emerge, as not all women do and have not adhered to established standards of attractiveness and desirability; hence, carnival influencers cannot represent *all of us*.

Skin shade is a crucial aspect of looking good in carnival; therefore, a desirable skin tone makes the carnival influencer more appealing to their viewers and creates FOMO-AC. The ideal look is a lighter skin shade that has come to represent middle-class femininity and the commercial appeal of the festival. Although speaking about women in hip hop music, Sharpley-Whiting’s perspective is valuable in this context to ground how media representations often perpetuate stereotypes that associate Blackness with hypersexuality while privileging mixed-race or lighter-skinned women as epitomes of beauty. In hip hop music, mixed-race women are often idealized in popular culture (The Official Time, 2020), similar to how they are elevated in the Trinidad Carnival as opposed to how the Black *jamette* stereotype is denigrated.

The complex history of enslavement and colonization in the Caribbean has created tiers of skin shade, and those closest to white are embraced as more attractive and aligning with conventional beauty

standards. As a result of its history, in Trinidad and Tobago, it is estimated that mixed Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian populations, as well as those of mixed “other” descent, make up 15.16% of the ethnic demographic (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). The dynamics of the presence of mixed ethnic groups, particularly those with a lighter skin shade, result in standards of desirability. Hence, the image of the light-skinned, mixed-race woman has long been the standard for advertisements in local media, as well as in the promotion of the Trinidad Carnival.

In the modern, commercially motivated carnival, the female body is the focus of the pretty mas, which, along with a light skin tone, is usually depicted as slim and includes a flat stomach and toned legs, arms, and buttocks. The pretty mas costumes are specifically designed for this body type. For instance, bras supported with wire require a particular upper body shape and size. These designs are created for women with evenly rounded breasts that are neither too small nor too large. The bottom pieces are also skimpy and highlight toned stomachs, legs, and buttocks. Consequently, the emphasis on exercise, diet, and losing weight is common among women in their preparation for the pretty mas and is also a familiar theme in carnival influencers’ content. Being slim and fit carries meanings associated with desirability, attractiveness, and socio-economic status. However, slimmer bodies are preferred in the media when combined with skin color and enjoyment. It is

unsurprising, then, that carnival influencers typically fit these representations, and fulfilling these criteria for looking good in carnival is a significant feature of their content that gives rise to FOMO-AC.

Another aspect of looking good in carnival content is adornment, which is elevated further when combined with a slim physique and a light skin shade. In this regard, content on fitness and beauty regimens in preparation for carnival events as well as skin care, hair, makeup, nails, and eyelashes, is foregrounded by influencers. Posts about carnival accessories for the pretty mas masquerade, including footwear choices, bags, and stockings, are also evident. These are captured in preparation posts, such as preparing for fetes and playing mas (the street parade).

GRWM (get ready with me) content reveals individuals preparing for their day, typically focusing on their hair and makeup, as well as making fashion and style choices (Karle, 2020, p. 50). GRWM content usually showcases everyday routines that legitimize influencers' trustworthiness and authenticity by being *just like us*. Accordingly, carnival influencers' GRWM content presents an idealized version of looking good for the festival, facilitated by the underlying narrative of FOMO—that they are *just like us*, but not quite *us*.

The complicated and sometimes contradictory narratives that define looking good in the Trinidad and Tobago experience stem from historical encounters and manifest in the modern carnival and social spaces. The paper focuses on two carnival influencers that sometimes embody and challenge these narratives attached to looking good, which result in the manufacturing of FOMO-AC in the digital space.

Carnival Influencers: Achsah Henry and Shan the Brand ¹²

Firstly, Achsah Henry (@achsahhenry) is a Trinidadian costume model, marketing expert, and background dancer for soca artiste Machel Montano. As of February 2025, Henry has 110,000 followers on the social media platform Instagram and 20,100 on TikTok. Her social media content concentrates on her experiences at various carnivals as a costume model, participant, and dancer. Her most popular posts include a street food review in Paris, which garnered 19,100 views, and an informative piece on the carnival modeling industry (Hype Auditor¹³, 2025). In addition to carnival content, which includes carnival prep, recap, and informational videos, her fitness and beauty routines, travel, and corporate endorsements comprise other aspects of her social media

¹The research involved analyzing publicly available social media content produced by the specified influencers. Since the data are accessible and are intended for public viewing, informed consent from the influencers was not required. However, ethical principles such as maintaining contextual integrity and quoting accurately to avoid misrepresentation of the influencers' content were upheld.

²The insights were calculated using the Hype Auditor digital analytics platform, which provides insights into social media

performance, primarily focusing on influencer marketing. The AI tool helps brands, marketers, and content creators analyze audience demographics, engagement rates, follower authenticity, and overall social media reach across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter/X. The platform is widely used to detect fake followers, measure engagement rates, and assess the credibility of influencers, ensuring that brands collaborate with genuine content creators. Hype Auditor uses AI-driven technology to track metrics (Hype Auditor, 2025).

content. Her influencer status has led to partnerships outside of carnival-based enterprises and the creation of her own business ventures.

Henry's fete and road march preparation videos present an idealized version of dressing up for carnival events, which influencers who resemble Henry promote as a standard for looking good in carnival. In Henry's case, her mixed racial background, light skin tone, slim physique, and conventional attractiveness all check the boxes for looking good, and when combined with her presence at carnival events, drive FOMO-AC.

Second, Shan the Brand (@_callmeshan), a carnival influencer from Tobago, can also be described as a carnival chaser. Carnival chasers travel to various Caribbean carnivals throughout the year. In Shan's case, the chaser has evolved into a carnival influencer and content creator.

Shan, with a background in event management, started her platform by making live videos on Instagram and sharing personal stories that led to a growing following. As a result, in 2022, she started *Fete Travellers*, a community and business dedicated to the carnival chase that marked the start of her carnival influencer and content creation journey. Her leading platforms as of January 2025 are TikTok, where she has amassed 34,200 followers, whom she refers to as "branders," and Instagram, where she has 23,300 followers. She includes "the Brand" as part of her social media handle as if to convey that an influencer can, in fact, become a brand.

Shan the Brand builds her brand by primarily highlighting her attending

carnival events and playing mas at various Caribbean-style carnivals. It also spotlights her preparation for these events, or what she calls FRWM (fete ready with me), her version of GRWM. These posts usually showcase Shan's makeup routines and outfit selections while offering commentary as she prepares for various events. In Shan's FRWM content, she often discusses her expectations of the event and provides in-depth reviews of the events in which she has already participated. Her attendance at carnivals, preparations, recaps, informational videos, and partnerships with carnival brands solidify her status as a carnival influencer, enhancing her ability to create FOMO-AC. However, outside her standard carnival-based content, Shan uses her platform to address social issues, particularly colorism, body image, personal relationships, and other motivational and spiritual content. Her discussion of these topics adds an element of critical analysis that goes beyond superficial insights provided by other carnival influencers such as Achsah Henry.

Social Media Metrics

On TikTok, Shan the Brand commands a larger following of 33,900 compared to Achsah Henry's 17,200 followers. In addition to her more expansive audience, Shan's content has accumulated more than three times the engagement seen on Henry's profile. These numbers suggest a higher level of interaction with Shan's videos, potentially due to the frequency of content, their viral nature, and audience retention (Hype Auditor, 2025).

Based on audience size, Achsah Henry and Shan the Brand can be considered micro-influencers based on Ruiz-Gomez's (2019) classification. According to Ruiz-Gomez, micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic than high-profile influencers with larger followings, who tend to appear less accessible as their popularity grows. It is this sense of authenticity and accessibility that micro-influencers project, which leads to a stronger connection with their audience. The two influencers can also be classified as micro-celebrities without considering audience size. Senft (2008) defined them as individuals who engage in practices to maintain a relationship with their audience. Overall, both influencers have built their personal brands on social media, with Shan the Brand leading in TikTok engagement and Achsah Henry maintaining a lead on Instagram.

Yet, these are only vanity metrics that do not provide further insight into the complexities of the carnival culture that their content captures beyond FOMO-AC. Rogers (2018) defines vanity metrics as "a critical term from business studies that admonishes analysts for a reliance on the brute counting of page views and likes as indicators of success in the hit and like economies" (p. 450). He further argues that social media metrics perpetuate this cycle of well-knownness by keeping score and showing it in number badges, follower counts, and other external signs. The term "microcelebrity" is relevant in this setting because it results from tiny fame markers (p. 454). Social media, therefore, helps produce influencers or microcelebrities by emphasizing visible and quantifiable signs

of popularity. These signs, however, do not measure the quality of their impact but instead elevate individuals based on their perceived popularity. Further, it does not consider identity creation as a data-driven, socially mediated performance, in which the self is curated according to cultural and algorithmic norms.

While influencers' physical appearance may appear to be a matter of aesthetic presentation, it is further an outcome of a commercialized embodiment of cultural norms, particularly those tied to dominant beauty standards. Influencers' visibility is often contingent on conforming to dominant ideals related to race, gender, body size, skin tone, and style, which are ideals that are deeply rooted in Eurocentric and capitalist visual cultures (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Therefore, their appearance is part of a larger cultural and economic system determining who gets to be seen, trusted, and monetized online.

Although the popularity of TikTok's FYP (for you page) has influenced other social media platforms to develop their own algorithmic recommendation features, TikTok's implementation remains the most prominent. Distinct from Instagram, where homepages routinely display curated content from followed accounts, TikTok's FYP serves as the default feed and primary site of user engagement (Blackburn & Hogg, 2024). Unlike Instagram's Explore page, which is based on engagement rather than follower count, TikTok allows visibility for ordinary users. Blackburn and Hogg (2024) establish a correlation between time spent on social media and the presence of eating disorder

psychopathologies, heightened body image concerns, increased internalization of the thin ideal, and reduced self-esteem. Notably, FOMO intensifies users' engagement with content that reinforces beauty standards, as influencers feel compelled to remain visible and relevant by aligning themselves with perceived norms of attractiveness. While dominant representations are exclusionary, they are also challenged and negotiated in spaces like social media.

Carnival Influencers Looking Good on TikTok

Whereas Achsah Henry fits the standards of a typical carnival influencer in content and physical appearance, Shan the Brand deviates to some extent, particularly in her appearance. In her FRWM posts, Shan provides content like Achsah's, which includes beauty and makeup routines, outfit choices, and other adornments for fetes and playing mas. However, the influencers' content on their physique differs.

Achsah Henry's physique is significant to her content as a carnival influencer and a background dancer. She has many posts dedicated to fitness and diet to maintain her slender figure, which meets the standards for pretty mas and carnival fetes. This dedication to her physique is reflected in her fitness and diet posts, where she is seen at the gym or preparing healthy meals. For instance, she provided a recap of her participation in the 75 Strong challenge, which she adhered to from October 2024 to January 2025. The challenge is a 75-day self-improvement program designed to help participants enhance physical and mental

well-being while documenting their progress on social media. Henry's recap video of the challenge highlighted the benefits to her body, which came in time for the Trinidad Carnival 2025 (Henry, 6 January 2025). The advantages to her body were evident in a post that showed Achsah in a Trinidad Carnival costume from that year (Henry, 6 March 2025). All the posts featuring Henry in the pretty mas costume underscored ideal physical attributes, for which viewers lauded her.

Achsah Henry does not deviate from the standards set up for carnival influencers in her content. Her GRWM posts, workout and diet posts, and hair, makeup, and skin routine posts subscribe to physical appearance and attractiveness standards that dominate social and traditional media. Notably, her posts do not challenge these standards about beauty or promote diverse body sizes and appearances.

Shan the Brand featured carnival content the same way as Achsah did, showcasing her pretty mas costume for Trinidad Carnival 2025. However, she also spoke about the criticisms she received about her body. According to her, much of the criticism she encountered privately through direct messages was aimed at her physique and it not being suitable for her costume choice (Shan the Brand, 7 March 2025). Standards of attractiveness and desirability have been consistently reinforced throughout history and in contemporary society, and those who deviate may face discrimination or pressure to conform. In the same post, Shan lamented that she was not being received by a larger audience and event promoters who had told her she was

not “bookable” as an influencer. Interestingly, she attempted to change her hairstyles and makeup to fit within the box that defines influencer beauty standards. Even so, as stated by Shan, she was not being hired as an influencer and content creator partly due to her appearance, particularly her body shape and skin tone. Shan the Brand has brought the conversation about her non-adherence to traditional beauty standards to her TikTok, resulting in comparisons and insecurity about her look. In a 2024 TikTok post, she outlined that not meeting the standards of looking good or an ideal image of self affected her confidence as a legitimate influencer. In her words, she felt she was “not palatable,” and equated this to being “untidy.” She told her viewers, “I was unkept, I was under-presented; I was doing this to myself...I realize I was just lacking feminine appeal; I was lacking intention; I was lacking a sense of try” (Shan the Brand, 11 September 2024). In another post, she alleges that she got backlash from users for not maintaining beauty standards relating to hair, outfits, makeup, and adornment (Shan the Brand, 1 April 2024). She ultimately linked attractiveness to her success as an influencer: “I never thought I was ugly. I still don’t think so. I just feel like I can make more effective contributions to becoming or feeling or looking more beautiful, not just beautiful but like a lot more respectable, a lot more managerial” (Shan the Brand, 1 April 2024).

In addition, she has raised colorism as another reason that she believed she was being passed over for influencer jobs. In a video captioned “Dear Tobago,” she said

even though she faced colorism from others outside of Trinidad and Tobago, she was surprised she faced it at home in Tobago by not getting support for her event businesses by the Tobago Festivals Commission and other promoters: “I still have carnival bands telling me I am too black to be their frontline and to be their face of the day...” (Shan the Brand, 14 April 2024). These sentiments are not new to Shan the Brand, as in November of 2023, she voiced her frustration with the skin shade and body-shaming she had been experiencing. At the end of her rant, she exclaimed, “F*ck yuh box, I’m creating my own” (Shan the Brand, 14 November 2023).

“F*ck yuh Box, I’m Creating my Own”

As a result of the backlash she received about her physical appearance, Shan also utilizes her platforms to challenge beauty norms and promote body positivity and self-empowerment, leading to monetizing this type of digital content. In September 2023, she announced that she would promote brands, services, and products under a campaign called “Branded”, which she believed would help women “brand themselves in their own versions of beauty,” similar to what she was doing as Shan the Brand (Shan the Brand, 11 September 2024).

While colorism has historically undermined the body image of dark-skinned women, social media has become a space to transform these discourses. It enables female content creators and influencers to challenge beauty norms, celebrate diverse representations, and promote body positivity and self-empowerment. Childs

(2022) examines how Black women in the United States utilize social media platforms to discuss and combat colorism, positing that they are actively working to redefine beauty standards and promote inclusivity by sharing personal narratives, beauty tutorials, and discussions on colorism. However, these can also result from the societal pressure to conform.

Interestingly, after receiving criticisms following the Trinidad Carnival in 2025, Shan the Brand's viewers were introduced to a new type of content featuring her gym attendance and a healthier lifestyle (Shan the Brand, 25 March 2025). It can be assumed that this emerged from the criticisms about her body, leading to her adapting to social norms, or her needing to fulfil the content criteria of carnival influencers (for example, Achsah Henry's gym and fitness content), or to promote body positivity. She sometimes declares she is comfortable with her body and seems confident. And at other times, she seems defeated and uninspired to conform to physical appearance norms. What is notable is that these developments in her content are not linear and do not follow a chronological or thematic sequence. Instead, it jumps across topics, formats, or periods. Her posts do not build upon each other to form a clear storyline or progression in how she feels about her physical appearance. Instead, it appears less curated and can be viewed as unfiltered or authentic by followers. Nonetheless, this can also be seen as a strategy to improve engagement metrics, where empowerment and unfiltered content are marketed. This ties into FOMO-AC, as users may link body-positive and body-

diversity trends to the idea that carnival is all-embracing and empowering, which can be another type of curated content.

Conclusion: In Between the Algorithm

The differences and similarities in carnival content between Shan the Brand and Achsah Henry on TikTok demonstrate complex messages about looking good in carnival on social media. On one hand, traditional and social media have always established their conventions through the frequency of specific images of women's bodies that help shape ideas about the ideal carnival physique. It is intensified by the idealized images of women that fit traditional beauty standards regarding skin tone, physique, and aesthetic self-care routines, combined with enjoyment. To increase visibility and cultural capital, users frequently subscribe to trends and physique ideals reinforced by TikTok's FYP algorithm and the prevalence of these images, facilitating FOMO-AC. Social media platforms, particularly those centered on visual content like TikTok, provide a consistent stream of idealized bodies, prompting users to engage in upward social comparisons that negatively affect self-perception. Blackburn and Hoggs (2024) found that women exposed to such content experienced a significant decrease in body image satisfaction and an increased internalization of societal beauty standards. In this sense, users may feel pressure to participate in this carnival experience and achieve a specific appearance by purchasing the same brands or adopting similar lifestyle choices, reinforcing consumerist behaviours.

On the other hand, FOMO-AC can be generated by showcasing diverse body types and self-love messages, which appeal to a different kind of carnival consumer. And even so, messages can still encourage the consumption of certain products and lifestyle choices. These nuances highlight the tension between empowerment and strategic marketing, where empowerment can be marketed if it is profitable, aesthetically pleasing, and garners engagement metrics. However, more research is needed to assess audiences' interaction with carnival influencers' content, for example, through comments, duets, and shares, and how it impacts their perceptions of looking good in carnival and ultimate FOMO-AC.

Until then, it is posited that FOMO-AC is fuelled by narratives that promote the carnival as an industry, and how the carnival participant should look is crucial in marketing that industry. While carnival influencers may work to uphold the business of carnival, there is room for other voices and other types of influencers on social media to disrupt and initiate conversations that are needed about the Trinidad Carnival product. Because it depends on images of sameness, the

industry does not account for the obscurities and inconsistencies that define carnival culture, especially when other socio-political dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender, and commodification come into play. Here, norms can be elevated, challenged, transformed, and something else in between the algorithmic grip.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the organizers of the conference *Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections; Cultural Cadence: Steelpan, Calypso and Mas, and the Global Diaspora Connection*, hosted by The University of Trinidad and Tobago and the International Carnival Conference Committee from March 6–8, 2025, in Trinidad and Tobago. The opportunity to present an earlier version of this work and engage with insightful feedback from fellow participants greatly contributed to the development of this article.

References

- Abidin, C. (2016). Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?: Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. *Social Media and Society*, 2(2), pp. 1-17. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342>
- Backlinko. (2025). *TikTok statistics you need to know*. Available at: <https://backlinko.com/tiktok-users>
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic™: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bettez-Halnon, K. (2010). Carnival culture. In: Hall, J., Grindstaff, L. and Ming-Cheng Lo, M., eds. *Handbook of cultural sociology*. London: Routledge, pp. 201-210.
- Blackburn M.R. and Hogg R.C. (2024) #ForYou? The impact of pro-ana TikTok content on body image dissatisfaction and internalisation of societal beauty standards. *PLOS ONE* 19(8), pp. 1-29. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0307597>
- Bucher, T. (2018). *If... then: Algorithmic power and politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Childs, K. M. (2022). “The shade of it all”: How black women use Instagram and YouTube to contest colorism in the beauty industry. *Social Media and Society*, 8(2), pp. 1-25. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221107634>
- Djafarova, E. and Trofimenko, O. (2018). ‘Instafamous’ – Credibility and self-presentation of micro-celebrities on social media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(10), pp. 1432–1446. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2018.1438491.
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). “Having it All” on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), pp. 1-22. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337>
- Duffy, B.E. (2020). Social media influencers. In: Ross, K., ed. *The international encyclopedia of gender, media, and communication*. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Franco, P.R. (2001). *Shifting ground: An early history of Afro-creole women's mas in Trinidad Carnival*, Emory University [Dissertation]. Available at: <https://login.ezproxy.utech.edu.jm/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/shifting-ground-early-history-afro-creole-womens/docview/304750863>
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McCaughey, K. and Freberg, L. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), pp. 90–92. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001>
- Government of The Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development. (2012). *Trinidad and Tobago 2011 population and housing census demographic report*. Available at: <https://cso.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2011-Demographic-Report.pdf>
- Henry, A. (2025). *We did it Joe...What a journey... But I'm so proud of my self for sticking with it and completing this challenge...*, 6 January [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@achsahenry/video/7456937531087670574?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [13 May 2025].

- Henry, A. (2025). *Right down till the last drum...The Carnival love affair continues... Trinidad I love you* ππ, 6 March [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@achsahhenry/video/7478796875982720298?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [13 May 2025].
- Hine, C. (2008). Virtual ethnography: Modes, varieties, affordances. In: Fielding, N., Lee, R. and Blank, G. eds. *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 257-270.
- Hype Auditor. (2025). *Influencer profile- Shan the Brand*. Available at: https://app.hypeauditor.com/my-network/influencer/37271815/analytics/tiktok/_callmeshan [16 May 2025].
- Hype Auditor. (2025). *Influencer profile-Achsah Henry*. Available at: <https://app.hypeauditor.com/my-network/influencer/31059109/analytics/tiktok/achsahhenry> [16 May 2025].
- Karle, M. (2020). *A social media survival guide: How to use the most popular platforms and protect your privacy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kress, G.R. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Bloomsbury Academic
- Perez-Sobers, A. (February 26, 2025). Carnival's economic impact not falling, says Dr Tull. *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.guardian.co.tt/business/carnivals-economic-impact-not-falling-says-dr-tull-6.2.2243054.10072d5715>
- Przybylski, A., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. and Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), pp. 1841-1848. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- Rogers, C. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework. In: Koch, S., ed. *Psychology: A study of a science*. New York: McGraw Hill, pp. 184-256.
- Rogers, R. (2018). Otherwise engaged: Social media from vanity metrics to critical analytics. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, pp. 450-472.
- Ruiz-Gomez, A. (2019). Digital fame and fortune in the age of social media: A classification of social media influencers. *aDResearch: International Journal of Communication Research*, 19 (19), pp. 8-29.
- Senft, T. (2008). *Camgirls: Celebrity and community in the age of social networks*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Shan the Brand. (2023). *Allur win*, 14 November [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7301453453769903365?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [13 May 2025].
- Shan the Brand. (2024). *Its #shansition season - and i wanna welcome you guys to #Branded #shanthethebrand*, 11 September [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7413376774496685317?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [15 May 2025].
- Shan the Brand. (2024). *I really just wanna know - #deartobago - wassup? #rantwithshan*, 14 April [TikTok]. Available at:

- https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7357844533025017094?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [15 May 2025]
- Shan the Brand. (2024). *Ok guys tall rwady to go along? Cause we doing it this time for real, lets get #branded - #shanthethebrand*, 1 April [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7353085192749337861?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [15 May 2025].
- Shan the Brand. (2025). No caption, 7 March [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7479079165463956741?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [13 May 2025].
- Shan the Brand. (2025). *We added fitness to the life of Shan it's a big goal I wanna commit to for both my mental and physical health. - So welcome to the journey*, 25 March [TikTok]. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@_callmeshan/video/7485719068603878661?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7455819327565874693 [14 May 2025].
- The Official Time. (2020). Tracy Sharpley-Whiting on feminism, narrative, Fanon, negritude, hip-hop, France, and surrealism [YouTube]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTIUJ53OBLw&t=1s>
- Tidy, J. and Smith Galer, S. (August 5, 2020). TikTok: The story of a social media giant. *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53640724>
- Tull, J. (March 4, 2022). The economics of “A Taste of Carnival.” The University of the West Indies. [Zoom Session].
- Watkins, B. (2022). An examination of the influencer–brand relationship: Implications and future directions for influencer marketing. In: Harris Lipschultz, J., Freberg, K. and Luttrell, R. eds. *The emerald handbook of computer-mediated communication and social media*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 287-303. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80071-597-420221017>

Steelpan Symphony: Harmonizing Tradition and Theory in Caribbean Pedagogy and Identity

Paul J. Massy

Florida Memorial University
15800 NW 42nd Ave, Miami Gardens, FL, USA
paul.massy@fmu.edu

Josephine Torrel-Brown

The University of Trinidad and Tobago,
John Donaldson Campus, Wrightson Rd, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago,
josephine.torrel@utt.edu.tt

Abstract

In both educational and research contexts, memorization and rote learning have often been criticized—and, in many respects, rightfully so. However, while rote learning and memorization have limitations, they can be valuable when used appropriately and in conjunction with other teaching strategies. The key is to find a balance that promotes both foundational knowledge and deeper understanding. The Caribbean identity has long been a wellspring of innovation and creativity, shaping distinctive educational practices that defy conventional norms. In this paper, we explore the value of the “panyard way” of teaching and learning—an approach that has not only yielded exceptional educational outcomes but also embodies the art of musicking. A recent case study conducted with teachers in Trinidad and Tobago who learned to play the steelpan in the Panyard provides valuable insight. These individuals, now accomplished steelpan educators and practitioners, exemplify how this unique form of learning fosters both technical skill and deep cultural connection. The findings underscore the continuing relevance of the Panyard tradition, demonstrating how it remains an essential and transformative component of how we learn and teach today. We emphasize the relevance and validity of the panyard model, which relies in some ways on rote and memorization teaching strategies. The dynamic relationship between rote learning and theoretical instruction, using the steelpan as a teaching tool, will be demonstrated. This approach highlights that Caribbean identity—rich in creativity, resilience, and tradition—should not be sidelined in and out of the classroom. The integration of the steelpan in education supports philosophies of cultural relevance, advocating for a curriculum that is indigenized and reflective of students’ lived experiences. This method continues to inspire and captivate audiences worldwide, reaffirming the enduring relevance of Trinidad and Tobago’s cultural heritage in shaping global educational practices.

Key Words: steelpan; pedagogy; panyard; Caribbean identity; music education; theory; standardization; decolonization; Indigenus

Introduction

The legacy of colonization has profoundly shaped the educational landscape and

societal behaviors in Trinidad and Tobago. Colonial powers imposed an education

system that prioritized European cultural norms and values, often at the expense of indigenous knowledge and practices.

According to Torrel-Taylor (2010), this system, characterized by teacher-centered methodologies and rote memorization, has been critiqued by scholars such as Hawes and Stephens (1990), who argue that true learning is rooted in active engagement and experiential interaction rather than passive listening and memorization.

Education in Trinidad and Tobago, as in many post-colonial societies, has struggled with the remnants of an alien curriculum that fails to resonate with the lived experiences of its students. Hawes and Stephens (1990) further emphasize the importance of an education system that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to learners, warning against the psychological disturbances and superficial understanding that arise from disconnected, foreign content. Lawrence Lowery and Dr. Howard Gardner further advocate for varied instructional strategies that cater to multiple intelligences, highlighting the limitations of traditional lecture-based approaches (Ministry of Education, 2001).

The dichotomy between "high" and "low" culture, rooted in colonial ideologies (Vázquez Córdoba, 2019; Eagleton, 2000), continues to influence perceptions of Caribbean cultural practices. European arts have historically been deemed "classical," while Caribbean music and dance were often relegated to the status of "low culture" (Nettleford, 2003). This cultural hierarchy, reinforced by media and international consumption patterns, has led to the undervaluation of Caribbean artistic expressions. Scholars like Nettleford challenge this notion, advocating for the recognition and celebration of Caribbean aesthetics as integral to the region's identity. Dr. Eric Williams, a pivotal figure in the intellectual decolonization of the Caribbean, criticized the colonial education

he received for being disconnected from the realities of Trinidad and the West Indies (Palmer, 2006). He called for educational strategies that draw on indigenous heritage and relate to students' lived experiences. Similarly, Professor Gordon Rohlehr (2007) emphasized the need for curriculum indigenization to foster qualities such as grace, humility, and largeness of spirit, which were often missing in the colonial education system (Torrel-Taylor, 2010).

Teaching the steelpan by rote, while integrating traditional methodologies, can also play a significant role in the decolonization of education in Trinidad and Tobago. The steelpan, an instrument born out of the ingenuity and resilience of the Caribbean people, symbolizes cultural pride and innovation. By incorporating rote learning, which emphasizes repetition and memorization (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978), students can master the technical skills required to play the steelpan. However, integrating this approach with experiential and culturally relevant methodologies allows students to connect deeply with their heritage. This fusion of techniques not only preserves the traditional art form but also empowers students to appreciate and celebrate their cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging and pride. Such an approach challenges the colonial legacy of education by prioritizing formal knowledge and practices, ultimately contributing to the intellectual and cultural decolonization of the region (Massy & Sembiente, 2022; Massy, 2023).

Moreover, the steelpan's unique design and sound provide an engaging and culturally relevant way to teach music. By learning to play the steelpan, students not only develop musical skills but also gain an appreciation for the rich cultural history of the Caribbean

and the way indigenous music is played on the instrument. For example, Christopher Small, a musicologist and socio-musicologist, reminds us that some genres of music are not just static objects or products but an active process (Small, 1998). His term *musicking* refers to the act of engaging with music in any form — whether performing, listening, composing, or even organizing a musical event. Small argued that *musicking* is a social activity that helps people explore relationships and meanings within their cultural context. It is a fascinating concept that shifts the focus from music as a "thing" to music as an experience. This explains why in many cases we cannot and should not separate the pannist from the instrument during a musical performance. The pannist embodies the performance and provides us with an experience.

The standardized steelpan ensemble has also ensured that students receive a comprehensive education in both the technical aspects of music and the cultural significance of the steelpan. This holistic approach to music education supports the decolonization of the curriculum by integrating local traditions and practices, making learning more meaningful and relevant to the students' lives. The steelpan, particularly the standardized 16-piece ensemble placed in Trinidad and Tobago's schools by the Ministry of Education's Pan in the Classroom Unit, serves as an excellent teaching tool for music theory and practice. The fourths and fifths design of the steelpan facilitates ease of learning, as the arrangement of notes follows a logical and intuitive pattern. This design allows students to grasp the fundamentals of music theory more effectively, as they can visually and aurally connect the

relationships between notes. The consistent layout across different pans in the ensemble means that once a student learns to play one pan, they can easily transfer their skills to other pans, enhancing their versatility and confidence in playing multiple instruments.

This paper explores the harmonization of tradition and theory in Caribbean pedagogy, with a focus on the steelpan as a symbol of cultural resilience and innovation. By examining the impact of colonization on education and behavior in Trinidad and Tobago, it seeks to highlight the importance of culturally relevant education in shaping identity and fostering a sense of belonging.

Background

While the steelpan was being developed in formal educational systems as an educational tool, there was already a history of Indigenous teaching and learning of the steelpan in the community panyard. The panyard is a physical space where the teaching and learning of the steelpan occurs in many communities in Trinidad and Tobago.



Figure 1
The Pamperi, Steel Orchestra, make music in their panyard in Trinidad. ©2025 by Cheo Cato

It is also a sociocultural space accessible to all, and some of the learning happens by

rote. There is also a communal teaching and learning experience between the arranger and players and between players and players. For example, the effective panorama preparation process is also experienced in the panyard as an effective strategy of learning and memorizing six to eight minutes of complex music during the Carnival season. However, once the instrument was introduced to the school system, the dominant activity for the teaching and learning of music using the steelpan became the reading and writing of the music score, which impacted the other critical attributes of organic panyard instruction, as mentioned above. The impact of this significant change and other casual or correlation activities could be understood through research beginning with music teachers who encountered panyard steelpan instructional experiences during their personal and professional development.

The panyard is also a place that continues to allow music educators who have experienced this form of organic instruction to “*apprehend that work in the light of their backgrounds, biographies, and experiences*” and researchers to “*presume a multiplicity of perspectives, a plurality of interpretations*” (Greene, 2001). For example, this physical space can be found in more than 150 communities in Trinidad and Tobago that are straddled between rural and urban towns populated by citizens of varied races, classes, and ages whose experiences have created a fertile ground for quantitative and qualitative work in steelpan studies. Therefore, as we investigate in this study the impact of panyard steelpan’s experiences on its participants who are now music teachers in Trinidad and Tobago, there will be critical intersections, similarities, and differences

that reflect the historical, physical, social, and technical nature of the panyard as a communal space on their pedagogical practices. For example, one of the current professors in the Department of Creative and Festive Arts at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine posited

The old saying 'I guess you had to be there...' pretty much sums up the fact that the importance of panyard learning is hard to put to words because panyard lessons are technical, cultural, and social. As the instrument progresses into the 21st century, the third-generation player and arranger must learn to balance his/her classroom experience with the big yard and not lose track of the idea of panyard spontaneity, aural training, and folk culture (Remy, 2006). Literature should also make panyard community teaching and learning and its contributions noticeable in formal education systems through research. There will also be a better understanding among steelpan stakeholders of how all these activities facilitated by community panyards have contributed to steelpan today as an educational tool. Therefore, the symbiosis among instructional practices in the panyard, the K-12 system, and postsecondary institutions continues to be the fertile space for understanding steelpan curriculum and instruction. Moreover, the relevant frameworks that inform this work are culturally sustaining pedagogy and decolonialization theory.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) was birthed out of a need for more profound, nuanced ways of understanding cultural relevance and responsiveness. Initially influenced by Ladson-Billings’s Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in 1995 and Gay’s Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in 2002, Paris (2012) asserts that

The term culturally sustaining pedagogies requires that pedagogies be more than responsive to or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence (p. 95). We also identified these elements for this study to illustrate the framework and make visible the elements of the CSP used in this inquiry:

Some Elements of CSP Elements in Panyard Steelpan Pedagogy	
Valuing community languages, practices, and ways of being	• Learn music by rote. • Develop a teaching and learning relationship between arranger/teacher and student and/or student and student. • Facilitate practice sessions to ensure everyone learns what should be played correctly.
Schools are accountable to the community	• Constant dialogue between educators and practitioners of the community steel band • The ways of knowing in the community steel bands are represented and sustained in schooling.
Curriculum that connects to cultural and linguistic histories	• Explicit connection to the way the steelpan was taught and learned historically. • A clear reference to the pioneers of the instrument and their contributions.
Sustaining cultural and linguistic	• Learning music by rote • Reading and writing music notation

practices, while providing access to the dominant culture	• Communal practice facilitated by the teacher and student • Individual practice with the expert
---	--

Another framework, decolonization theory seeks to understand and challenge the enduring impacts of colonialism on societies, cultures, and institutions (Kohn & McBride, 2011). It critically examines the legacies of colonial rule and the ongoing structures of oppression that persisted long after formal independence. It calls for a comprehensive reevaluation of power dynamics, knowledge production, and cultural representation to dismantle colonial mindsets and foster genuine liberation. For example, internationally renowned Caribbean scholars, including Marcus Garvey and the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, were advocates and immensely instrumental in decolonizing activities with a critical focus on the education system. His first act as Prime Minister of independent Trinidad and Tobago allowed Williams to leverage *“his academic expertise to concretize the transformation of the education system by making education available to all—regardless of socio-economic status”* (as cited in Sappleton & Adams, 2022). At its core, decolonization theory emphasizes the need to confront historical injustices and acknowledge the violence and exploitation perpetrated during the colonial era. By recognizing the past, decolonization theory encourages societies to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in honest conversations about their shared histories. This process is essential for reconciliation, as it helps

address historical trauma and paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable future. Moreover, in the decade which begins in 2030 the steelpan, as known today, will be a musical instrument that is a century old. Its historical teaching and learning, especially in the panyards, has never been given the value that is presently afforded to the instructional practices in the classroom. Therefore, after identifying the critical attributes connected to culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining theories, we would also like to frame the contribution of colonization on panyard steelpan's pedagogical experiences and contribute to decolonizing these practices using decolonization theory.

The Steelpan as a Pedagogical Tool for Music Theory

The Pan in the Classroom Unit (PICU), established by the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago, represented a strategic initiative to integrate steelpan education into the national school curriculum. Through the Pan in the Classroom Programme, the Ministry aimed to implement a comprehensive and culturally grounded music curriculum, positioning the steelpan—the national instrument—as a central medium for music instruction. As part of this initiative, government and government-assisted schools across Trinidad and Tobago were each equipped with a standardized sixteen-piece steelpan ensemble, typically comprising tenor pans, double tenor pans, double seconds pans, guitar pans, cello pans, and bass pans.

To ensure pedagogical consistency and instructional effectiveness, the PICU engaged in extensive research, stakeholder consultation, and strategic planning to standardize the configuration of steelpan

instruments in schools. A key outcome of this process was the development of a uniform note layout across the various types of pans. For instance, notes located on the right side of the tenor pan are mirrored on the right side of the four-bass pans. This spatial alignment supports kinesthetic memory, enabling students to internalize note positions and transfer playing techniques across instruments—particularly within ensemble contexts. This standardization has significantly enhanced students' access to music theory and conceptual learning, rendering music education more structured, intuitive, and inclusive. The benefits of this approach are multifaceted:

- **Cognitive Clarity and Pattern Recognition:**
A consistent note layout enables students to more readily identify musical patterns, thereby reinforcing their understanding of scales, intervals, and chords. This visual and spatial consistency strengthens theoretical learning through repetition and pattern recognition.
- **Kinesthetic Learning and Muscle Memory:**
Given the physical nature of steelpan performance, a standardized layout facilitates the development of muscle memory

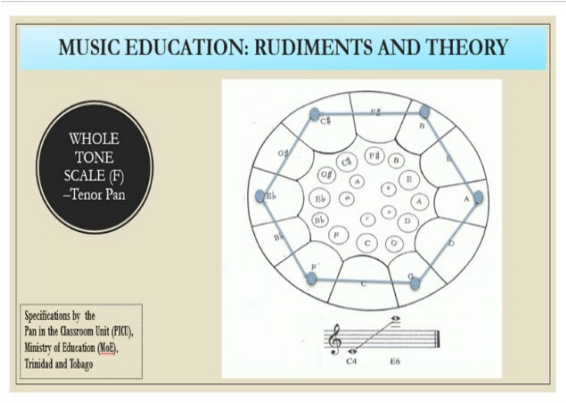


Figure 2: Pattern of Whole Tone Scale

that transfers across instruments. This allows students to switch between pans without relearning note positions, reinforcing learning through embodied practice.

- **Structured Learning Progression:** Educators can design coherent, scaffolded curricula that support students' progression from simpler to more complex instruments. This continuity fosters deeper conceptual understanding and smoother transitions in learning.
- **Ensemble Coordination:** In group performance settings, consistent note placement enhances students' ability to follow cues, anticipate harmonies, and coordinate with peers. This improves both ensemble performance and comprehension of musical structure.

Moreover, this standardized approach supports rote learning strategies for students who may struggle with abstract theoretical concepts. For example, as illustrated in Figure 2, a hexagonal pattern emerges when skipping notes in a counterclockwise direction starting from F on the Low C tenor pan, forming a whole-tone scale. Such visual and spatial patterns provide intuitive entry points into complex musical ideas, further demonstrating the pedagogical value of the steelpan in music education.

Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 3, augmented chords can be visualized by drawing straight lines between notes positioned directly opposite each other, beginning with the tonic C or B $\flat$. This standardized layout enables students to internalize and apply foundational musical concepts with greater ease and intuitive understanding.

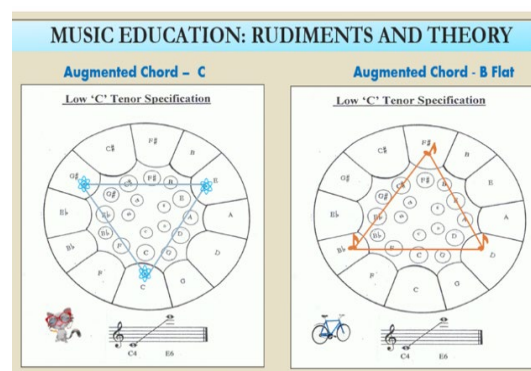


Figure 3: Patterns of Augmented Chords

Beyond classroom learning, standardized steelpan instruments have had a substantial impact on national performances, particularly within the National Schools' Panorama competition. Standardization allows students to seamlessly transition onto stage and perform on a uniform set of instruments, rather than requiring each band to set up its individualized steelpan configuration. This efficiency significantly reduces set-up time, post-performance logistics, and transportation costs associated with moving steelbands to and from event locations.

Methodology

This study utilized a case study design of three participants. Data were collected from interviews, demographic and curriculum documents, and the live teaching of a lesson with the primary objective of teaching a song on the steelpan to students at a secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago. The data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis and data analysis tools. We received permission from the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, the respective schools, and its stakeholders. This process was facilitated from Fall 2022 to Spring 2023, and while the interviews were conducted on Zoom, we observed the

teaching of the lessons in person. Therefore, several ways were enabled to implement the plan successfully during the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 period.

Figure 4A - The Data Collection Time Period for the Study

Research Question

In what ways, if any, does previous panyard



steelpan experience impact music teachers' pedagogical implementation?

The case study design allowed the researcher to understand the differences and similarities between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995) and analyze the data within and across conditions (Yin, 2009). The unique characteristics, biographies and experiences of each participant, all located in Trinidad and Tobago, provided much needed research context and data to assist with the formation of valid hypotheses, theoretical propositions, or assumptions. The themes that emerge from the study can also provide many opportunities for further examination of the present panyard steelpan practices globally and reference points associated with the local context.

Data collection for this study comprised four sources: demographic questionnaires, interviews, curriculum/lesson plans, and observations (in person and zoom video recordings). For this study, more than 10 teachers responded positively to our recruitment strategy. However, we purposively selected three participants who met all the inclusion criteria outlined below.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. They must have experienced learning to play the steelpan in a panyard situated in Trinidad and Tobago before entering or during a postsecondary BA in Music program.
2. They must have attended a postsecondary institution, attained their undergraduate degree in music and used the steelpan in their studies.
3. They must be presently music teachers in government secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Research Setting

The research occurred in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, which birthed the steelpan. The country has a population of 1.5 million people, and the steelpan is found in over 150 communities on the islands. Educators have also made an intentional effort to ensure that music teachers can teach the steelpan in secondary schools, especially at the postsecondary level. Some of these music teachers also experienced teaching and learning the instrument in the panyard. Therefore, this setting provided an authentic and organic opportunity to understand how schooling has evolved and the cultural practices that are valued or not based on music teachers' panyard experiences. These music teachers graduated from postsecondary music programs and now teach in public secondary schools known as government schools on the islands. Music, as a subject, is also compulsory in all schools and each school is given a 16-piece steel ensemble as part of its resources for teaching and learning. Schools are located in different parts of the islands and their sizes also vary. The teacher who will be highlighted in this paper is a member of

the school as described below using a pseudonym:

Eastview Secondary - a seven-year government-run secondary school located in the urban, eastern part of Trinidad. The school is co-educational and has a population of more than 500 students. There is an after-school steel band that performs at school and community events. They have also succeeded at the premier school steel band carnival competition in Trinidad and Tobago. The age range of the students is from 11 to 19 years, and their Secondary Entrance Assessment score range (the mandatory examination given to all students who have completed their primary school education for placement into secondary schools) is between 55-85%.



Figure 4B - The Data Analysis Time Period for the Study

Data Analysis

In Phase I, the demographic data collected from each participant, including those who were not selected, provided much-needed context to select the study’s participants purposively because they had to meet all of the inclusion criteria. The data from the first two phases, Demographic Information and Interview I, provided insight into what lessons should be considered in Phase III. The data were analyzed using the Grounded Theory Methodology (Corbin & Strauss,

1990). This methodology consisted of the transcription of the interviews, data scrutinized line by line, the coding of emerging data as it is collected, the use of the comparative method, the formation of categories, significance given to common and frequent categories, and finally, the generation of themes. Data were collected and interpretations were constructed with participants, committee members (member checks), and a visiting Fulbright scholar. We intentionally relied on the participants’ reflections to help with member checking. According to Merriam (1998), in member checking, the researcher solicits participants’ views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Moreover, there were many opportunities to triangulate data using curricular documents and audiovisual materials. Therefore, a chain of evidence was maintained to allow for constant cross-checking of data and findings to strengthen dependability and reliability.

Results

For this paper we have selected one participant, Renella, to develop the context for the findings. She is introduced through a summary profile; sketches of her are drawn from data collected through interviews. She was also asked the same interview questions; however, they were purposely open-ended to elicit an honest expression of her panyard steelpan experiences. A pseudonym was also assigned to help protect the confidentiality of the participant.

Renella is a female music teacher who started to play the steelpan at the age of twelve and indicated that the “*Steelpan has been part of my family.*” (Interview I, August 2022). Her deceased father was a

pannist. He was the captain for Bayside Orchestra, a prominent steel band still located in East Trinidad, and he would have been for about twenty-seven years. Renella grew up on the outskirts of the urban town of Arima, and both her deceased father and brother were *"very instrumental in them getting their panyard."* They would have contributed to constructing the space in their community where everyone had access to music-making using the steelpan as the instrument of choice. These familial and community experiences provided many opportunities to understand Renella's valuing of community languages, practices, and ways of being (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012) and how they have impacted her pedagogical implementation meaningfully or not in the classroom.

Renella also earned her Bachelor of Arts in Music from Florida Memorial University in the United States and pursued a Master of Philosophy in Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. While at Florida Memorial University, her steelpan studies were conducted under another accomplished female steelpan scholar and professor, Dr. Dawn Batson, originally from Trinidad and Tobago. Renella recalled:

Dr. Batson made us experience the both. There was a lot of experiences with the sheet music however, we also learned music by rote. There was more order, and with every theory, every subject, she always tried to connect everything to the steelpan. We were doing chords. We didn't go to the keyboard. We did it on the steelpan. You know, and so that helps me a lot.

Renella indicated that these experiences have affected her educational philosophy and classroom instructional practices. For example, she knows music theory is

compulsory in the formal system. However, she has intentionally learned at her postsecondary institution how panyard steelpan experiences, including the use of rote music, can be used effectively in the classroom. Renella is also one of the Deans at her secondary school in East Trinidad, an avid pan player, steelpan adjudicator, and contributor to her community steel band.

Three Themes:

Three major themes emerged as the data were reviewed and coded. Data points were found readily, and each participant provided valuable information for the Research Question: In what ways, if any, does previous Panyard steelpan experience impact music teachers' pedagogical implementation?

The three themes derived from this data analysis represented panyard steelpan experiences that impacted their pedagogical implementation as:

1. Organic & Indigenous instruction
2. Familial Steelpan Legacy
3. Colonial vs. Decolonial Classroom Tensions

Organic and Indigenous Instruction:

The theme, Organic and Indigenous instruction, relates to the community-based nature upon which learning is created/generated through a communal process that is shared organically between teachers and students. As such data analysis revealed four significant subthemes that represented the organic and Indigenous instructional practices derived from the panyard within their pedagogical practices, which include: a) Rote learning, b) Learner-centered instruction, c) Physical,

Communal, and Collective practice, d) Panyard Literacies.

Rote learning is a memorization technique that allows participants to engage in instruction that involves repetition as its foundational strategy. Renella identified rote learning as a critical attribute of panyard steelpan instruction. She posited:

Very importantly, everything was by rote. At that time, I couldn't read. You're highly dependent on somebody showing you the music. Yeah, I mean showing it to you, and most times it might be shown to one person, one or two people, and then those two people have to show you, and they will tell you the notes and you played well, I mean, and that's one thing about people in the panyard.

Renella also explicitly identified learner-centered instruction as another panyard steelpan subtheme because there was a direct connection between learner-centered instruction and rote learning. Learner-centered instruction involves the intentional opportunities for teaching and learning to occur from every participant during the teaching and learning process as value is given to the knowledge, skills and experience each person brings to the space. Moreover, a conducive environment in the panyard provided the space for connecting and utilizing these two elements and the process. Renella explained:

It's important for us to keep up with things like playing by rote, sharing music, sharing ideas, just coming together, and we may not follow something on the score. We're working together and go with what works for us, and keeping all those elements that makes Carnival and the panyard. I think that cannot be achieved fully if we're so

focused on following strictly a piece of music, sheet music.

The communal and Indigenous practice of teaching each other was also simultaneously identified as part of a successful, critical, valued process and will be found among “people in the panyard.” Renella likened this way of being, doing, knowing and creating to “freedom” and “a sense of pride.” Additionally, the panyard’s physical, social, and collective nature provided these enriching, sustaining, and humanizing steelpan experiences that exist even today. This circulatory understanding of Indigenous practices that embraces the physical, social and collective nature of panyard steelpan experiences by all participants reminded me of Starlift Steel Orchestra’s motto, “We, not I.”

Specific and intentional vocabulary was used as a mechanism to support learning the music associated with panyard steelpan instructional experiences. Renella was the only participant who indicated that these terminologies were very instructive and are still used today, even in her classroom. They also evoked the constellation of meanings around the panyard and all the emotional and social connections. The three that were explicitly identified and used by her were “tout moun,” “skating,” and “coasting.” She indicated that the use of these words and their meanings were essential elements of her panyard steelpan experiences, as provided in her response below:

I think one of the things for me is just the jargon, you know. And I try to use that in the classroom, you know, in the panyard is when they want everybody to play it's tout moun. Stop coasting, stop skating, and then I think with the panyard the opening space

-

Familial Steelpan Legacy:

Familial Steelpan Legacy was a central theme identified during our analysis of the interviews and allows us to understand the family and community's impact on participants' pedagogical development. This theme centers around the rich panyard steelpan legacy of participants family members both personal and professional and how and why these experiences have impacted their instruction. Renella had a holistic familial experience. Steelpanns were “being tuned” at her home and her father and brother were instrumental in ensuring there was construction of the panyard in her community. The “tuning” of steelpanns is a complex activity that contributes to a better sounding musical instrument due to the accuracy of pitch; the required universal melodic sound of the note. Interestingly Renella had this firsthand experience at home that allowed her to observe the tuning of the steelpan that engaged the steelpan tuner visually due to the watching of each note, auditory when the notes were hit and produced the necessary sound, and kinesthetically due to the pounding of the metal on the pan to ensure that the notes were tuned.

Colonial vs. Decolonial Classroom Tensions:

As participants considered their panyard steelpan experiences, they also referenced their position today as music teachers in the formal secondary school system. We specifically asked them to consider the similarities and differences in their pedagogical practices informed by their panyard steelpan experiences. Renella was able to explicitly express how the organic and Indigenous practices from the panyard

and their familial experiences were sometimes in conflict or in consensus with the instruction and outcomes that are expected when teaching students to play a song on the steelpan in the classroom. Renella stated

My experience has been it's almost like the sheet music is a guide in the panyard, but eventually, we kind of move out of that. You enjoy the playing and everything, and you kind of go by feel so I don't think we're ever really accurate to what is on the sheet, especially when it comes to strumming, and so on, you know.

Renella also indicated that the sheet music is a guide. She highlighted that some of the music played in the Caribbean is very syncopated, especially the Calypso and Soca genres of music created in Trinidad and Tobago. She proffered:

There is so much that goes into the learning of the music. It's the full experience. That is important to us and I think we lose those things when we follow the rigidity of the sheet music.

The findings represented the three themes found from analyzing the interviews that occurred before and after the lesson by Renella. The themes were organic & Indigenous instruction, familial steelpan legacy, and the colonized vs. decolonized classroom tensions. The organic and Indigenous instruction theme explicitly identified rote learning, learner-centered instruction, and the physical, social, and collective practice as attributes of panyard steelpan experiences that impacted her pedagogical implementation. The fourth characteristic panyard steelpan literacies only identified by Renella, included the terminologies “tout muon, skating and coasting.”

Discussion / Conclusion

One significant implication of the study is ensuring that research provides opportunities for voices that have been historically marginalized and represent Indigenous spaces as seen in this case study. The three music teachers were all from Trinidad and Tobago and were able to provide much-needed first-hand data to analyze their panyard steelpan's Indigenous way of knowing, doing and being. Consequently, Renella explicitly identified the attributes found in panyard pedagogy and explained how they are represented in instructional practices or not. Schmidt (2005) postulated that music in education should *"impart knowledge through the eyes and voices of individuals that, themselves, constitute these cultural and social backgrounds rather than through harmonious consensus and careful representation of certain cultural and social elements, traditions and practices"* (p. 9). This study intentionally provided opportunities to understand steelpan histories and social constructs better. Moreover, participants' backgrounds, biographies and experiences also provided contextual evidence for their pedagogical perspectives (Greene, 2001).

Through this study, we also gained greater clarity about how each participant's relation and proximity to the panyard steelpan experience was demarcated by familial influence. More importantly, the data collection and analysis process confirmed why qualitative methodology is critical for this type of work as we made sense and documented each person's story and their similarities and differences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For example, the unique

characteristics, biographies and experiences of Renella, located in Trinidad and Tobago, provided much-needed research context and data to assist with the formation of valid hypotheses, theoretical propositions, or assumptions.

Mignolo (2021) posits that we cannot address colonialism from a post-colonial position because *"Colonization is All Over."* This was vividly observed in this research as we felt the tension between the participants and their pedagogical implementation informed by the classroom parameters. Educators continued to navigate a school system founded on an efficiency model seen in the distribution of periods associated with prescribed time limits. Interestingly, the significant objective of the music program at this level in a secondary school was also linked to a colonial perspective: musical instruction with music notation. Vázquez Córdoba (2019) posits

Concepts like writing music— which symbolizes the capacity of abstraction of sounds and rhythms in a score—as well as the appreciation of music through cognitive processes where the player and the audience have no interaction during the musical act, are fundamental in being considered a "superior" form of art (p. 206). Therefore, efficiency in formal education systems must be upended, especially in arts education, because it gives the impression that any and every new instructional improvement to an educational system is warranted and will always redound to the absolute benefit of all stakeholders. There must be more extended periods for music education instruction that can contribute to alternative scheduling methods in the school system.

More importantly, as seen in the participants' panyard steelpan experiences, culturally sustaining pedagogy envisions learning that connects histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities locally, nationally, and internationally (Paris 2012). A curriculum connecting to cultural and linguistic histories must be feasible as Indigenous systems navigate the colonized classroom continuum (Nightingale-Lee et al., 2021). Consequently, a significant feature of any Panyard Steelpan curriculum, for example, must embrace Panyard Steelpan Literacy. Renella's exploration of the literacy associated with the vocabulary of "Tout moun", "Skating" and "Coasting" were perfect examples of how an Indigenous art form can ensure educators value and sustain the cultural and linguistic practices of their community while still providing access to traditional spaces. Therefore, this process will also involve the local practitioners found in the panyard as we *"foreground more culturally relevant, community-based, student-responsive musical constructs and/or practices"* (Massy & Sembiente, 2022). We must also remember that *"Decolonization is not a metaphor"* (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2012). It is an ongoing process that extends beyond mere acknowledgment and critique; it is a call to action (Asher, 2009).

Considering these findings, it becomes clear that the integration of the steelpan into formal education is not merely a pedagogical innovation but a profound act

of cultural reclamation. The persistent dichotomy between "high" and "low" culture—rooted in colonial ideologies that privilege European artistic forms over Caribbean expressions (Vázquez Córdoba, 2019; Eagleton, 2000; Nettleford, 2003)—continues to shape perceptions of value within the arts. However, the steelpan, as an Indigenous instrument born from resistance and creativity, challenges these hierarchies and repositions Caribbean cultural practices at the center of educational discourse. As Eric Williams and Gordon Rohlehr have argued, education must be grounded in the lived realities and cultural heritage of the people it serves (Palmer, 2006; Torrel-Taylor, 2010). Teaching the steelpan through culturally relevant methods such as rote learning, storytelling, and community engagement not only preserves traditional knowledge but also fosters a sense of identity, pride, and belonging among students. Torrel-Taylor's (2010) research also underscores the transformative potential of such approaches, highlighting how Indigenous pedagogies cultivate emotional intelligence, social cohesion, and spiritual depth—qualities often overlooked in colonial models of education. Ultimately, embracing the steelpan as a legitimate and powerful educational tool contributes to the broader project of decolonizing the curriculum, affirming Caribbean epistemologies, and reimagining education as a space of cultural affirmation and liberation.

References

- Asher, N. 2009. Chapter 5: Decolonization and education: Locating pedagogy and self at the interstices in global times. *Counterpoints*, 369, 67–77. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980382>
- Bandura, A., 1977. *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S., 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544–559.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 1990. Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593>
- Eagleton, Terry, 2000. “Versions of Culture” in *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1-31.
- Gay, G. 2002. Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53 106-116
- Greene, M., 2001. Variations on a blue guitar: the Lincoln Center Institute lectures on aesthetic education. *Teachers College Press*.
- Hawes, H. and Stephens, D., 1990. *Questions of quality: Primary education and development*. London: Longman.
- Kohn, M., & McBride, K., 2011. *Political theories of decolonization*. Oxford University Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G., 1995. But that’s just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165
- Massy, P. J., 2023. “Panyard” Steelpan Experiences Impact on Secondary School Teachers’ Pedagogical Practices: A Case Study. *ProQuest LLC*
- Massy, P. J., & Sembiante, S. F., 2022. Pedagogical practices, curriculum development, and student experiences within postsecondary music education: A systematic literature review. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 1321103X221128172.
- Mignolo, W. D., 2021. *The politics of decolonial investigations*. Duke University Press.
- Merriam, S.B., 1998. *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago, 2001. *GORTT/IBRD, Fourth Basic Education Programme. Pilot Project in Integrated Arts. Regional Workshops, January – February 2001*.
- Ministry of Education, Pan in the Classroom Unit, 2011. *Pan in the Classroom Status Report, October 2011*. Trinidad and Tobago.

Nettleford, R., 2003. *Caribbean cultural identity: The case of Jamaica*. 2nd ed. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers.

Nightengale-Lee, B., Massy, P.J. & Knowles, B., 2021. Putting Black Boys' Literacies First: Collective Curriculum Development for the Lives & Literacies of Black Boys. *Journal of Literacy Innovation*, 6(1), 5-22.

Small, C., 1998. *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan University Press.

Stake, R. E., 1995. *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.

Palmer, C.A., 2006. *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Paris, D., 2012. Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>

Remy, J., 2006. The panyard as a model space for training. The Second Carnival Studies Colloquium, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Retrieved from http://www.seetobago.org/trinidad/pan/archive/r&d/uwi/PMST_v04_edit-b.htm?fbclid=IwAR3LY5VyZS2-GeTKifTswTd2ZoA_fph-kNPfLnNdvoeNvwOj7Px9nw7vpQ

Torrel-Taylor, J. 2010. *The use of indigenous arts to enhance classroom learning*. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. Retrieved from <https://uwispace.sta.uwi.edu/items/c09da830-c13b-4e1e-ab1c-92420c6a3844>

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W., 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1), 1–40

Vázquez Córdoba, H. M., 2019. (Re)centering Indigenous perspectives in music education in Latin America. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 18(3), 200–225. Retrieved from: <http://doi.org/10.22176/act18.3.200>

Sapleton, S., & Adams, D., 2022. On decolonizing US education: Lessons from the Caribbean and South Africa. *The Professional Educator*, 45(1), 42–57. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.47038/tpe.45.01.11>

Schmidt, P., 2005. Music education as transformative practice: Creating new frameworks for learning music through a Freirian perspective. *Visions of 166 Research in Music education*, 6(1), 2.

Vygotsky, L. S., 1978. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Yin, R. K., 2009. *Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.)*. Sage Publications.

Caribbean Spirit: Regional and Diasporic Family Ties in Jamaican and Trinbagonian Music

Byron M. Jones Jr.

University of the West Indies

St. Augustine, Trinidad

Tel: 662-2002 ext. 83493

Email: byron.jones@uwi.edu

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of family as expressed in Trinbagonian and Jamaican popular music. Employing Representation Theory and Discourse Analysis, it explores the factors and mechanisms through which family is constructed, symbolized, and reinforced in music. By tracing the sociohistorical backgrounds of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago and analyzing lyrics, themes, and performances, the study investigates how music represents familial structures and relationships while shaping cultural identity.

Given the role of diasporic connections in (re)shaping national and regional identity, this study also examines how Caribbean nationals forge familial bonds through music. It argues that beyond national borders, music functions as a cultural bridge, reinforcing kinship and belonging through lyrics, sound system culture, and participatory musical engagement. Within the diaspora, mic men and deejays play a critical role in sustaining familial discourse through music and audience engagement.

Key Words: family ties, mic man, representation, diaspora, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Soca, Dancehall, JPMC

Introduction

Sociohistorical Foundations

The Caribbean is a region deeply shaped by its sociohistorical foundations, with colonization being a defining force in its formation. These foundations are found in every facet and manifestation of the region, though diverse as a space it is. Throughout its history, every Caribbean country has experienced some form of European colonial rule – whether under the British, French, Spanish, or Dutch. The legacy of colonial domination significantly influenced the region's political, economic, and social structures, embedding European systems of governance, legal frameworks,

and cultural norms into Caribbean societies (Brereton, 2010).

The composition of Caribbean societies was also shaped by the forced and voluntary migrations of different ethnic groups, primarily for labour on plantation economies. Enslaved Africans formed the backbone of the plantation workforce, brought to the region under European chattel slavery from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Following the institutional abolition of slavery in the 19th century, indentured labourers from India and China were brought to the Caribbean to sustain

plantation economies, particularly in British-controlled territories such as Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana (Shepherd, 2002). These historical migrations contributed to the complex ethnic and cultural diversity of the Caribbean, with features persisting today in various aspects of Caribbean life, including language, legal systems, religious practices, and musical and cultural traditions, all critical ingredients in national and regional identity.

Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago exemplify the broader Caribbean experience of colonial history and demographic diversity, thus their focus in this paper. Jamaica, under British rule from 1655 until its independence in 1962, had a plantation system dominated by African enslaved labour. Today, the majority of the population is of African descent, with a small but influential minority of mixed-race, European, Chinese, Indian, and Syrian populations (Bryan, 2004). Trinidad & Tobago, on the other hand, had a more complex colonial history. Spain claimed Trinidad in 1498 and maintained control until its surrender to the British in 1797, while Tobago changed colonial hands several times before being ceded to Britain in 1814. The two islands were administratively unified in 1889 and remained under British rule until independence in 1962. French influence, though not political, was deeply embedded in Trinidadian culture following the 1783 Cedula of Population, which attracted French-speaking planters and their enslaved labourers (Brereton, 1981; Williams, 1962; Honychurch, 2000). Unlike Jamaica, where the African-descended population remained dominant, Trinidad's East Indian population grew overtime due to the influx of indentured

labourers following the abolition of slavery. Today, Trinidad's population is roughly split between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, with smaller Chinese, Syrian, and European communities adding to its multicultural demographic (Brereton, 1981).

This diverse ethnic composition had a direct impact on family structures in both countries. In Jamaica, family structures have been shaped by the sociohistorical conditions of slavery, where the disruption of traditional African kinship systems and the commodification of enslaved individuals led to the emergence of flexible and resilient family units. The "matrifocal" family structure – where women often play the central role in the household – became a defining feature of many Jamaican families, partly due to the legacy of slavery and the economic pressures that affected men's ability to be consistent providers (Barrow, 1996). In Trinidad & Tobago, extended family structures play a significant role in both Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian communities. While Afro-Trinidadian families often reflect matrifocal dynamics, Indo-Trinidadian families have historically leaned toward patriarchal systems, particularly in the organization of authority and lineage within the extended household. (Reddock, 1994), (Chevannes, 2001, p. 4). These family dynamics have found varied expression in the music of both countries. In Jamaica, Reggae and Dancehall often reflect the realities of matrifocal family systems, urban struggle, and migration. Artistes frequently highlight themes of single parenthood, resilience, and community survival, underscoring the enduring strength of kin-based networks. In Trinidad & Tobago, while family structures differ across ethnic lines, with Afro-

Trinidadian families more commonly matrifocal and Indo-Trinidadian families tending toward patriarchal extended systems, Calypso and Soca music engage familial representation in distinct ways. These genres frequently celebrate community, ancestry, and intergenerational relationships, particularly through the performative and participatory ethos of Carnival. Here, festivity is not divorced from structure; instead, it becomes a symbolic space where family networks gather, reaffirm bonds, and enact shared cultural memory, reflecting the values upheld within both matrifocal and patriarchal systems. Through the lens of music, this paper explores family ties – linguistic and sociocultural elements of symbolism and representation through which identity is marked and reinforced. Just as the extended family structure is a fundamental aspect of Caribbean life, music extends national culture and ideals beyond the immediate family unit, linking communities regionally and throughout the diaspora. Through music, these familial ties serve as cultural conduits, allowing individuals to express national pride, regional solidarity, and diasporic belonging, transforming individual's expressions into a collective Caribbean identity, demonstrating that family in the Caribbean is not just a social unit bound by blood relations, but a cultural practice, continually enacted and reaffirmed through musical representation and performance.

Way Forward

The rest of this paper is focused on illustrating what family ties look like and how they function. Before this is done however, the next section will cover the framework within which the phenomenon is grounded as well as the data used in the

study. Thereafter, the analysis and presentation of the phenomenon will be examined.

Methodology and Framework

Introduction

This section outlines the theoretical foundation and methodological approach used to examine family ties in Caribbean music. Grounded in Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, the study explores how music functions as a representational system, shaping perceptions of national, regional, and diasporic identity. The section also provides an overview of the data at the heart of the study.

Framework: Representation Theory

Hall's (1997) Representation Theory explores how meaning is created and communicated through language, symbols, and cultural practices. Hall notes that culture is about "shared meanings", and language is the primary medium through which these meanings are produced and exchanged (1). However, in the case of Caribbean music, cultural representation and language extends beyond words to include symbols, sound, rhythm, performance, and audience interaction. This study contends that family is not merely a lyrical theme but a lived and represented experience, constructed through musical engagement, performance culture, and the community dynamics fostered by Caribbean music practitioners, especially sound system practitioners such as mic men, and deejays. According to Hall, representation is not simply a passive reflection of reality, but an active process that constructs and organizes meaning

(1997). This theory is grounded in the idea that meaning is not fixed, but is shaped through social interactions, cultural expressions, and media forms. He distinguishes between two key approaches to representation:

1. *Reflective Representation* which assumes that meaning is an inherent quality of objects or concepts and that language merely reflects what already exists.
2. *Constructivist Representation* which argues that meaning is constructed through discourse, signs, and shared cultural practices rather than being an objective reality.

The constructivist approach is most relevant to this study, as it emphasizes how music, performance, and cultural engagement actively create and sustain representations of identity and community. In the Caribbean context, music does not simply depict family ties, it produces, negotiates, and reaffirms them within regional and diasporic spaces. By using Representation Theory, the study positions music as a cultural practice and a mechanism that constructs and sustains family ties beyond blood relations. It positions music functions as a binding force, extending family structures into symbolic spaces of belonging that unite people within and across different islands and throughout the Caribbean diaspora.

Data

The data used in this study was organized at two levels: the first focuses on the *curation and creation phase*, where song lyrics and discographic details play a

critical role in examining how familial ties are represented through musical composition. This dataset was built using a corpus of 505 songs spanning Calypso, Soca, Reggae, and Dancehall, selected based on thematic structures and their links to national or regional identity. The second level examines the *performative and consumption phase*, where representation extends beyond lyrical content into live audience engagement and DJ selection and mic man discourse. Here, specific diaspora-based party performances were selected to explore how family ties are reinforced in real-time musical interactions. Two key events were analyzed:

- *The 2024 edition of Fashion & Brunch*, focusing on the *Elegant Sound System* segment.
- *Yardie Fiesta 2024*, with particular attention to the sets by Young Sound & DJ Xlence and Copper Shot Sound System.

Both events were held in New York City, a hub for Caribbean diasporic engagement, making them ideal spaces for capturing the phenomenon under focus.

To ensure comprehensive analysis, both datasets were systematically tagged and coded. In phase one, data was tagged according to practitioners' gender, nationality, ethnicity, thematic structures, and marked linguistic features along lexical and semantic lines. In phase two, the music selection and mic man's discourse were coded for national and regional symbols, linguistic markers, and performative engagement strategies.

The study used a continuous and adaptive approach to data collection, allowing for a nuanced examination of diversity and

heterogeneity within the Caribbean musical landscape. This approach ensured that all relevant features were systematically categorized in flexible analytical framework that could accommodate emerging themes throughout the study.

Analytical Framework

Following the systematic tagging and categorization of the data, the analysis proceeded through a thematic and representational coding process, aligned with the paper's theoretical foundation in *Representation Theory*. The aim of the analysis was to identify patterns of symbolic meaning, linguistic signifiers, and modes of cultural representation that function as family ties in Caribbean music. For the *curation and creation phase*, analysis involved a thematic mapping of lyrics, informed by sociocultural and historical context. Songs were examined for lexical choices, recurring metaphors, cultural references, and national symbols, and then discussed based on how they are used to create familial representation or extended community ties. This qualitative approach allowed for the emergence of relational themes, cross-national unity, or diasporic longing, which were then analyzed in terms of their representational strategies, for example, direct lyricism, symbolic allusion or intra and international collaborations.

In the *performative and consumption phase*, a form of discourse and performance analysis was applied to DJ sets and mic man commentary. Here, attention was paid to repetition, direct audience engagement, and national roll calls, all of which were treated as performative acts of cultural and familial representation. This included identifying how certain phrases, or crowd prompts functioned as ritualized markers of

identity and how DJs used language to frame music selections within a narrative of regional or familial belonging.

Importantly, no statistical analysis was applied, as the research is qualitative and interpretive in nature, grounded in cultural studies and representation theory. Findings were derived through iterative comparison, where insights from one data set informed the interpretation of the other, revealing how both musical texts and live performances participate in the construction of Caribbean family identity.

Forging of Ties: Meaning-Making, Symbolism and Representation

In Caribbean societies, the family plays a central role in shaping cultural meaning. It transmits shared norms, values, and modes of living that contribute significantly to the development of individual identity and the reinforcement of social belonging. These frameworks of understanding are embedded within family structures and are instrumental in anchoring individuals to both lineage and community across generations (Barrow, 1996; Chevannes, 2001). Traditionally, family ties have been defined in terms of biological relations, legal bonds such as marriage, or the social connections formed through shared life experiences. However, within the domain of Caribbean music, this concept extends beyond those definitions. This paper proposes that family is also constituted through a range of musical and performative practices that occur within a shared cultural space.

Rather than focusing solely on explicit references to family in song lyrics, this study examines how the idea of family is represented through a series of interactive and interpretive musical processes.

Drawing on Representation Theory (Hall, 1997), these processes are understood as forms of symbolic meaning-making, where music functions as a site for articulating social identity and cultural cohesion. In parallel, using the Community of Practice framework (Wenger, 1998), these musical engagements are viewed as part of a collective learning environment in which shared practices, such as riddim creation, performance, and audience participation, cultivate a sense of community and mutual recognition among Caribbean people.

The term "family ties" as used in this paper refer to *these representational and pragmatic features, notably musical collaborations, DJ commentary, lyrical content, and participatory audience behaviours*, that contribute to the construction and reinforcement of a collective Caribbean identity. These practices facilitate social cohesion within national contexts and among diasporic communities, producing a symbolic and impactful sense of regional unity. Within this system, music acts as a cultural product and a mechanism through which the Caribbean and its diaspora are integrated under the concept of an extended cultural family.

Curating Meaning: Production and Creation

Music in the Caribbean functions not only as a form of artistic expression, but also as a social practice, one that curates, cultivates, and communicates national and regional identity long before it reaches an audience. Using the lens of Community of Practice theory (Wenger 1998), the creation of music can be understood as a collaborative, participatory process in which practitioners (artists, producers,

arrangers, and others) co-construct cultural meaning and reinforce collective belonging. Within this community, knowledge, values, and representational norms are shared, debated, and creatively reworked, making the production phase itself a space of identity negotiation.

In this context, family is not treated as a fixed or solely biological category. Instead, it is a symbolic and evolving cultural construct, shaped by the relationships and interactions among members of the creative community. Through collaborative processes such as joint studio sessions, shared riddims, and cross-national songwriting, music becomes a vehicle through which diverse interpretations of family are imagined and represented. Each collaborator brings with them specific cultural norms, linguistic choices, and sociohistorical experiences, contributing to a broader, multifaceted representation of family that reflects the heterogeneity of the Caribbean. While an individual artiste may enter the creation process with a particular vision, the co-participation within a creative community ensures that the final product is layered with multiple perspectives. This aligns with Wenger's view that identity is formed through participation in shared practices, and that meaning emerges through ongoing negotiation among community members (1998). In this way, family ties in Caribbean music are not static narratives, but dynamic representations shaped by collective engagement.

This study explores the creation phase through three overlapping but analytically distinct levels of collaboration: *producer-to-artiste interactions*, *artiste-to-artiste collaborations*, and *culture-mixing collaborations*. These are not fixed categories but conceptual entry points for

examining how Caribbean musical communities create, transmit, and expand cultural meanings of family and identity through sound.

Producer-to-Artiste Collaborations

The riddim-driven model, a foundational element of Jamaican Popular Music and Culture (JPMC), illustrates how shared musical platforms support the development of regional cultural bonds. In this format, a single instrumental track, the riddim, is used by multiple artistes, each adding distinct lyrical and stylistic contributions. While this model originated in Jamaica, it has become integral to music-making across the Caribbean, enabling a collaborative structure that fosters both individuality and collective expression (Manuel and Largey, 2016).

Central to this process is the producer who creates the riddim and directs the overall concept of the project. The producer determines the sonic framework and conceptual direction, serving as both technical architect and cultural coordinator. However, the full meaning of the project evolves through the vocal and lyrical contributions of participating artistes. Their varied inputs introduce layers of cultural reference, linguistic diversity, and symbolic alignment with specific national or regional identities.

These projects often operate beyond national boundaries. For example, Machel Montano's *Wop Dem* (2004) places a Trinbagonian Soca artiste within the Jamaican Dancehall framework recording on the *Ching Chong riddim*. Montano's deliberate use of Jamaican Creole forms is stylistic and, most importantly, an indexical act, marking affiliation with dancehall culture while asserting a broader Caribbean

identity. The title, *Wop Dem*, functions as a culturally charged expression of triumph, applicable across national lines. Similarly, Linky First's *Jeune Femme* (2019) demonstrates a Jamaican artiste's engagement with the St. Lucian Dennerly Segment through the use of Kwéyòl, highlighting how linguistic and sonic adaptation supports cultural inclusion and signals shared belonging across Caribbean spaces.

This exchange of cultural elements reflects a broader pattern of intra-Caribbean collaboration, where producers construct the sonic framework of a riddim, and artistes contribute interpretive depth through their performances. For instance, in *Dancé* (2019), Machel Montano participates in St. Lucian musical culture by voicing on Motto's *Ole Ting* riddim and incorporating local linguistic forms into his lyrics. Similarly, *X Games* (2020) by St. Lucian artiste Teddyson John, recorded on Trinbagonian DJ Private Ryan's *Fizzle Project* riddim, exemplifies this cross-country engagement. These instances underscore how the movement of artistes across production spaces functions as a representational act where participation itself affirms regional affiliation and mutual cultural recognition.

In this context, familial ties are not only communicated through lyrics but are embedded in the collaborative process. The interaction between producers and artistes, especially when they come from different national or cultural backgrounds, becomes a site where Caribbean identity is both constructed and reinforced. This *producer-to-artiste* model highlights the fluidity and interdependence within Caribbean music production. The riddim, as a shared musical foundation, operates as a unifying mechanism, a family tie, that connects

diverse contributors and symbolically enacts the idea of a regional family through sound and language.

Artiste-to-Artiste Interactions

The collaborative exchanges between artistes of different nationalities in Caribbean music also serve as a mechanism for representing and reinforcing a Caribbean identity. They are a symbolic enactment of a shared cultural space – one in which national distinctions become secondary to a broader Caribbean familial bond, even as national representation is embodied. These interactions are seen as intentional acts of meaning-making, where the coexistence of multiple national and cultural identities on a single song becomes a performative articulation of Caribbean unity. In this context, musical collaboration becomes a performative process through which unity is symbolically enacted, reflecting Hall's (1997) view that meaning is produced through language, symbols, and culturally embedded practices. By engaging with each other's musical styles, linguistic codes, and performance conventions, artistes co-construct a regional identity that transcends insular boundaries. These partnerships form part of a larger cultural dialogue, in which national distinctions contribute to, rather than hinder, a sense of collective belonging. This aligns with Wenger's (1998) theory of Communities of Practice, where identity is formed and negotiated through shared participation in a set of practices, allowing contributors to shape and affirm their cultural affiliations.

This collaborative tradition is exemplified in Mighty Sparrow and Byron Lee & the Dragonaires' *Dragon Dance* (1991),

bridging the musical landscapes of Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica. This collaboration was an acknowledgment of the historical and cultural ties between the two nations, represented through the merging of Calypso, Soca, and Ska-infused instrumentation amidst a Reggae and Dancehall culture. The same can be said about the 2013 hit *Bad Like We* by Grenadian artiste Tallpre and Trinbagonian artiste Bunji Garlin, and in *Cyah Bother We*, a collaboration between Barbadian Lil Rick and Trinbagonian Benjai. These songs not only brought together the distinctive musical traditions of each island but also reaffirmed a shared Caribbean ethos of resilience, confidence, and cultural pride that transcended the countries of the artistes.

This collaborative representation continues in *Carnival Tabanca Remix* (2014), a collaboration between Bunji Garlin and Jamaican vocalist Tarrus Riley. Their partnership highlights the emotional and cultural weight of Carnival across the region, reinforcing shared experiences through musical expression. The message is even more explicit in *Famalay* (2019), performed by Skinny Fabulous, Machel Montano, and Bunji Garlin. The title itself, a creolization of "family", signals the core theme of Caribbean unity and illustrates how music becomes a tool for affirming regional kinship.

These examples demonstrate that Caribbean music is a dynamic and collaborative space where identity is negotiated through practice. Cross-national collaborations serve as meaningful sites of representation, which is constructed through cultural dialogue, shared performance, and symbolic participation. As Hall (1997) argues, representation is

central to how meaning is made; in Caribbean music, each collaborative act, becomes a mechanism that reaffirms a regional collective identity.

Culture-Mixing Collaborations: Genre & Cultural Diversity

As expressed in the introduction, the Caribbean is an inherently diverse space, where specific ethnicities, traditions, and histories coexist, shaping the region's cultural space. Trinidad and Tobago exemplifies this dynamic well. The country's musical genres of Calypso, Chutney, and Soca function both as a space for reinforcing group identities and as a site for negotiating inter-ethnic understanding and unity. Soca for example, originally pioneered by Ras Shorty I, emerged from a conscious effort to bridge Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian musical traditions. Its integration of Indian rhythmic and melodic elements into the Afro-Caribbean calypso form in the 1970s was intended to forge a culturally inclusive musical language for the nation (Manuel, 2006). This foundational act set a precedent for the use of music as a means of cultural union in a society often divided along racial and ethnic lines.

An extension of this legacy can be seen in *Indian Gal* (2013), a collaboration between Afro-Trinidadian artiste Machel Montano and Indo-Trinidadian performer Drupatee. Set to a Chutney Soca riddim, the song brings together two historically distinct cultural aesthetics in Drupatee's traditional chutney vocal stylings and Montano's high-energy Soca delivery. The artistic collaboration enacts a symbolic reconciliation between two ethnic communities, making visible a model of co-existence and mutual representation. The

blending of styles is not merely musical, but ideologically representative of a larger societal aspiration toward unity across ethnic boundaries.

The thematic intent of cultural integration is even more explicitly addressed in Montano's *I Forget* (2017), featuring Nikkita Brown. The lyrics promote love and solidarity across races and social classes, rejecting longstanding barriers that often divide communities. In public statements about the song, Montano identifies the work as a challenge to racial taboos and a celebration of Trinidad and Tobago's plural society.

These musical acts of inclusion are particularly significant within Trinidad and Tobago, where politics, religion, and cultural practices are often racialized. The representation of Afro-Indo unity in music not only reflects a symbolic familial bond within the nation but also offers a template for broader Caribbean societies with similar ethnic compositions, such as Guyana and Suriname. By modelling cross-ethnic collaboration, these works provide cultural frameworks through which national and regional identity can be imagined as inclusive rather than divisive.

Song Lyrics: Integration and Celebration

In the Caribbean context, more potent and effective than most other mechanisms are song lyrics, which function as key sites of cultural representation, where the complexities of identity, whether related to nationality, ethnicity, race, or regional belonging, are expressed, negotiated, and affirmed. Artistes frequently employ lyrical devices such as roll calls and references to cultural practices and national symbols to establish a sense of collective belonging.

These performances situate the individual within broader national or regional communities. In *Yard Man* (2003), Assassin directly addresses Jamaicans both at home and abroad, urging them to maintain cultural loyalty and national pride regardless of their geographic location:

1. *So weh di real Jamaican people dem de man, whether yu de a foreign or yu de within the yard-shore, just remember one thing Jamaicans, always keep it yard-core.*

This line exemplifies representation operating through linguistic choices that carry cultural and national significance. The term “yard” in Jamaican Creole is more than a reference to physical space; it symbolizes the nation itself. Jamaicans commonly refer to their country as “yard”, and by extension, to themselves as “Yardies”, a label that reinforces both national identity and cultural belonging. Therefore, the call to remain “yard-core”, even when residing abroad, invokes this linguistic marker as a mechanism for sustaining cultural identity. It affirms a model of national consciousness that is mobile, rather than being fixed to territorial borders, and is maintained through discourse, performance, and community affiliation. In this way, language becomes a vehicle through which diasporic Jamaicans assert continuity with their homeland, and representation emerges through lyrical content and through the use of culturally resonant terms that index national loyalty and pride.

Similarly, national pride is often embedded in lyrics that highlight participation in cultural traditions and achievements. In *My Team* (2014), Shurwayne Winchester

references both sporting and Carnival-related practices as defining elements of Caribbean identity:

2. *Panorama, never miss it. Must have a Carib for in cricket, taking a wine for every wicket...*

The references to cricket, and festive revelry situate Caribbean cultural symbols as markers of national pride. Beyond individual nations, many artistes engage in regional identity construction, where the Caribbean is represented as a unified cultural space rather than a collection of separate countries. This pan-Caribbean vision is often expressed again through roll call, where multiple islands are acknowledged. In *Caribbean Love* (2015), Rhyming King acknowledges several countries:

3. *Rhyming King representing Jamaica, St. Martin, St. Lucia, Antigua, Grenada, Dominica, Barbados, Bahamas to Aruba, Caribbean love mek all girls fall in love.*

This naming practice positions each island as part of a broader regional network, constructing the Caribbean as a cohesive cultural unit. The inclusion of multiple territories reflects a model of identity that recognizes national specificity while emphasizing shared cultural heritage.

Caribbean music also contributes to the maintenance of diasporic identity. For Caribbean nationals living abroad, music often serves as a means of preserving cultural connection and emotional attachment to home. In *Eskimo* (2025), Trinidad Killah captures the sentiment of the Caribbean national living abroad, often

in an emotional state made worse by the inclement weather being endured, especially at a pivotal time in the region: *Carnival*:

4. *Yuh know I out in the cold, miss the sun when it snow, and I cyah fight the feeling and I wish I could be dey for yuh, when yuh out on the road, I write yuh name in the snow, now I missing the feeling, And I wish I could be dey with yuh*

This emotional state caused by missing Carnival has been embedded in Caribbean musical expression as far back as the mid-20th century, reflecting the deep cultural attachment to this festival as a cornerstone of identity and belonging. The Mighty Terror captured this sentiment both in lyrics and the melancholy melodies and tune of his 1955 *No Carnival in Britain*, which articulates the sense of cultural dislocation experienced by Caribbean migrants in the UK. He sings:

5. *I really missing the carnival, because I adore that festival, the Terror is really missing the carnival... I can't hear no steelpan, I cant't see no clown, no wild Indian, yes, I does cry when the time comes for mas here in Great Britain.*

Carnival is a representation of community, belonging, and cultural expression, and to be missing such an event eventually creates a community of such individuals. To further represent the Caribbean family and the diasporic link, Trinidad Killah collaborated with Nicki Minaj, a Trinbagonian residing in the United States, for the songs intro and eventual remix. The Mighty Terror further

states that he is unable 'to jump in a band and consume liquor', communal activities that create bonds, even among strangers.

The lyrics depict Carnival as a national event and a central component of communal identity. The emotional dissonance experienced by those in the diaspora during Carnival points to the importance of cultural events in affirming group membership. The collaboration with Nicki Minaj, a U.S.-based Trinbagonian artiste, further reinforces the song's representation of diasporic solidarity and belonging. This theme of unity is echoed in *I Forget* (2017), where Machel Montano and Nikkita Brown directly challenge racial and cultural divisions:

6. *Well, I forget different races when I see you faces, love and happiness and everything I'll ever need...*

While the primary theme addresses interracial romantic relationships, the broader lyrical framing suggests a rejection of racial segmentation and promotes a unified Caribbean identity rooted in shared values and emotional connection. The song becomes a mechanism through which inclusive identity is symbolically constructed and celebrated.

A particularly complex example of cross-national and cross-cultural representation is found in *Shabba Madda Pot* (2015) by Dexta Daps. The song simultaneously references cultural symbols from Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, creating layered meanings through both instrumentation and slang. This is particularly evident in the line: "*steel pan a beat like Trinidad*" a key example of multilayered representation, where meaning is constructed at both the surface and underlying levels. On the surface, the reference to steel pan pays

homage to Trinidad & Tobago, as the country's national instrument and a defining symbol of its cultural heritage. Additionally, the song itself incorporates steel pan instrumentation, further reinforcing Trinidadian musical identity within a Jamaican dancehall song. However, at a deeper, coded level, the phrase "steel pan" takes on an entirely different meaning within the context of Jamaican street culture. In Jamaican slang, "steel" refers to bullets, and "pan" is a colloquial term for a gun, effectively transforming the line into a metaphor for gunfire when used in conjunction with the term "beat". This dual meaning is significant because it allows the lyric to simultaneously signal affiliation with both Jamaican and Trinbagonian cultures, creating a hybrid representational space that speaks to multiple audiences.

The symbolic use of the steelpan by Dexta Daps, both at the surface level and in its deeper coded meaning, is a deliberate and significant feature of the song. That particular moment in the song where the steelpan is referenced holds strong resonance with listeners, even when the full linguistic or cultural context may not be fully understood. The cultural weight of the steelpan as a regional symbol is further reinforced by The Mighty Terror, who expressed his admiration for the instrument in *Pan Talent*, a track from his 1995 album *Pan Poetry*, which also includes *Steelband Jamboree* and *Pan in Tune*. These repeated references highlight the steelpan's deep-rooted presence in Caribbean cultural life is analogous to the *sound system* in Jamaica, and underscore its symbolic function as a marker of identity and pride. Dexta Daps' invocation of the steelpan thus aligns him with a broader

Caribbean musical tradition, extending his engagement beyond lyrical skill to a deeper cultural connection that resonates across national boundaries.

Thematic Motifs in Lyrics

Throughout Caribbean music, recurring thematic motifs serve as mechanisms through which identity, memory, and collective belonging are constructed and performed. These themes, however, are not incidental; they are intentional expressions that embed cultural knowledge and reinforce shared values, making them central to the region's representational practices. Through lyrics, artistes actively participate in the transmission of cultural identity by drawing on gestures, and rituals that resonate across national and diasporic audiences. Below are several of these recurring themes:

- *Waving & Hand Gestures*: found in *Baddist* (2012) by Destra and Kerwin Du Bois functioning as a performative act of joy and celebration
 - *"Smile, just say cheese, le' wi take a picture please, I want the whole world to see I having the time of my life, wave it, wave it away..."*
- *Fete & Dance as Rituals of Identity*: expressed in *Wettin* (2013) by Kerwin Du Bois sees fete culture represented as a coping mechanism and a ritual of emotional release. The theme of celebration amidst adversity is a well-documented Caribbean response to hardship, where dance and communal

festivity serve as affirmations of life and endurance:

- *"When mi pressure facing a all-time low, a fete is the only place to go..."*
- ***Alcohol & Music as Cultural Signifiers:*** seen in *Island Life* (2015) by Voicemail where the theme of **music** and alcohol work to define the Caribbean as a space where joy and music are embedded in the everyday social fabric.
- *"From we have good vibes and we have rum, speaker a blaze, club ina di hot sun."*
- ***Remembrance & Celebration as Forms of Unity:*** in *Everybody Rock* (2015) by Assassin, lyrics reveal how mourning is transformed into communal acknowledgment. Honouring lost friends and family through music becomes a means of reinforcing social bonds and collective memory:
 - *"An all the friends dem and di family we lose too, so ifyu have somebody weh gone too soon rock fi dem."*

These thematic expressions are not only representative of Caribbean life, but they also function discursively to mark cultural continuity across time and space. Each theme underscores a particular dimension of identity, such as joy, endurance, celebration, or memory, that together form a layered representation of what it means to belong to the Caribbean family.

Art and Life: Performance and Consumption

Within Caribbean music operates a dynamic cultural practice that comprises performance, social interaction, and audience participation. It functions as an artistic expression and a process through which representations of identity, community, and belonging are continuously shaped and reinforced. The significance of music extends beyond its lyrical and melodic content; the modes of performance, dissemination, and reception play a critical role in constructing the concept of the Caribbean family, particularly within diasporic contexts. Here, DJs and mic men serve as meaning-makers, actively shaping the way audiences perceive, interact with, and understand the music. They do not just play songs; they construct narratives, emphasize themes, and reinforce representations by controlling the sonic and social atmosphere of musical spaces. Through their musical selections, speech acts (pragmatic markers), call-and-response techniques, and ad-libs, they create an idea of Caribbean identity, often blurring the lines between local and regional, past and present, individual and communal identities. Additionally, the ways in which music is consumed, whether in fetes,

dancehall sessions, Carnival events, or diasporic gatherings, contribute to its representation.

Roll Call and Attendance: Affirming National and Regional Identity

A defining feature of Caribbean party culture in the diaspora is the *roll call*, where DJs and mic men “shout out” various Caribbean countries. This phase serves multiple functions: it allows attendees to represent their homeland, fosters a sense of regional unity, and transforms the party into a space of cultural reaffirmation. These announcements act as moments of recognition, where people can publicly affirm their national identity within a shared Caribbean space; reinforcing Wenger’s (1998) notion of a community. For example, during *Elegant Sound’s Fashion & Brunch* (2024), the mic man engages in repeated country-based callouts, such as:

7. *"Anybody representing Barbados in here?"* (before playing a Bajan soca)
8. *"Is there anybody from Jamaica in the building?"* (despite playing a Vincentian artiste)
9. *"Anybody from Guyana in the building?"*

These verbal recognitions allow the mic man to construct an inclusive Caribbean environment. This is further exemplified in Young Sound & DJ Xlence’s set at Yardie Fiesta (2024), where the DJ explicitly links nationality to linguistic and cultural markers:

10. *"Do we have any Jamaicans in here? Say bombo claat. Do we have*

any Guyanese in here? Say oh skunt buddy. Do we have anybody from Trinidad? Say hol’ yuh mudda cunt."

While these terms are often labelled as profane, taboo or vulgar in dominant discourse, their use in Caribbean party spaces functions as a deliberate form of identity affirmation. Within these environments, such language becomes a marker of cultural authenticity, signalling in-group belonging and resistance to imposed norms. As Cooper (2004) argues, the overt use of feminized “bad” words in Jamaican popular culture acts as a “subversive reclamation of the contested power of the ‘bad’ and the ‘vulgar.’” This linguistic choice also reflects a broader anti-authoritative stance embedded in the party scene, where participants often position themselves in opposition to middle- and upper-class expectations of respectability. In this way, the party becomes not only a space of celebration, but also one of symbolic resistance to social control and cultural policing; embracing the “badness”. As such, by instructing people to respond with these words, the mic man **orchestrates participation** in a way that affirms **individual and collective identity** and power and resistance.

Mic Man as Narrative Shaper: Controlling Interpretation and Representation

The mic man does not simply facilitate **country-based representation**, he also **guides the audience’s understanding of the music itself**. Through verbal interjections, instructions, and framing statements, he **influences how the music is perceived and consumed**,

constructing an **interpretative framework for the audience**. For example, before playing *Famalay* by Skinny Fabulous, Bunji Garlin and Machel Montano, the mic man **anchors the song's meaning** with a framing question:

11. *"Who going to the next carnival?
Where is your real team?"*

By juxtaposing symbol of Carnival celebrations and the notion of team, he creates a context of community and togetherness, positioning the track as an anthem of regional and diasporic solidarity. Similarly, before playing *Pop a Bottle* by Machel Montano, he prompts the crowd:

12. *"Who is here with they team? Put
your hand around your team."*

Here, the emphasis is placed on group participation, transforming the song into a symbolic enactment of collective celebration. The mic man, in this case, acts as a cultural mediator, instructing the crowd on how to engage with the song and, by extension, how to perform their identity within the space. Another notable instance of curating representation through narrative occurs when the mic man deliberately lowers the music during certain songs, allowing the crowd to fill the void by performing the lyrics. During the performance of Popcaan's *Family*, the vocals were removed at key moments, a performative act that shifts agency from the DJ to the audience, making them active participants in shaping the musical moment. It also serves as a symbolic affirmation of shared values, as attendees collectively declare their sense of familial connection through performance.

The mic man also is a cultural mediator, an orchestrator of energy, and a builder of camaraderie. His voice is the catalyst that transforms a crowd of individuals into a unified collective. His role is not just about keeping the momentum of a party going; it is about constructing and reinforcing identity, belonging, and community in real time. This is particularly evident in moments like:

13. *"Leh we fuck up in here... who is
going to Trinidad Carnival next
year... anybody going Grenada,
Vincy, Lucia, Barbados for
Carnival?"*

Here, the mic man is not simply asking a question, he is activating a ritual of inclusion, using call-and-response engagement to reaffirm collective identity. By calling out multiple islands in succession, he erases borders and distinctions and instead highlights the regional connectivity that defines the Caribbean family. The repeated emphasis on Carnival as a shared cultural experience further strengthens the sense of unity, making it clear that whether in Trinidad, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, or Barbados, the experience of revelry, music, and festivity is a **tie** linking Caribbean people together.

Additionally, the phrase "Leh we fuck up in here" carries a communal connotation, signalling collective participation. It is an invitation for everyone to immerse themselves in the moment, removing inhibitions and embracing the camaraderie and resistive and anti-authoritative stance that defines Caribbean celebrations.

The Use of Symbolism and Cultural Codes in Performance Spaces

Beyond verbal interventions, representation is also reinforced through **non-verbal cues** and cultural symbols. The Caribbean party space is rich with performative gestures, classified elsewhere (Jones, Dawkins and Farquharson, forthcoming) as *interactional*, where identity is enacted through movement, hand signals, and participation rituals, created through the discourse of the mic man.

- *Hand Raising and Flag Waving* existed as cultural **symbols** during Young Sound's set at Yardie Fiesta (2024), where he repeatedly prompts the audience to raise their hands in recognition of different nationalities:

14. *"All who come from the Caribbean, put yu hand ina di air. Weh di Caribbean people dem de? Represent fi yu country."*

This embodied response transforms the audience into a visual representation of Caribbean identity, reinforcing **national** affiliation while maintaining regional unity.

- *Crowd Singing and Call-and-Response*, a deliberate muting of the music, allows the crowd to sing important lyrics. This is seen in the performance of YG Marley's *Praise Jah in the Moonlight*, where the mic man mutes the song at its most recognizable moment, giving the audience the opportunity to chant collectively. This seemingly innate

understanding of the music by both the mic man and the audience, is a matter of musical awareness that symbolizes a shared understanding of a cultural symbol.

- *The Integration of Caribbean Social Issues* can be used as symbols of representations, since they trigger an emotional response through the shared moment of meaning-making through understanding of references significant to contemporary Caribbean life. In Yardie Fiesta, the DJ playfully integrates financial concerns into the party atmosphere:

15. *"If you owe me money, on December 31st, I will be texting your phone..."*

This narrative was a "preemptive" to the playing of *Dubai* by Sekon Sta, a song that satirizes the DSS money scheme in Trinidad, which saw people suffering varying levels of financial loss. This moment symbolizes the music, tying it to Caribbean socio-political realities, making the experience culturally specific and relatable.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Caribbean music functions as a cultural space where identity, belonging, and family are continuously represented and negotiated. Using Hall's Representation Theory and Wenger's Community of Practice framework, the analysis demonstrated how lyrics, performances, and audience participation create shared meanings and practices that sustain national, regional, and diasporic ties. Thematic and discourse analysis

revealed that motifs such as celebration, resilience, and remembrance operate as symbolic ties through which cultural identity is expressed. Music events serve as communal practices where participants reinforce their cultural membership through

language, ritual, and symbolic acts. In this context, family extends beyond kinship to encompass those engaged in the shared performance and experience of Caribbean identity

References

- Barrow, C., 1996. *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and Perspectives*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Brereton, B., 1981. *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783–1962*. London: Heinemann.
- Brereton, B., 2010. *Tracing the Legacy of Colonialism: Histories of Race and Class in the Caribbean*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Bryan, P., 2004. *The Jamaican People, 1880–1902: Race, Class and Social Control*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Chevannes, B., 2001. *Learning to Be a Man: Culture, Socialization, and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Cooper, C. (2004) 'Lady Saw Cuts Loose: Female Fertility Rituals in the', in *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 99–124.
- Hall, S., 1997. Introduction. In: S. Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications, pp.1–11.
- Hall, S., ed., 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Honychurch, L., 2000. *The Caribbean People: Book Two*. Oxford: Nelson Thornes.
- Montano, M., 2017. Interview with Revolt. [Online]. Available at: [revolt.tv]
- Manuel, P., 2006. *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tan-Singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Manuel, P. and Largey, M., 2016. *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Reddock, R., 1994. *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books.
- Shepherd, V., 2002. *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845–1950*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Wenger, E., 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, E., 1962. *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Discography

- 1955. The Mighty Terror, No Carnival in Britain.
- 1991. The Mighty Sparrow & Byron Lee & The Dragonnaires, Dragon Dance.
- 1995. Pan Talent, The Mighty Terror
- 1995. Pan in Tune, The Mighty Terror
- 1995. Steelband Jamboree, The Mighty Terror
- 2003. Assassin, Yardman
- 2004. Machel Montano, Wap Dem.
- 2012. Destra and Kerwin Du Bois, Baddist.
- 2013. Drupatee & Machel Montano, Indian Gal.
- 2013. Kerwin Du Bois, Wettin.
- 2013. Lil Rick ft. Benjai, Cyah Bother We
- 2013. Tallpree & Bunji Garlin, Bad like We
- 2014. Bunji Garlin & Tarrus Riley, Carnival Tabanca (Remix).
- 2014. Shurwayne Winchester, My Team
- 2015. Assassin, Everybody Rock.
- 2015. Dexta Daps, Shabba Madda Pot
- 2015. Rhyming King, Caribbean Love
- 2015. Voicemail, Island Life.
- 2017. Machel Montano ft. Nikkita Brown, I Forget.
- 2019. Linky First, *Jeune Femme*.
- 2019. Machel Montano, *Dance*.
- 2019. Skinny Fanulous, Machel Montano & Bunji Garlin, *Famalay*.
- 2020. Teddyson John, *X Games*.
- 2025. Trinidad Killah, *Eskimo*.

The Duality of Identity in the Re (Creation) of the Mas

Dr. Margaret Nakhid-Chatoor.

University of Trinidad and Tobago,
91-101 Esperanza Road, Brechin Castle,
Couva, Trinidad
Tel: (868)223-4888 Ext.28230
Email: Margaret.chatoor@utt.edu.tt

Abstract

The festival of Carnival represents a profound duality: it is both a celebration of cultural memory and a platform for individual self-expression. This paper explores its dual role as a living archive that preserves traditions, stories, and rituals while also serving as a transformative space for personal and collective liberation. By analyzing secondary data, including historical records, cultural documentation, and scholarly analyses, the study highlights how Carnival functions as a mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage, ensuring its vibrancy and relevance. At the heart of this exploration is the symbolic act of masquerade, a practice that embodies both continuity and transformation. Through masks and costumes, individuals adopt alternative personas, transcending societal constraints and personal inhibitions. This act provides a sense of anonymity and freedom, allowing participants to confront and express suppressed emotions and identities, emerging as a liminal space, where the complexities of identity can be explored, reconciled, and redefined. The research therefore underscores the integral role of Carnival in preserving cultural traditions and fostering communal bonds. Simultaneously, it demonstrates the event's capacity to address personal challenges, including trauma, through its liberating and expressive environment. This intersection of cultural preservation and personal healing makes it a dynamic and enduring tradition that resonates across generations. By focusing on secondary data, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the festival's impact as both a cultural repository and an avenue for self-discovery. It affirms its significance as a space where cultural memory and individual identity intertwine, ensuring the celebration's continued relevance in contemporary society.

Key Words: Carnival; Cultural Memory; Masquerade; Identity; Traditions; Self-Expression; Trauma; Transformation.

Introduction

Over the years, successive governments in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) have implemented policies and tools for pragmatic cultural promotions, the features and designs of which have changed due to the actors involved, the agendas of political regimes and the perceived notions of what constitutes national identity. Within this context, Carnival has grown to be a key component in promoting and institutionalizing aspects of T&T's culture

and "identity" to local and foreign audiences (Chami & Teelucksingh, 2017). This cultural phenomenon plays a pivotal role in the intergenerational transmission of heritage by serving as a dynamic platform where traditions, stories, and rituals are preserved and passed down. This annual festival has been institutionalized through initiatives like the National Carnival Commission (NCC), which organizes events such as the "Viey La Cou" (The Old Yard) to showcase traditional masquerade

characters and performances (National Carnival Commission. n.d.). These efforts not only preserve historical elements but also engage younger generations in the celebration of their cultural identity. Similarly, the establishment of the NCC aims to document and safeguard knowledge related to traditional festival arts, further reinforcing its role as a repository of cultural memory. This interplay between preservation and innovation underscores Carnival's enduring significance as a mechanism for cultural transmission (Chami & Teelucksingh, 2017).

Added to the *extrinsic* benefits of preserving legacy and continuing traditions and rituals, the *intrinsic* benefits of the duality of the festival will be examined. Few studies have explored the psychological benefits of masking in Carnival, in an era where topics such as mental health and suicidal ideation have become central to discussions on a society's collective well-being. Aching (2002) considers how masking can counter social invisibility and provide a means for individuals to navigate their subjectivities. Supporting this viewpoint, Godet (2020) highlights how masking allows for self-expression and emotional release. Both authors posit that the symbolic act of the masquerade plays a crucial role in self-expression – that is, by donning traditional costumes and performing age-old rituals, participants embody and reenact cultural narratives, ensuring their survival and relevance in modern contexts, and at the same time, navigating the subjectivity of the mas for their personal transformation and healing.

SECTION 1: Cannes Brûlées! Vive le Carnival!

According to Mendes (2003), the Cannes Brûlées was 'patois-rized to Canboulay and was the DNA for our present-day Carnival' (p.222). He continues that 'long before the masked balls of aristocracy, the natives were already restless – busy inventing Pan, Caiso and what would become a prodigious street Carnival – now exported to the World!' (p. 223). In the nineteenth century as many historical documents assert, black revelers were not allowed to play mas in the streets, and the Canboulay riots were intense attempts to change the minds of the colonial authorities. But after one time became two time*, and persistent efforts gave rise to the Viey La Cou – the old-time Courtyard which was the forerunner of the Mas' Camp (Mendes, 2003). In this space or yard, Carnival characters met to rehearse their moves and speeches – the Midnight Robbers, Minstrels, Pierrots Grenade, Imps, Indians, Bookmen, Jab Jabs, Warrahoons, Dames Lorraine, Ramajay with Sailors, Moko Jumbies, Bats and Kalinda; Tambou bamboo, Vintage Kaiso, Pai Banan, Negue Jardin and Pan round de neck (p. 234). Everyone was there, who wanted to give 'voice and meaning' to their interpretations of the Carnival!

Carnival as Cultural memory

As Sofo (2014) stated, through the encounter with other rituals such as African masquerade and Canboulay, Trinidad Carnival became, for the first time in the world, the instrument to earn an actual and non-temporary freedom, and the space for the celebration of a new interethnic national identity, obtained through the ritual itself. Thus, the Cannes Brûlées uprisings and the later Canboulay riots of 1881 were pivotal

moments where Caribbean peoples defied colonial oppression, ensuring that their cultural rituals and traditions survived and were remembered and preserved, despite attempts to suppress them. Cultural memory can be viewed as a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and conveys to these people a cultural identity (Assman, 2011). According to this author, it is also more than that: Cultural memory is not just about preserving facts—it is about *shaping meaning* and it refers to the shared pool of knowledge, beliefs, and traditions that a community collectively acknowledges and passes down through generations. It plays a significant role in shaping a group's identity and is maintained through various mediums like storytelling, rituals, and historical texts.

In contemporary times, Carnival is a living, evolving testament to the power of cultural memory in constructing and maintaining identity – it brings people together, allowing them to celebrate their past, express their present, and envision their future. In the same way where the Greeks used epic poetry (like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) to transmit cultural values and heroic ideals (Assman, 2011), the Carnival is a space where individuals and communities exhibit their cultural, historical, and personal identities openly and joyously. Through dazzling costumes, music, and performance, participants become highly visible, asserting pride and reclaiming agency in the face of post-colonial histories. Carnival's deep historical roots can be traced back to ancient rituals and celebrations and to connections to African heritage and the post-Emancipation era, where freed slaves used the festival to celebrate their newfound freedom and artistic expression.

Events like the Parade of Bands, the Dimanche Gras, steel band competitions, and J'ouvert all serve to reinforce cultural memories and collective identity (Liverpool, 1998).

Despite the enduring legacies of post-colonial oppressions with disparities in wealth, education, and access to opportunities, when the season of Carnival comes around annually, it fosters a sense of belonging and unity within a community. Efforts to reclaim and celebrate local heritage continue by many indigenous groups and participation in the varied activities, whether through music, dance, costume-making, or simply attending the festivities, strengthens communal bonds and reaffirms ethnic identity. Cultural expressions are integral to this celebration such as soca, calypso, and other musical genres and these diverse genres are a reflection of the community's history, struggles, and joys, and carry much symbolic significance and shared memories. Riggio (2004) has argued that Trinidad's Carnival as described here, is the "most copied yet least studied" major Carnival in the world and explores how the festival evolved from colonial and post-emancipation roots into this vibrant expression of identity, resistance, and creativity.

Similar to Mendes (2003) as stated previously, Riggio (2004) discusses the roles of Indian, Chinese, and Amerindian communities in shaping Carnival traditions, highlighting Trinidad's multicultural fabric and the crucial role of the collective memory depicted by historical and mythical themes, preserving and celebrating the region's authentic heritage and identity. This '*memory*' is also captured in the exhilarating Extempo battles – the

verbal folklore tradition where calypsonians engage in spontaneous lyrical duels, using wit, humor, and sharp social commentary to tell the stories of the people, politics, and everyday struggles. The steelpan, born out of post-slavery ingenuity, additionally carries this communal legacy and many stories are told of early pan men creating music from discarded oil drums, defying oppression and transforming the streets into a sonic revolution. These embodiments not only celebrate cultural heritage but also provide a platform for storytelling and remembrance. In all of the above, cultural memory is shared as older generations pass down traditions, stories, and skills to younger generations, ensuring that historical and ritualistic memories are preserved and identity and meaning-making are continuously shaped.

Symbolism of masquerade

The symbolic act of masquerade within Carnival is central to this transmission of rituals and storytelling. Masquerade reflects the vibrant ceremonial and artistic identity of Trinidad and Tobago and it is a celebration of heritage, with characters like the Pierrot Grenade, Jab Jab, and Dame Lorraine offering insights into social commentary and folklore. Performers step into their roles with passion, transforming streets into stages. Through costumes, dance, and even satire, they bring myths and societal narratives to life. Each movement, pose, or gesture is deliberate, adding layers of meaning to the spectacle, a *continuous cultural practice*—a living, breathing expression of community, politics, and creativity (Riggio, 2004).

Masking or masquing is also deeply rooted in rituals and traditions as it embodies cultural archetypes and characters, such as

kings, queens, spirits, and animals, which are often tied to folklore and communal stories such as La Diablesse or the legend of the Jab Molassie. It therefore serves as a bridge between the past and present, connecting individuals to their heritage and history, and providing a sense of continuity and resilience. The connections made in these Carnavalesque encounters can be both powerful and empowering, reinforcing identity and belonging, and ensuring their survival and relevance in modern contexts.

Using masks to navigate visibility and invisibility.

Individuals in Caribbean cultures use masks to navigate visibility and invisibility (Aching, 2002). The writer expands on this duality of the masquerade in Carnival, seeing the festival as a cultural space rich with symbolism, where these concepts come alive. For example, visibility can be seen in the striking costumes, public performances, and storytelling that amplify cultural memory; and invisibility might be the unspoken histories, lost traditions, or marginalized voices that struggle to be recognized not only in the Trinidad mas but also in the masquerades in Cuba and in Martinique.

Aching (2002) further explains these seemingly opposite frameworks as he states that the costumes, dances, and performances are used to celebrate identity and assert power, making participants highly visible and expressive, while at the same time, masks and disguises allow for anonymity, enabling participants to critique social norms or power structures without fear of retaliation. For example, someone may mock a political figure under the guise of a costume (*see Figure 1*). Visibility during these events enables participants to challenge dominant narratives and inspire

dialogue, often through symbolic representations that are bold and unapologetic.

Carnival blurs the boundaries between these concepts of visibility and invisibility, creating a unique psychological experience for participants. There is that sense of empowerment where visibility can boost pride and collective identity, while invisibility empowers individuals to challenge norms and experiment with alternate selves (Aching, 2002). This balance of visibility and invisibility can therefore create a space for catharsis, helping participants process and reflect on social tensions and personal struggles through creative expression and where they can be viewed as tools for navigating identity, power, and resistance, offering participants a chance to reshape their social realities in powerful and celebratory ways. To what extent can these different ‘roles’ also provide a platform where social inequalities can be addressed in a transformative way?

Social Justice and Transformation

As can be seen in the Canboulay riots, in the speeches of the Midnight Robber and the Pierrot Grenade, and the exchange of picong* in the improvised extempo calypsos, the Carnival has often been a platform for addressing societal inequalities and advocating for change. For example, performers and designers create costumes that symbolize struggles for racial equality and gender rights -

- ✓ The *Jamette Mas* represents the rebellious lower-class women who defied societal norms and restrictions, embodying gender resistance.

- ✓ The popular *Fancy Indians* reflects the historical struggles of indigenous communities.
- ✓ The *Midnight Robber* is a speaker of the truth, bringing the country’s attention to both historical and contemporary wrongdoings (Marshall, Farrar & Farrar, 2017).

These costumes often use bold imagery, colors, and symbols to convey powerful messages. In the calypso portrayals, songs or theatrical skits might highlight issues like poverty, corruption, or discrimination, turning Carnival into a space for activism and dialogue. Carnival costumes sometimes tell stories of historical events or figures. Orji (2019) states that chains, whips, and shackles are reimagined as bold symbols of liberation, often paired with fiery colors like red and orange to represent the rebellion and resilience of the slavery experience, and designs that incorporate feathers, beads, and earth tones honor the legacy of native and indigenous peoples and their connection to the land...Well! This celebration is Mas! The overt. The obvious. The performative plays by many characters, designers and steel bands, rich with symbolism and not just as spectacle, but as a deeply layered cultural phenomenon.

Let us turn now to the less obvious, the unspoken narratives, the subtle expressions beneath the spectacle - the emotions stirred and the personal transformations made when the costumes are folded away.

SECTION 2: DIS TIME NUH LIKE BEFORE TIME*.

Carnival as a space for Healing and Transformation

This section will address the role of the festival as a space for healing and transformation when the Mas and masking serves as a necessary conduit for some persons as they deal with psychological trauma. This process of transformation is not new. Historically, masks have been used in Carnival celebrations to explore and express different facets of identity, allowing individuals to step into roles, personas, or even societal critiques (Godet, 2020) that they might not typically express in their everyday lives. In her article, 'The mask in the mas' in *Trinidad Guardian* (2018), Nakhid-Chatoor explores this viewpoint as she highlights the significant psychological impact of the wearing of the mask. The following themes emerge:

1. **Freedom of Expression:** anonymity enables persons to express emotions and behaviors they might otherwise suppress.
2. **Exploration of Identity:** a form of self-exploration, helping individuals connect with aspects of their personality they may not openly display.
3. **Catharsis and Emotional Release:** the act of masquerading can be therapeutic, serving as an outlet for pent-up emotions, stress, or frustrations.
4. **Social Connection:** Participants may feel united by shared cultural traditions and the collective experience of Carnival.
5. **Temporary Escape:** offers a temporary reprieve from life's stresses, which can have restorative psychological benefits.

These effects illustrate the profound interplay between culture, creativity, and individual psychology. Have you, the reader, ever experienced this kind of emotional release or identity exploration through Carnival? Let us further explore and expand on these themes.

Masking in Carnival and its links to trauma.

Trauma often involves a loss of control and agency, leaving individuals feeling powerless, and donning a mask is an act of transformation which can empower the self, as it allows individuals to reclaim control over their narrative and express themselves in ways they might not feel comfortable doing in their daily lives (Francis East and Roll, 2015). In their paper titled *Women, Poverty, and Trauma: An Empowerment Practice Approach*, the authors outline a model developed over 20 years of hands-on experience working with women facing poverty, trauma, and systemic oppression. Francis East and Roll's empowerment practice, centers on transforming personal trauma into agency and collective action, especially for women marginalized by poverty and violence.

One of the stronger themes of their work is the symbolism of the mask which creates a space for expression, solidarity, and agency. When someone dons a mask or costume during *mas*, they step outside the roles which society assigns them. In similar ways to their empowerment groups which use role-play or storytelling, the wearing of the mask in the Carnival allows participants to *embody new identities* so that a woman masked as a queen or warrior shifts the narrative from victimhood to sovereignty. While their work unfolds in counseling rooms and community centers, and the Carnival explodes in the streets, both are

seen as spaces where healing begins with reclaiming the narrative.

In a different way, Ortega's insights (2023), in *Masking and Trauma: How Hiding Your True Self Affects Mental Health* explore the psychological toll of masking—the act of suppressing one's authentic self to conform to social expectations. According to this writer, if masking becomes a habitual coping mechanism outside of Carnival, it may lead to mental health challenges such as burnout and a disconnect from one's true self, especially for individuals who may be neurodivergent or may have existing mental health issues. However, Ortega's work highlights the emotional toll of *involuntary* masking—suppressing one's identity to meet societal expectations. Carnival flips that script. The *voluntary* use of a mask becomes empowering because **you choose who you become**, and in that choice lies autonomy—a fundamental aspect of individual well-being which trauma often strips away.

To further highlight these viewpoints, let us explore two familiar Carnival characters who play a 'charade' at every festivity – The *Midnight Robber* and the *Jab Molassie*



Figure 1. CASE STUDY A -The Midnight Robber.

Like other tricksters, the Midnight Robber is the agent of both destruction and creation, offering

a psychological release to listeners, onlookers, storytellers and Mas players (Marshall, Farrar & Farrar, 2017). This is a powerful example of how Carnival Mas allows for the exploration and expression of dual identities, providing both concealment and liberation.

Themes Behind the Mask

- **Concealment:** Uses his costume and mask to disguise his true identity, allowing him to step into a role that is bold, boastful, and fearless. This concealment offers him the freedom and liberation to express thoughts and feelings that he might not normally share.
- **Social Commentary:** Through exaggerated tales and braggadocio, he critiques social injustices, corruption, and other societal issues, hiding his critiques behind the mask of entertainment.

Empowerment: the performer can feel a sense of empowerment and control, using the persona to navigate the complex social dynamics with the society.



Figure 2. CASE STUDY B – The Jab Molassie.

This character is often covered in black or blue paint and adorned with horns and

chains, creating a fearsome and mysterious persona.

Themes Behind the Mask

- **Alter Ego:** allows the performer to break free from societal constraints and embrace a more primal and uninhibited identity; explore and express hidden aspects of themselves while experiencing a sense of freedom and empowerment.
- **Inner Conflict:** provides a safe outlet for confronting and exploring inner conflicts / and darker aspects of their personality.

Empowerment: the performer can feel a sense of empowerment and control, as the mask allows them to embody something new or deeply personal, doing so uninhibited.

The mask as a construct of gender identity

In a society where the adoption of certain gender roles can be questioned, shunned and negated, the masquerade in Trinidad's Carnival offers a fascinating lens through which gender identity is constructed, expressed, and sometimes challenged. Historically, masquerade characters often reflected societal norms and expectations of gender. For example, the Dame Lorraine character humorously exaggerates femininity, using satire to critique class and gender dynamics. Similarly, male characters like the Midnight Robber embody traits of bravado and dominance. Other themes emerge such as:

1. **Cross-Dressing and Fluidity:** Masquerade has long been a space for exploring and subverting gender norms. Cross-dressing is a common

feature, allowing participants to embody roles outside their assigned gender. This challenges rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity, creating a more fluid understanding of identity.

2. **Empowerment Through Performance:** For many, masquerade is a way to reclaim and celebrate their gender identity. Women, for instance, have increasingly taken on roles that were traditionally male-dominated, such as leading steel bands or portraying powerful characters in mas.
3. **Artistic Representation:** Costume design plays a significant role in constructing gender identity. Designers often use elements like color, texture, and symbolism to highlight or blur gender distinctions, making the masquerade a *visual dialogue* on identity.
4. **Social Commentary:** Through satire and storytelling, masquerade characters often critique societal expectations of gender. This creates a space for reflection and conversation about how gender roles are perceived and enforced.

As you can imagine, the masquerade is not just a performance; it's a dynamic and evolving art form that mirrors and challenges societal views on gender and where the mask serves as a multifaceted tool that offers psychological, emotional, and social benefits. It provides a safe space for individuals to navigate their identities, express themselves freely, and at the same time, connect with their community and culture.

Masking and its links to Frantz Fanon's psychoanalysis.

As early as 1952, a young French psychiatrist, 27 years old, introduced a groundbreaking work that challenged prevailing understandings of colonialism and psychology within Francophone circles. His publication was titled "*Black Skin, White Masks*" where he explored the psychological impact of colonialism and racism on black individuals. Fanon discussed how blacks often adopted "white masks" to fit into a white-dominated society and he emphasized the importance of expressing one's emotions and confronting psychological trauma.

In similar ways, Carnival allows individuals to use masks as tools for identity exploration, adopting personas that might remain inaccessible in daily life. This duality can be interpreted as a way to navigate and challenge societal norms and expectations and as stated previously, to provide a safe space for emotional release and self-expression without fear of judgment. It reveals an important parallel: just as Fanon identified masking as a survival strategy within a colonial framework (Flores-Rodríguez, 2012), Carnival embraces masking as a means of reclaiming identity, challenging societal expectations, and fostering personal transformation. The colonial oppressive and hierarchical legacies continue down the generations as was exposed in Fanon's imposed masking (as a response to colonial oppression) and Carnival's voluntary masking (as a tool for liberation and reinvention). In contemporary Carnival, masking disrupts these hierarchies, allowing individuals to reclaim agency and participate in communal transformation. While both forms of masking alter how

individuals engage with society, one reflects psychological suppression, while the other fosters empowerment and renewal.

Two main areas are highlighted in these comparisons. **Firstly**, in confronting power structures, Fanon addresses the psychological toll of colonization and the desire to confront and resist the systems that impose racial hierarchies. The "mask" becomes a tool both for adapting to and subtly defying those structures. In Carnival, masks and costumes enable a form of social and political critique. Participants can mock authority figures, highlight societal inequalities, and express dissent in ways that might not be possible without the anonymity and symbolic power of the mask.

Secondly, the fluidity of identity is striking as for Fanon, the "mask" represents the duality and conflict of identity in colonial contexts—how individuals may perform roles to fit into societal expectations while yearning to assert their authentic selves (Flores-Rodríguez, 2012). In Carnival, masking reflects this fluidity of identity. By temporarily adopting new roles, participants challenge fixed notions of self, exploring the boundaries between reality and performance, power and resistance.

Both Fanon's work and Carnival masking grapple with the complexities of identity, power, and self-expression. While *Black Skin, White Masks* speaks to the deep psychological impact of racial and colonial hierarchies, the Carnival serves as a communal and symbolic arena for navigating these tensions. By linking these concepts, we can see how Carnival masking and Fanon's ideas both address the complexities of identity, resistance, and

psychological liberation in the context of colonialism and racism.

DISCUSSION

Carnival and Liminality

In musing on all of the areas as discussed above, the concept of liminality came to mind. In my opinion, Carnival is a quintessential example of a liminal space. It temporarily suspends the norms and hierarchies of everyday life, creating a world where participants can explore alternative roles, identities, and expressions. The concept of **liminality** originates from the work of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* where he described liminality as the transitional phase in a rite of passage, as individuals are "betwixt and between" their previous identity and their new one. Turner (1969) later expanded on this, emphasizing liminality as a space of ambiguity, potentiality, and transformation—a threshold where new identities and possibilities emerge. In the Carnival, how do we see this juxtaposition of identities and expressions emerging? As persons liberate themselves and 'throw caution to the wind', does this "betwixt and between" state allow for both personal and cultural transformation? In this paper, we have seen that this can happen.

At its core, Carnival embodies the **reconciliation** of opposites—order and chaos, tradition and innovation, individuality and community. In this heightened moment of festivity, participants willingly immerse themselves in **dualities**, embracing the contradictions that define both personal and cultural identity. Carnival creates a world in which tensions are explored and resolved,

allowing for personal healing and cultural cohesion. It is a space where boundaries blur, where identities shift, and where the spirit of renewal breathes life into both individuals and societies. Turner's concept of liminality provides a compelling lens through which to view the Carnival experience - a transitional phase, where individuals step outside of their structured social roles and exist in a state of flux. It momentarily dissolves rigid societal boundaries, allowing for uninhibited self-expression and communal bonding—what Turner terms *communitas*.

Recent scholarship builds upon Turner's insights by examining how liminality in Carnival has evolved in contemporary celebrations. Studies on Brazil's Rio Carnival, for instance, reveal how marginalized communities use the festival as a political platform, transforming the space into one of activism and identity assertion. Similarly, Cieslarová's (2020) research on the Basel Fasnacht explores how Carnival rituals balance tradition and innovation, demonstrating that liminality does not merely suspend social hierarchies—it also offers a space for renewal and reinvention. The interplay between structure and freedom within Carnival underscores its dual nature: while deeply rooted in cultural memory, it remains a dynamic arena where personal transformation unfolds.

CONCLUSION

Carnival, with its vibrant displays of music, dance, and masquerade, functions as both a repository of cultural memory and a transformative space for personal reinvention. Rooted in historical traditions, it serves as a living archive where the collective identity of a community is preserved, reimagined, and performed. As a

cultural memory, Carnival carries the echoes of colonial resistance, folk traditions, and ancestral knowledge, ensuring that history is not only remembered but continuously reinterpreted. The masquerade, in particular, allows individuals to revisit traditional characters or engage in orations that critique contemporary social structures.

Finally, Carnival functions as both an **archive and a stage**—it safeguards historical memory while fostering individual and collective metamorphosis. By embracing masks and performance, participants engage in a ritual that transcends the *everyday*, celebrating the fluid and evolving nature of identity. In this sense, Carnival is more than just a festival;

it is a liminal world where social norms are momentarily discarded, allowing for playful rebellion, introspection, and rebirth. The act of masking can itself become a powerful symbol and can represent themes of freedom, resistance, and resilience, which are remembered and celebrated year after year. Even though individuals may hide behind masks, the narratives they portray are often tied to historical events, myths, or social commentaries. These narratives become part of the cultural memory that is shared and remembered by the community. And as we end, *‘In every bead and feather, in every blaze of color, the mask becomes the mirror—and healing, the dance. Long live the rhythm, the resistance, the release... **Vive le Carnaval!**’*

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank the University of Trinidad and Tobago for hosting *Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections; Cultural Cadence; Steelpan, Calypso and Mas and the Global Diaspora Connection* – the 11th International Conference on Carnival, March 6 – 8th at NAPA, Port of

Spain, Trinidad. I was able to present my ideas on the current topic.

Many thanks also to the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the *International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA)* for the opportunity to present this current paper.

APPENDIX

Dictionary of Terms from Mendes, J. (2003) – *Cote Ci Cote La*:

1. **After One time is Two Time** – Conditions are the reverse of what they used to be (p.236).
2. **Dis Time Nuh Like Before Time** – Times now are not like they were before. Things have changed drastically (p.240).
3. **Gayelle** – Arena where cockfights and stick fights are held (p.76).
4. **Picong** – pseudo-insults exchanged between friends (p.145)

References:

1. Aching, G. (2002) *Masking and power: Carnival and popular culture in the Caribbean*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
2. Assmann, J. (2011) *Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Chami, G. and Teelucksingh, J. (2017) 'Carnival celebrations in Trinidad and Tobago and abroad: Cultural diplomacy in action/practice', in Pantin, S. and Teelucksingh, J. (eds.) *Ideology, regionalism, and society in Caribbean history*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 157–176. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61418-2_10
4. Cieslarová, O. and Chlup, R. (2020) 'Second-order liminality: Dynamics of ritual change in the Basel Fasnacht', *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 28(2), pp. 276–313.
5. Flores-Rodríguez, D. (2012) 'Language, power and resistance: Re-reading Fanon in a trans-Caribbean context', *The Black Scholar*, 42(3–4), pp. 27–35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5816/blackscholar.42.3-4.0027>
6. Francis East, J. and Roll, S.J. (2015) 'Women, poverty, and trauma: An empowerment practice approach', *Social Work*, 60(4), pp. 279–286. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv030>
7. Godet, A. (2020) 'Behind the masks: The politics of carnival', *Journal of Festive Studies*, 2(1), pp. 1–31.
8. Liverpool, H. (1998) 'Rituals and resistance: The power of masking in Carnival', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 44(3/4), pp. 194–223.
9. Marshall, E.Z., Farrar, M. and Farrar, G. (2017) 'Popular political cultures and the Caribbean carnival', *Soundings*, 67, pp. 34–49.
10. Mendes, J. (2003) *Cote ci cote la: Trinidad & Tobago dictionary*. Trinidad and Tobago: New Millennium Printing.
11. Nakhid-Chatoor, M. (2018) 'The mask in the mas', *The Trinidad Guardian*, [Online] 6 February. Available at: <https://www.guardian.co.tt/article-6.2.416750.28ccc682cb>
12. National Carnival Commission (n.d.) *Viey la cou (The Old Yard): Preserving traditional masquerade characters and performances*. Available at: <https://www.guardian.co.tt/article-6.2.416750.28ccc682cb>
13. Orji, B.E. (2019) 'Carnivalization of indigenous performance forms and the demystification of ritual essence in costume and mask designs of masquerade art', *African Theatre*, 18, pp. 42–62.
14. Ortega, M. (2023) *Masking and trauma: How hiding your true self affects mental health*. Ideal Psychology Group.
15. Riggio, M.C. (ed.) (2004) *Carnival: Culture in action – The Trinidad experience*. London: Routledge.
16. Sofo, G. (2014) 'Carnival, memory and identity', *Культура/Culture*, (6), pp. 17–24.
17. Turner, V. (1969) 'Liminality and communitas', in *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 41–49.

Floral Rhythms: Celebrating Steelpan, Our National Instrument

Melissa Lee Foon

St. James,
Port of Spain, Trinidad

Background to the Floral Installation

The Trinidad and Tobago Botanical Gardens, established in 1818, is among the oldest botanical gardens globally. Over time, it continuously inspired generations, nurturing creativity and fostering excellence, particularly in international arenas such as the UK's annual prestigious Chelsea Flower Show. As a direct beneficiary of this legacy, our teams have achieved gold medals at Chelsea for the past five years.

Throughout the world, ancient festivals integrate vibrant floral displays into their cultural traditions, representing themes of hope, renewal, prosperity, and progress. However, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the history of Carnival - rooted in the pain and suffering of enslavement and plantation life - has largely excluded floral displays as a prominent feature. Recent scholarship, however, highlights the pivotal role botanical institutions such as Kew Gardens in London, founded in 1759, played in the political and economic strategies of the expanding British Empire, both during and after the period of slavery when Carnival began to take shape. Kew facilitated the transfer of various plant species, including flowers, seedlings, and cash crops, which were cultivated to enhance yields on plantations, generating significant profits for Britain.

A striking example of the era's imperial ambitions is the 1848 Palm House at Kew, which became a powerful symbol of British colonialism. Between 1840 -1854, the importation of palm oil from West Africa to Britain more than doubled, driven by its industrial applications as a machine lubricant and its use in everyday products such as soap, candles, and margarine. The demand for palm oil played a key role in Britain's colonisation of West Africa and the eventual creation of modern Nigeria.

The historical and economic connections between botanical gardens and the expansion of empire are undeniable, and thus, these narratives should be consciously integrated into contemporary celebrations such as Carnival. The botanical history of empire offers a powerful lens through which to reframe Carnival, not only as a celebration of cultural resilience but also a reflection of the broader global political and economic forces that have shaped its evolution. In alignment with our participation in this conference, I presented a floral display themed around the steelpan, the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, recently recognised by UNESCO, with 11th August now designated as *World Steelpan Day*. This display honoured the creativity, scientific prowess, and artistic heritage of our people through the medium of floral art. Initial discussions concerning the historical and thematic context of this floral installation were initiated during the conference and continued in its aftermath. This response articulates the principal questions that surfaced during and post-presentation and explores them through a combination of personal analysis and extended research with support from the editors of the International Journal of Carnival Arts. In response to various questions, a comprehensive bibliography of relevant topics is cited below - Sathnam Sanghera (2021, 2023) has been particularly inspiring.

Key Words: Floral Installation, steelpan, empire, botanical history, colonialism, cultural expression, creativity, resilience

1) Summarise your background and how you rose from having a keen floral interest to winning a Gold Medal at the world-renowned Chelsea Flower Show in London in 2023.

Response: I was raised in the idyllic village of Moruga, nestled at the western edge of the Trinity Hills within the Princes Town region of Trinidad. Immersed in a lush and untamed natural environment during my formative years (Fig.1). I developed an intuitive connection with the region's extraordinary botanical diversity. This early exposure - unstructured yet profound - seeded a lifelong passion for tropical flora that would later crystallise into a purposeful vocation.

Upon relocating to Port of Spain, I began to integrate my deep appreciation for the natural world with a growing entrepreneurial sensibility. This culminated in the founding of *Garden Gennii*, a community-rooted horticultural venture created in partnership with my sister, Megan. Through *Garden Gennii*, we sought not merely to sell plants, but to celebrate and elevate Trinidadian flora, crafting vibrant arrangements from native foliage that both reflected and reinforced our cultural identity. Our work quickly resonated with the public, inspiring us to embrace bolder botanical designs and narratives.

This journey reached a significant milestone in May 2023, when I had the honour of contributing to a team that was awarded a Gold Medal at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show in London. This achievement not only affirmed the global relevance of Caribbean horticultural aesthetics, but also reinforced my commitment to promoting indigenous plant life through design and storytelling.

Beyond the sphere of competition, I am deeply involved with the Horticultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago, where I advocate for the reintegration of tropical cut flowers into local markets and everyday life and involves my daughter, Asia who loves both horticulture and Pan (Fig. 2). My work

emphasises the sustainable use of native flora, with the dual aim of ecological stewardship and cultural affirmation. One such project, a floral installation titled *Floral Pan*, was featured at the 11th Steelpan and Carnival Arts Conference between 6th - 8th March 2025 at NAPA. It represented an artistic fusion of our botanical heritage with Trinidad and Tobago's most iconic cultural innovation - The Steelpan - underscoring the rich, interwoven legacies of land, identity, and creative expression.



Figure 1 Trinidad and Tobago's natural splendor offers a wellspring of inspiration for the aspiring horticulturist. Here, the revered Immortal stands with its radiant bloom - an emblem woven through generations of children's tales and ancestral folklore.





Figure 2a (above): Melissa (right) her sister, Megan - midway through constructing the floral installation.

Figure 2b (below): The steelpan component nearing completion, with Melissa's assistants Megan (middle) and daughter Asia (left).



Figure 3. The completed floral installation that stayed on stage throughout the entire conference.



Figure 4. Our team at the Chelsea Flower Show (left to right) Anthony Tang Kai, Neave McKenzie, Simone Taylor, Andre Crawford, Melissa Lee Foon and Shane Valentine.

2) Has the Botanical Gardens in Port of Spain inspired you? You stated in your abstract it was established in 1818. Why do you think the British were so keen to establish a Botanical Garden in Trinidad so early, when their own Kew Gardens in England was only opened to the public in 1840?

Response: Institutions such as Kew Gardens played a significant role in the British Empire's political and economic strategies, transferring plant species to enhance plantation yields and supporting economic growth through botanical trade. As early as 1788, HMS Bounty went to Tahiti with two Kew Gardeners and collected 1,000 breadfruit plants to plant in the Caribbean. Tea, Coffee, Sugar are examples that build the wealth and power of the colonial Empires. Having a Botanical Garden in the tropics to use an experimental laboratory destined for the plantations would seem more logical than having one in a temperate climate such as Kew. It allowed experimental plant breeding for high yielding crops that could be taken from the gardens to the plantations. Moreover, the early establishment of the Botanical Gardens in Port of Spain reflects Trinidad's strategic importance within the British colonial network, particularly as a hub for tropical agriculture and trade. The island's climate and biodiversity made it an ideal location for cultivating and acclimatising exotic plants with commercial potential. These gardens were not just scientific centres but also tools of empire, enabling the testing of botanical specimens that could later be disseminated across Britain's tropical colonies. This ensured that Britain could exploit local ecologies efficiently, reduce dependence on foreign powers for essential crops, and reinforce imperial self-sufficiency through scientific control of nature.

3) Can you give at least one example of a plant or plant product that you see in a Botanical Garden that markedly

enhanced colonial expansion other than the ones you already touched on?

Response: Kew was opened to the public by 1840 as we said before – by 1848 it drew in the public with the establishment of the **Palm House** – which even up to today is one of the most visited parts of the garden. While these plants are majestic and spectacular, the underlying reason was to emphasise the value of palm oil which then came mainly from West Africa. It was used to drive Britain's Industrial growth period - Palm Oil being used to keep the large industrial machineries working eg in manufacturing industries, making household products such as soap, candles and food additives etc. Britain's creation of the state of Nigeria was to acquire its burgeoning palm oil industry.

Another significant example is **quinine**, a compound derived from the bark of the cinchona tree, native to the Andes but later cultivated widely in British colonies such as India and Sri Lanka. Quinine was essential in the treatment and prevention of malaria, a disease that posed a major threat to European colonisers in tropical regions. Its introduction and propagation through imperial botanical gardens enabled the British to expand deeper into malarial zones of Africa and Asia, often referred to as the "White Man's Grave" before quinine's widespread use. Thus, plants like cinchona not only contributed to economic and medical advancement but also directly facilitated the expansion and entrenchment of colonial rule.

4) Your contribution at this conference is a floral design to pay homage to our national instrument – the steelpan – what prompted you to do this?

Response: A lot of traditional festivals globally incorporate vibrant floral displays to mark seasonal or religious festivals - eg Morocco's Rose Festival in May, Japan's Cherry Blossom's in Spring, France's Jasmin's festival in August etc or in India at the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage, Hindus wear

flower garlands and then throw them into the Ganges as an offering. We can argue that our own carnival has a religious angle to it - in that it precedes Ash Wednesday - but our carnival has no floral association or floral interest.

Steelpan is not only our musical gift to the world but symbolises the very essence of our nation and Carnival is our largest festival. I wanted to use my passion and skill to pay tribute to the central role this instrument not only in Carnival Arts but also on the huge impact it has had on our culture and identity around the world. My own daughter, Asia who helped with the floral installation and attended the conference has her own steelpan and participated in her school Panorama competition in 2025.

By creating a floral homage to the steelpan, I also wanted to spark a broader conversation about how we can express national pride and memory through alternative artistic forms. Flowers are powerful symbols - they evoke beauty, celebration, and ephemerality, much like the fleeting brilliance of a Carnival performance. Placing the steelpan at the centre of a floral design allows us to reimagine it not only as an auditory experience but as a visual and emotional symbol of resilience, innovation, and unity. It's an invitation to the public to see our cultural icons with fresh eyes and to consider how traditional and natural elements can be woven into our modern expressions of identity.

5) Can carnival be partly reframed through Botanical History?

Response: Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival is rooted in the legacy of enslavement and plantation life and one of extreme pain and suffering. The French and Colonial Empire saw carnival as highly celebratory and the dressed up enormously and decorating their homes with flowers. By contrast, our carnival was an opportunity to use satire to protest against the slave master - dressing up and costumes reflected this mood while

our song came in the form of Calypso that expressed this revolution.

However, time has moved on and I think as we go around the world competing in botanical exhibitions, we should not only focus on the aesthetics but be mindful of the historical connections between botanical gardens and the empire which therefore underscores the need to integrate these narratives into Carnival, reframing it as a celebration of cultural resilience and a reflection of global political and economic forces as well.

In this sense, Carnival can be partly reframed through botanical history by recognising how plants, flowers, and gardens were used as tools of both dominance and resistance. Enslaved Africans and indentured labourers brought with them deep botanical knowledge—of healing plants, ritual flora, and agricultural traditions—that helped them survive and sustain community under oppressive regimes. Integrating these botanical legacies into Carnival—through costumes, storytelling, and design—allows us to honour those ancestral relationships with nature that were sidelined by colonial narratives. It also opens a new avenue for artistic innovation, using floral symbolism not just for beauty, but as a canvas for cultural memory, environmental awareness, and historical reckoning.

6) What is your hope for the future and what you have done for this conference today?

Response: As I said before, I feel it's time for us to integrate our narratives of botanical history with its pivotal role in the empire and that emergence of our distinctive culture and music. At the Chelsea Flower Show in London, which I previously touched on, steelbands have performed annually at exhibits representing various Caribbean islands such as Grenada and Barbados. However, I am yet to see a steelband featured at the Trinidad and Tobago botanical exhibition in overseas competitions.

But my vision is more than just a musical accessory - I want to see us fully integrate the history of Pan into our floral exhibitions so that the music take a central role as the background to a visual display and is therefore fully integrated.

For this conference, I've created a floral installation that centres the steelpan not just as an instrument, but as a symbol of transformation—born out of oppression, yet producing music that resonates with joy, resistance, and cultural pride.

I visited the Pan workshop of Jimi Phillip in Chaguanas prior to the conference - one of Trinidad and Tobago's revered master tuners and virtuosos and was offered not merely a glimpse, but an immersion into the

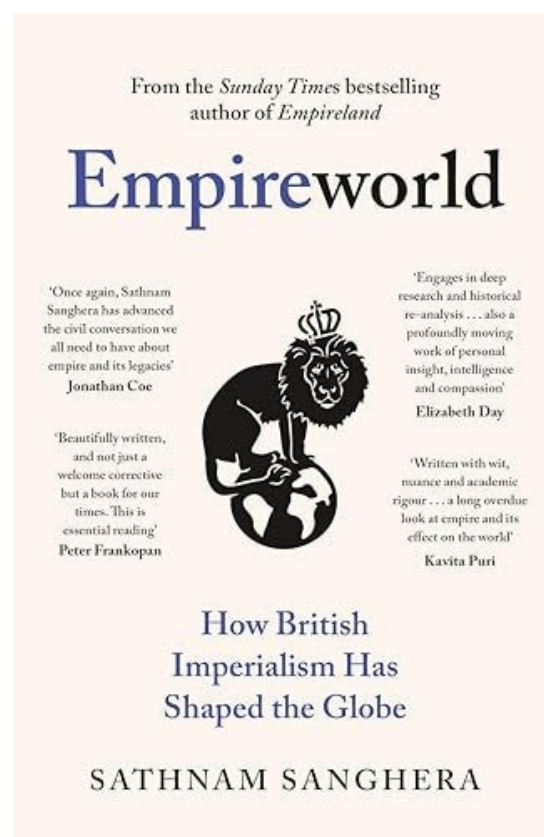


Figure 5. Sanghera, S. (2021). *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*. Viking - an inspirational reference source.

sacred process of steelpan creation. This was not a typical encounter with craft; it was a confrontation with a living tradition, an artisanal ritual that bridges the realms of music, labour, and cultural memory. In the dim heat of the forge, surrounded by

discarded oil drums and an arsenal of tools and a plethora of tuning hammers, I observed with reverent attention as Jimi brought forth sound from silence, coaxing resonant tone from raw metal. The transformation was almost alchemical: what began as the dull clang of a lifeless barrel gradually unfolded - stroke by stroke, tap by tap - into a symphony of notes, refined through the tuning ear and intuition of a master. The process was both physically punishing but spiritually elevating - a delicate balance of force and finesse. It was, in many ways, a metaphor for the history of the steelpan itself: an instrument born out of the detritus of industrialisation, forged in the crucible of colonial hardship, and elevated into a globally celebrated artform.

As I left the workshop, my mind was filled with questions—not only about how I might honour the visual form of the steelpan in my artistic practice, but how I might begin to capture the deeper metaphysical layers of what I had witnessed. How does one render, through flower and form, the resonance of a note forged through struggle? How might a floral arrangement carry within it the echo of the hammer's rhythm, the quiet patience of the tuner, the breath of resistance and innovation that has always defined Pan? I began to reflect not only on the physical structure of the instrument, but on the spiritual and historical weight it carries—the mysticism of creation, the ancestral memory of sound, and the artistry of turning discarded matter into beauty. It is this layered complexity that I now strive to evoke in my work: not merely a tribute to an object, but an offering to a cultural phenomenon that continues to shape our national identity in ways that are both profound and poetic.

My arrangement therefore incorporates native and colonial-era plants, echoing the dual legacy of exploitation and adaptation. My hope is that this piece acts as a prototype for future exhibitions where music, botany, and history are woven

together into a multisensory narrative. This is about reclaiming space - not only in gardens and galleries, but in the stories of the evolution we tell about its long journey on the global stage.

7) As discussions emerged around the floral installation, particularly its historical themes and contemporary relevance, several important questions were raised by younger participants and audiences. One recurring question was: **Could you recommend an accessible reference source that help explain the historical and political ideas reflected in this floral installation, steelpan and carnival, especially for younger readers or those new to these topics?**

Response: This question is vital, as it signals a growing interest among younger generations in understanding the deeper connections between culture, colonial history, and botanical knowledge. It also underscores the need for inclusive,



Figure 6. Megan (left) assists her sister, Melissa Lee Foon, owner of *Garden Gennii*, in setting up her stall. (Credit: NEWSDAY- Vidya Thurab)

engaging resources that bridge artistic expression and critical historical thinking. The historical and economic connections between botanical gardens and imperial expansion are undeniable. The British journalist and author Sathnam Sanghera, in his influential book *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain* (2021), explains how the British Empire still affects the way we live today, even if we don't always realise it. [He simplifies his arguments for children in his follow up

book Sanghera, S. (2023). *Stolen History: The Truth About the British Empire and How It Shaped Us*. Hodder Children's Books]. He shows that many institutions we think of as simply educational or beautiful such as botanical gardens, museums, or even the school curriculum – (see eg the Mighty Sparrow ‘Dan is the Man’ - <https://genius.com/Mighty-sparrow-dan-is-the-man-lyrics>) were once tools used by Britain to control other parts of the world. For example, places such as Kew Gardens in London were not just peaceful gardens for plant lovers; they played an active role in Britain’s empire by collecting and sending useful plants, seeds, and crops to colonies across the world. Plants, such as sugar cane, cocoa, cotton, and rubber, were often grown on plantations using the labour of enslaved or exploited indentured people, and they made huge profits for Britain. This movement of plants and knowledge is known as *botanical imperialism*. Sanghera helps us understand that the impact of empire is not just something from

the past but is all around us today, shaping what we celebrate, how we see the world, and what we learn. For young people in Trinidad and Tobago and across the Caribbean, understanding this history is especially important. It helps explain why certain aspects of our culture such as Carnival, which grew out of resistance to slavery, haven’t traditionally included things like floral displays, even though flowers are a big part of celebrations in other cultures as note above. It also invites us to reimagine Carnival in new ways, by connecting it with histories of science, plants, and resistance that were shaped by empire. Sanghera’s work encourages young people to ask critical questions: Who benefits from the things we’re taught? Whose stories are left out? And how can we use our creativity - including through lens such as floral art and music, to tell fuller, more powerful stories about who we are and where we come from?

Acknowledgement:

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the staff of the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago for their kind invitation to participate in the 11th International Conference on Steelpan/ Carnival Arts, held between 6th – 8th March 2025 at NAPA, Port of Spain, Trinidad. It was an honour to contribute not only as a horticultural practitioner and artist, but also as a speaker and author within the conference programme.

I am especially indebted to Ms. Allison Noriega Clarke for her unwavering support, and to Prof. Haroun Shah, whose insights - shared both before and after the Chelsea Flower Show - were instrumental in shaping my thinking. Their guidance significantly influenced the development of my ideas on the broader thematic concerns and historical dimensions of botanical geopolitics, which ultimately informed the questions posed to me and the presentation of this current paper in the *International Journal of Carnival Arts*

References

Historical Context: Botanical Gardens and Empire

1. Drayton, R. (2000). *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World*. Yale University Press.
2. Brockway, L. H. (1979). *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens*. Academic Press.
3. Johnson, V. (2015). *The Empire of Nature: How Natural History Made Knowledge of Empire*. University of Chicago Press.
4. Endersby, J. (2007). *Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science*. University of Chicago Press.
5. Sivasundaram, S. (2014). *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony*. University of Chicago Press. [Sections discussing botanical knowledge and imperial logistics.]
6. Sanghera, S. (2021). *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*. Viking.
7. Sanghera, S. (2023). *Stolen History: The Truth About the British Empire and How It Shaped Us*. Hodder Children's Books.

Economic and Political Role of Palm Oil

8. Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press. [For the palm oil trade and its link to colonial Nigeria.]
9. Martin, S. (1988). *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800–1980*. Cambridge University Press.
10. Lynn, M. (1997). *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press.
11. Hopkins, A. G. (1973). *An Economic History of West Africa*. Longman.

Carnival, Resistance, and Cultural Expression

12. Liverpool, H. (2001). *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1763–1962*. Research Associates School Times Publications.
13. Hill, D. (1993). *Calypso Callaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad*. University Press of Florida.
14. Riggio, M. C. (Ed.). (2004). *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*. Routledge.
15. Thomas, D. A. (2011). *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica*. Duke University Press. [Relevant for wider Caribbean post-slavery performance cultures.]

Steelpan and Contemporary Cultural Recognition

16. Dudley, S. (2004). *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*. Oxford University Press.
17. UNESCO. (2023). *World Steelpan Day Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly*. <https://www.unesco.org>
18. Stuempfle, S. (1995). *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Art, Botany, and Exhibitions (e.g., Chelsea Flower Show)

19. Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). (n.d.). *History of the Chelsea Flower Show*. <https://www.rhs.org.uk>
20. TNA (The National Archives UK). (n.d.). *Kew Gardens and Empire: Colonial Botany and Its Legacy*. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

Floral Culture in Festivals and Religion

21. Bhardwaj, S. M. (1983). "Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography." *Geographical Review*, 73(3), 328–343.
22. Turner, V. (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine Publishing. [For theories on festival and ritual.]

NEWSDAY

https://newsday.co.tt/2020/12/01/plant-sale/attachment/11714461/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

https://newsday.co.tt/2023/06/08/how-trinidad-and-tobagos-gold-medal-at-chelsea-flower-show-can-boost-economy/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Posters Presentations at 11th Steelpan/Carnival Arts Conference:
***Carnival Interconnections and Reconnections; Cultural Cadence: Steelpan,
 Calypso and Mas and the Global Diaspora Connection***

Background

Posters are a significant and valued form of presentation at all conferences today and, in many cases, are the preferred method for showcasing research, particularly when the goal is broad engagement and informal discussion. Unlike oral presentations, which are often restricted to brief time slots with limited opportunities for interaction, posters offer a more flexible and personal format. Traditionally, posters presented at conferences were printed on large placards, approximately one meter square, and mounted on boards provided by conference organisers. These sessions are scheduled into the conference programme, allowing participants to view posters, engage directly with authors, and discuss findings in an open, conversational setting. With the rise of digital platforms, posters are now increasingly viewed electronically, extending their availability and impact beyond the immediate timeframe of the conference. For example, at the NAPA meeting, eight posters were showcased at 15-minute intervals on a large screen and remained accessible throughout the event, with opportunities for attendees to leave comments even post-conference. This digital transformation enhances visibility, inclusivity, and participation across time zones. Poster presentations are now seen as more than just research summaries, they are evolving into curated, immersive experiences, analogous to artistic installations such as the floral works of Melissa Lee Foon, blending science and history with creativity. Ultimately, posters provide a valuable platform for knowledge exchange, especially for early-career researchers seeking feedback, recognition, and meaningful interaction.

Abstract & Poster 1:

**STEPPING INTO A CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL WITH A STEELBAND:
 AN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD'S JOURNEY**

Max Smith

Dunraven School,
 Streatham,
 London, SW16 2QB

The first notes of the steelband filled the air, vibrant and alive, as though the music itself danced along with the crowd. At eleven, I was stepping into my first Caribbean Carnival, an explosion of colour, rhythm, and life that felt like stepping into a dream. The pulse of the drums, the sparkle of the costumes, and the energy of the people made my heart race with eagerness. I found myself, with my Mum, in the midst of Oxford's Cowley Road Carnival with Nostalgia Steelband on 1st September 2024, just before the start of my school term.

The steelband was the heartbeat of the celebration and was put to the front of the parade with over 20 other costume bands behind us. I was given a range of percussion instruments to try my hand at and interchanged with my Mum between a tambourine and maracas. The unique

sound of steelpan - sharp yet warm, rhythmic yet melodic - drew me into the crowds as the band moved along Cowley Road. The performers played with a joy that radiated through their music, their hands moving skilfully over the steel pans. At times, I stood transfixed, hoping that one day, I too will be a member of this band and experience carnival as a player also. The music wasn't just something I heard; it was something I felt, a rhythm that seemed to connect everyone in the crowd, from the youngest children to the elders swaying to its beat.

As the band played, the procession came alive. Masqueraders from other bands danced by, their costumes glowing in this bright sunny day. Feathers, sequins, and bright fabrics moved in time with the music, creating a living tapestry of culture and celebration. I couldn't help but wonder what stories these costumes told - stories of ancestors, triumphs, pain and sorrow in traditions that passed down through generations that came from the roots of my heritage in Guyana and the Caribbean.

At first, I was timid and unsure of what to do but drawn by the energy, I joined the crowd and my feet started to move, following the rhythm of the steel pans. Soon, I was swept up in the dance, laughing and moving with others, listening to the band and playing along with my maracas or tambourine. It was a moment of pure freedom, where the music erased all boundaries and made everyone part of something bigger.

It was a long day, leaving London at dawn and travelling in Nostalgia's minibus to Oxford in time for the carnival parade at 12.30 pm which ended at 2 pm and then a stage performance that ended at 4pm. By the time the sun began to set, the carnival had imprinted itself on me and I was ready to return to London, reaching home at 10pm. The steelband's rhythm seemed to stay with me, like a heartbeat that wouldn't fade. For an eleven-year-old, stepping into a Caribbean Carnival with a steelband wasn't just an experience - it was a journey into the soul of my culture. It was a celebration of life, connection, and joy, and it was a moment I knew I would carry with me forever.

STEPPING INTO A CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL WITH A STEELBAND: AN ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD'S JOURNEY

Max Smith
Dunraven School,
Streatham,
London, SW16 2QB

First Caribbean Carnival Experience

I attended my first Caribbean Carnival - age eleven and had no idea what to expect.



I was woken up at dawn by my mum and drove into the area where the Notting Hill Carnival (NHC) took place a week ago (25-26th August 2024).

Enagement with Music

Arriving in Oxford, I helped off load the steelpans from the minibus and started testing a few percussion instruments like the tambourine (left photo) and maracas (right) sharing this experience with my mum and a friend I met there





Vibrant Atmosphere

The event was filled with vibrant music, colourful costumes, and energetic crowds, creating a lively and dream-like celebration as the bands paraded along Cowley Road - the carnival route - on a beautiful sunny day. In the photo (below), I soon found myself at the front row of the band, totally unaware of how involved I was. Crowds at the side of the road applauded us while we played.



Cultural Connection and Lasting Impact

Growing up in England and without ever participating in a carnival, this, my first experience of a carnival left a lasting impression on me, one I was eager to share with my friends. The vibrant energy, the colourful parade, and the infectious rhythm of the steelband awakened something deep within me - a strong connection to my Caribbean heritage. It was more than just a celebration, it was a living experience of the stories, traditions, and values passed down to me over the years, especially from my family and friends from Guyana.

The beat of the steelpan echoed the tales of resilience, joy, and community that I'd heard as a child, bringing them to life in the most vivid way. Dancing through the streets, surrounded by people united in cultural pride, I felt an overwhelming sense of belonging. The rhythm of the steelband is now etched in my memory, symbolising not just the joy of that day but the deep cultural roots that continue to shape who I am. I will now look forward to the many carnivals we are lucky to have in England every summer and hope that one day I will be part of a steelband playing one of these instruments that are such an important part of my heritage.

Abstract & Poster 2:**The International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA):
Our Narratives, Our Way**Laila M.N. Shah^{1, 2} and Haroun N. Shah^{1, 3, 4}¹Nostalgia Steelband, 2a Maxilla Walk, London W10 6SW²Department of Physical & Theoretical Chemistry, University of Oxford, Oxford, OX1 3QZ³Natural Sciences, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT and⁴School of Biomedical Sciences, University of West London W5 5RF

The *International Journal of Carnival Arts* (IJCA) is a relatively new, peer-reviewed, open-access academic journal launched in May 2020, following the global COVID-19 pandemic. Its inaugural volume marked a significant step in providing a platform for rigorous scholarship in carnival and steelpan arts. The journal originated from a series of international conferences on steelpan and carnival arts, which commenced in London in 2006. These conferences transitioned to new locations, moving to Oxford in 2022, then overseas to Ghana in 2023, and now to its homeland in Trinidad in March 2025.

The creation of IJCA was largely driven by the dissatisfaction among students and researchers with the brevity of conference abstracts - typically limited to 300 - 400 words - which provided minimal insight into the depth and scope of the presented research. In contrast, IJCA offers an expansive platform for detailed scholarship, with papers ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 words. These articles include accompanying figures, tables, graphic illustrations, and bibliographies, serving as comprehensive records and archival materials that can be cited, critiqued, and debated. Another critical impetus for establishing IJCA was the proliferation of poorly researched publications, often derived from postgraduate theses in the diaspora. Many of these works, frequently based on small, non-representative interview samples (e.g., limited to family members), contained significant inaccuracies about carnival arts. Recognising the need to correct such misinformation, IJCA established a policy to publish *errata* submitted by readers, thereby promoting scholarly consensus on contentious topics. One prominent example of such scholarly debates concerns the northern-centric narrative surrounding the development of the steelpan. This perspective has been contested by notable figures such as Cyril Khamai, a 93-year-old steelpan pioneer, tuner, and globally acclaimed pannist. In his seminal paper, "*Cyril Khamai's Commentary on the Early History of Steelpan in One Corner of Trinidad (San Fernando)*" (IJCA, Vol. 2, pp. 23–52), Khamai challenges prevailing narratives. He recounts his meeting with Ellie Mannette in 1950 during the formation of TASPO and describes the advanced techniques displayed by his band, "Melody Makers," at their Panyard on Coffee Street, San Fernando. Khamai's influence is evident in the selection of Theo Stephens, a former member of Khamai's earlier band, "Free French," as a TASPO representative. Khamai offers a detailed historical account of the period, documenting the existence of approximately 80 steelbands operating in San Fernando and South Trinidad during this active period of development. Such first-hand narratives, recorded while contributors retain strong memory and cognitive faculties, underscore IJCA's vital role in preserving and advancing the scholarship of carnival arts.

IJCA also addresses barriers to scholarly participation, particularly for grassroots contributors who may lack the financial means to cover publication costs. To ensure accessibility, the journal operates entirely free of charge and relies on the dedicated efforts of volunteers. This commitment to inclusivity and scholarly rigor has positioned IJCA as an essential resource for the documentation and study of carnival arts, serving both as an archive and a platform for critical discourse.

AUTHORS

Laila M.A. Shah and Haroun N. Shah
Nostalgia Steelband, 2a Maxilla, London W10 6SW
Department of Physical & Theoretical Chemistry,
University of Oxford, Oxford, OX1 3QZ
National Sciences, Middlesex University, NW4 4BT &
School of Biomedical Sciences, University of West
London W5 5RF

The International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA): Our Narratives, Our Way

Launch and Purpose

The International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA) was launched in May 2020 as a peer-reviewed, open-access journal to provide a platform for rigorous scholarship in carnival and steelpan arts.



**Journal of
Carnival Arts**

Volume 2
December 2020

Vol. 1 opened with an Editorial based on a booklet published by 'Will' Austin Simmonds in 1959 on the early history of Pan along with seven diverse papers

Origin of the Conferences - IJCA emerged from a series of international conferences on steelpan and carnival arts that began in London in 2006, later moving to Oxford (2022), Ghana (2023), and Trinidad (2025).

Papers emanating from the 10th conference in Ghana were published in two volumes of IJCA as Vol. 8A (February 2024, 135 pages) and Volume 8B (June 2024, 172 pages).

Correcting Misinformation

- Much of the history of carnival arts remains oral and therefore subject to bias. IJCA attempts to address some of these inaccuracies by subjecting submitted manuscripts to robust peer review while allowing for errata submissions to refine scholarly discourse.

A paper by the late Nestor Sullivan, former Vice President, Pan Trinbago and manager of Pamperi Steel Orchestra titled 'Cultural Pluralism in the Steelband Movement of Trinidad and Tobago: East Indian Involvement in Steelband' pp. 43-62, reignited a long-running discussion on the diverse input into the development of this remarkable instrument

Expanded Research Platform

The journal was also created to expand short conference abstracts into full detailed research articles (5,000-10,000 words) with figures, tables, and bibliographies for archival and scholarly reference. James McGrath first presented part of his PhD research on the songs of Lennon-McCartney that uncovered the work of Lord Woodbine (Harold Adolphus Phillips) at our 5th steelpan conference in 2014 (see link: <https://www.steelpanconference.com/5th-conference>) and was published as a full paper in Vol. 2 pp 53-70.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

IJCA ensures free access to scholars and grassroots contributors by operating without publication fees and relying on volunteer efforts.

Carnival arts came to an abrupt end during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notting Hill Carnival returned to the streets of London on 28th August 2022 after a two-year hiatus. During this period, some steelband activities took place and were reported in IJCA and by the BBC. See eg. Shah et al (2021) 'CarniVAX' - Steelpan and Calypso at London Hospitals to Boost Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) Vaccinations.' International Journal of Carnival Arts. Vol. 3, 27-45

Historical Contributions

The journal features first-hand narratives, such as steelpan pioneer Cyril Khamai's challenge to the northern-centric historical narratives, documenting early steelband development in Trinidad. This paper titled simply 'Cyril Khamai's Commentary on the Early History of Steelpan in One Corner of Trinidad (San Fernando)' [IJCA 2, pp 23-52] was a ground-breaking piece of work that recalled a tremendous amount of data that was "lost". Its modus operandi is used as a study module at several universities.

Volume 8B
JUNE 2024
ISSN 2752-342X

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
CARNIVAL
ARTS**



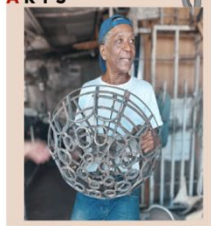
Volume 9
DECEMBER 2024
ISSN 2752-342X

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
CARNIVAL
ARTS**



Volume 7
AUGUST 2023
ISSN 2752-342X

**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
CARNIVAL
ARTS**



Abstract & Poster 3:

STEELPAN AS A BEACON OF HOPE
IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID PANDEMIC

Cyril Khamai
Lynford Road
London W9 3LX
and
Nostalgia Steelband
2a Maxilla Walk, London, W10 6SW

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, impacting health, social connection, mental well-being, and cultural expressions. Amidst these hardships, the steelpan - a symbol of resilience and creativity - emerged as a beacon of hope. During the height of the pandemic, I faced profound isolation and adversity as a senior citizen (DoB:13/12/1931) living alone in a basement flat in the heart of the Notting Hill Carnival area, a vibrant Caribbean community known for its mutual support. Accustomed to the communal warmth of my neighbourhood, the sudden isolation was stark and daunting. Although members of Nostalgia Steelband kindly delivered meals to my door, I avoided inviting anyone inside for

fear of infection. For three months, I remained indoors, grappling with trepidation and uncertainty.

This changed on a sunny Saturday, May 9, 2020, when Laila Shah arrived with five steelpan and assembled a small ensemble outside my door. As the band played, I was initially so startled that I questioned my senses. Opening the door, I saw a *dudup* (a bass pan) with a stick ready for use. Tentatively, I reached out and began to participate from the doorway. Gradually, the music drew me out to the threshold. Neighbours gathered, enlivening the subdued lockdown atmosphere. Within 40 minutes, I mustered the courage to step fully outside and play a double tenor steelpan set up for me. We performed several of my favourite melodies, leaving me energised and more audacious. When the band departed, I ventured on my first walk in three months, cautiously navigating the street and block with support from the surrounding fences. The following day marked an even greater milestone: I left home without hesitation and resumed using public transport for errands. The sound of Pan restored my courage, helping me overcome fear and reclaim a sense of normality. This musical intervention was not just personally transformative but highlighted the power of Pan and culture during crises.

This newfound confidence allowed me to join other projects using Pan to combat the pandemic's challenges. Alongside calypsonian Alexander D Great, our small ensemble performed for members of the carnival community facing hardship. The most ambitious project used Pan to boost vaccine uptake from 30% to over 90% in the BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) community - a success reported by BBC National News and Caribbean media.

Steelpan as a Beacon of Hope in the Midst of the COVID Pandemic

Cyril Khumel
Nostalgia Steelband, 2a Maxilla Walk, London, W10 6SW

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, impacting health, social connection, mental well-being, and cultural expressions. Amidst these hardships, the steelpan - a symbol of resilience and creativity - emerged as a beacon of hope.

During the height of the pandemic, I faced profound isolation and adversity as a senior citizen (DoB:13/12/1937), living alone in a basement flat in the heart of the Notting Hill Carnival area. Accustomed to the communal warmth of my neighbourhood, the sudden isolation was stark and daunting. Although members of Nostalgia Steelband kindly delivered meals to my door, I avoided inviting anyone inside for fear of infection. For three months, I remained indoors, grappling with trepidation and uncertainty.

On 9th May 2020, on a bright and sunny day, a steelpan ensemble outside my door, led by Laila Shah, drew me out of my prolonged isolation and encouraged me to participate in steelpan music, starting from outside my doorstep.



Steelpan as a Turning Point

Figures (Above): L to R - time in minutes. Playing percussion inside my home (15), then rhythm, using a dudup - at first very tentative (30), then gaining more confidence, I played a double tenor outside (60). I left my home for the first time that day.

(Below, L to R). Playing at a community member's home the following day with members of Nostalgia and other residents.

Inspired by the above experience, I joined several of Nostalgia Steelband's projects to address challenges posed by the pandemic, including community performances for those in hardship. Photo above: Performing at the entrance to St Charles Hospital - located in the heart of Notting Hill Carnival - all needing to wear mask and be socially distanced.



Vaccine Uptake Initiative: A steelpan-driven campaign significantly boosted COVID-19 vaccine uptake in the BAME community from 30% to over 90%, an achievement highlighted by BBC National News and Caribbean media.





Figures (L to R). The performance at St Charles Hospital quickly spread to other hospitals and requests were received to perform at other hospitals. The one above was at Northwick Park Hospital, outside London and on one of the coldest days of the year (-10°C) but was highly successful. I performed using a scratcher. Far right, sitting, I was interviewed by the BBC reporter Ayisha Bush - which later appeared on BBC national news and on several Caribbean television channels.





These performances allowed me to regain my confidence during the COVID pandemic, leaving me energised and more audacious. I was able to leave my home again and took my first walk in three months after the first gig outside my door above. By the following day, I left home without hesitation and resumed using public transport for errands. The sound of Pan restored my courage, helping me overcome fear and reclaim a sense of normality. This musical intervention was not just personally transformative but highlighted the power of Pan and our culture during crises.



Abstract & Poster 4:

BROOKLYN J'OUVERT – PAN, RHYTHM, AND OLE MAS

Ray Allen,

author: *Jump Up! Caribbean Carnival Music in New York City*
(Oxford University Press, 2019)

Brooklyn is home to the largest West Indian community outside the Caribbean. Since 1971 the borough has hosted to a daytime Labor Day Carnival parade that annually draws close to two million participants to Eastern Parkway. Based on the Trinidad model, Brooklyn steelbands originally provided the music for fancy mas bands to wine and chip down the Parkway. By the 1990s, however, the acoustic pans had become overwhelmed by high-volume sound trucks and DJs and eventually vanished from the daytime parade.

In response, an early morning J'Ouvert celebration was added to the festivities with a unique “Pan and Rhythm only” policy that banned deejays and sound trucks from the event. Organized in the mid-1990s by pan man Earl King and community activist Yvette Rennie under the banner of J'Ouvert City International, the event grew into a massive predawn celebration, attracting nearly 100,000 steelband and ole mas enthusiasts. Organizer Earl King recalled:

Brooklyn J'Ouvert puts Pan in the spotlight. You see, Pan got lost on the Parkway when the big sound systems and deejays took over. So we were determined to do something to preserve Pan, to let our children know where Carnival really comes from. So in J'Ouvert it's just Pan and mas bands, no deejays invited. Now people are remembering the joy you can get by taking your time and playing mas with a steel band, just inching up the road, pushing Pan. We're trying to revive that whole thing.

In addition to steelbands, Brooklyn J'Ouvert features all rhythm sections of conga, boom, and dudup drums, along with timbales and iron brake drums. Pulsing rhythms became the heart of J'Ouvert by evoking historical memory, as Anthony Reece of the Kutter's Rhythm Band explained:

Our ancestors were drummers—we came out of that African Skin drumming. And during J'Ouvert we get into this certain zone, and you listen to the rhythm that we call “jumbie.” It's like a spiritual groove that makes everything synch together. It takes us back to the roots of it all.

Unlike the intricate, brightly colored costumes of beads and feathers that dominate daytime Carnival in Trinidad and Brooklyn, J'Ouvert attire tends toward the simple and homemade. In keeping with the J'Ouvert traditions of humor and the macabre, individuals play mud mas, dress in old rags, smear paint on their faces and bodies, and cover themselves with white powder and flour. Some may masquerade as devils, witches, ghosts, and goblins, while traditional ole mas characters like the mischievous Midnight Robber, the curvaceous Dane Lorraine, and the oil soaked Jab Jab occasionally appear.

In recent years Brooklyn Carnival and J'Ouvert have struggled with creeping gentrification that has made it difficult to find spaces for mas camps and steel pan yards. Sensationalist media accounts of exaggerated violence has plagued the event, and in 2017 the J'Ouvert start time was moved from 4:00am to 6:00am to the dismay of many participants. Despite these troubles the J'Ouvert spirit continues to thrive in Brooklyn. With its magical blend of creative and transgressive play, the celebration reminds West Indians in the diaspora about who they are,

where they come from, and where they might be going. The late Martin Douglas, co-founder of the US Steelband Association, put it this way:

Here in America J'Ouvert is a nostalgic feeling, like being back home in Trinidad when J'Ouvert started at five in the morning. You could hear the cocks crowing and the steelbands coming, and then the sun starts coming up and everyone is having a good time. So now this is where you are going to enjoy, this is your Carnival, right here in Brooklyn.

BROOKLYN J'OUVERT – PAN, RHYTHM, AND OLE MAS

Ray Allen

author: Jump Up! Caribbean Carnival Music in New York City
(Oxford University Press, 2919, All photos; Ray Allen)

Brooklyn's West Indian Community and Labor Day Parade

Brooklyn hosts the largest West Indian community outside the Caribbean and has held a Labor Day Carnival parade since 1971, attracting nearly two million participants.

Pan Liberty, Brooklyn J' Ouvert 2019



Pan Liberty, Brooklyn , J' Ouvert 2019

J'Ouvert's Cultural and Historical Significance

J'Ouvert incorporates traditional drumming rhythms rooted in African heritage, along with unique costumes and playful masquerading, maintaining historical and spiritual connections for the diaspora.



Pan Harmony
Brooklyn J'Ouvert 2022



Kutter's Rhythm Band
Preparing for Brooklyn J'Ouvert 2023

Photo by Ray Allen

Creation of J'Ouvert to Preserve Steel Pan Music

The traditional steel pan music was over-shadowed by loud sound systems in the daytime parade, leading to the introduction of the Brooklyn J'Ouvert in the mid-1990s, which exclusively features steelbands and rhythm sections.



Black Bat Devil Brooklyn J'Ouvert 2023



Challenges and Resilience of J'Ouvert

Gentrification, media exaggerations of violence, and a later start time have impacted J'Ouvert, but the celebration remains a powerful symbol of cultural identity and nostalgia for West Indians in Brooklyn

Photo (left).The unique sound of the two-note 'Dudup' in a rhythm band - Brooklyn J'Ouvert 2023

165

Abstract & Poster 5:**BEYOND BORDERS: GHANA AND TRINIDAD IN
DIALOGUE THROUGH CARNIVAL****Barbara Nyarko**

Mas Africa

Notting Hill Carnival and Winneba Carnival

Ghana

The 10th International Conference of Carnival & Masquerade Arts: *‘Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation and Decolonisation’* took place at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) between 4-8th December 2023. While the conference was in progress a 5 -day workshop on Mas was conducted and led by Clary Salandy and Carl Gabriel from London and myself, who also participates in Notting Hill Carnival but grew in the city of Winneba and still participate in the city’s annual carnival. The workshop produced some master pieces on Mas while much of the traditional costumes were produce my Mas Band, ‘Mas Africa’. When the conference concluded on 8th December to everybody surprise, the city of Winneba erupted into a carnival on 9th December firstly with a sensational J’Ouvert in the morning to 11am and a joyous five-hour street parade through Winneba from 3pm, terminating with a concert at 8pm.

The events was reported in International Journal of Carnival Arts (IJCA) Vol. 8A pp 1-5 (Shah, L.M.N.) as follows: “The culmination of the 5-day masquerade workshop, running parallel to the conference and led by experts Clary Salandy (Mahogany Carnival Design), the UK’s carnival master technician Carl Gabriel and Barbara Nyarko (Mas Africa), added a vibrant local touch to the conference.” Without doubt the workshop's creations adorned the streets and set Winneba ablaze in a celebration of cultural triumph. The procession of Ghanaian children exhibited remarkable nimbleness and artistic flair, particularly evident in their adept foot movements during the parade, a spectacle reminiscent of classical dancers. The endurance displayed by these young participants, sustaining their energetic performance for approximately six hours, left observers in awe. Their agility and lightness on their feet, coupled with the resonant accompaniment of a pulsating brass band, created a hypnotising atmosphere. The parade, traversing from one university campus (North) to another (Central) over the course of the day/evening, evoked a sense of bliss akin to the vibrant carnival scenes of 1960s Trinidad, where entire towns embraced the streets, and families joined the revelry alongside steelbands.

This presentation will demonstrate comparable Masquerade Figures with Trinidad and Tobago’s carnival and show how the routes of the latter may have been derived.

- **Conference and Workshop:** The 10th International Conference of Carnival & Masquerade Arts, themed *‘Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation, and Decolonisation’*, was held at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) from 4 – 8th December 2023, alongside a 5-day Mas workshop led by Clary Salandy, Carl Gabriel, and Barbara Nyarko.

**BEYOND BORDERS:
GHANA AND TRINIDAD
IN
DIALOGUE THROUGH
CARNIVAL**

Barbara Nyarko, Mas
Africa
Notting Hill Carnival and
Winneba Carnival, Ghana



Conference and Workshop

The 10th International Conference of Carnival & Masquerade Arts, themed 'Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation, and Decolonisation', was held at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) from 4-8 December 2023, alongside a 5-day Mas workshop facilitated by Mas Africa. UEW's Hypers gym facility at the Department of Physical Education being converted into a Mas Workshop led by artists, Clary Salandy, Carl Gabriel and Barbara Nyarko.

**Workshop Outcomes - Spontaneous
Carnival Celebration**

The workshop produced impressive Mas pieces, with traditional costumes crafted by the Mas Band 'Mas Africa', contributing significantly to the cultural vibrancy of the event. See a cross-section of the band on the left

Following the conference, Winneba unexpectedly erupted into a city-wide carnival on 9th December 2023, featuring a morning J'Ouvert and a lively five-hour street parade, culminating in a concert. The parade showcased the artistic agility and endurance of Ghanaian children, whose dynamic performances, accompanied by a brass band, captivated audiences and mirrored the energy of the early Trinidadian carnivals.

Cultural Connections and Outcomes

Photos (left and bottom) of some of the towering figures at the carnival parade that dominated the event throughout the entire five hours. Left shows the closing of the carnival parade and conference at 10 pm on 9th December, 2023. The cake was made and presented by workshop tutor and Chair of 'Mas Africa', Barbara Nyarko – and is seen on stage with calypsonian Winston D' Alberto who did the closing songs. The cake bore the green leaflet of the conference and the national flag of Trinidad and Tobago.

The event highlighted similarities between Ghanaian Masquerade (Mas) figures and those of Trinidad and Tobago's carnival, emphasising its historical connections and shared cultural roots in carnival traditions. Furthermore, traditional costumes crafted by the Mas Band 'Mas Africa', contributed significantly to the cultural vibrancy of the event. For example, it resulted in Mas Africa and the Ebuebuge CG Unity Project, in which UK artists Clary Salandy and Carl Gabriel were honoured by the community, with Clary receiving the name "Abena Ebuebuge" - "Abena" denoting a female born on Tuesday and Carl as "Ebuebuge" meaning "Open, Open," symbolising new opportunities. This recognition led to the establishment of the Ebuebuge CG Unity Project, dedicated to creating large-scale costumes and structures. Plans are underway for five artists to travel to the UK in preparation for the Adinkra 2025 Carnival and other major Ghanaian festivals. The group's work is now a permanent feature at the annual Winneba Fancy Dress Festival, showcased 1st January annually. Additionally, Mas Africa conducts workshops in schools and communities to inspire young creatives.

Poster Abstract 6:

THE FIVE AESTHETICS OF CARNIVAL

Kela Francis

PhD., ¹University of Trinidad and Tobago
Tamana In-Tech Park, Wallerfield, ARIMA 301776,
Trinidad and Tobago— (868) 642 8888 u.tt.edu.tt

In the introduction to Caribbean Festival Arts: Every bit of Difference, Nunley, Bettelheim, and Bridges (1989) cite Peter Minshall's Callaloo as a metaphor that "embodies the pan-Caribbean aesthetic, with its mixture of media and themes, and defines the flavour of the Caribbean character: a blend of ethnicities, religions, and political orientations intrinsic to the colour themes, music, and spirit of festival arts" (32). Key here is the idea that carnival is "pan-Caribbean" and multifaceted. Indeed, for many, carnival serves a deeper purpose than saying farewell to the flesh or temporarily inverting the status quo. It is an enriching, multicultural, multi-ethnic, expression of how we see the world. As Nunley, Bettelheim, and Bridges (1989) assert "Festivals are no longer regarded as mere rites of reversal, when class struggles and

repression can find a public forum, nor as politically neutral expressions” (35). Nettleford (1989) in the conclusion of the same text expands on this assertion, stating that “Many students of Caribbean society past and present see the festival as a temporary respite from a world of drudgery, hardship, and toil. But it is also a positive expression of people’s world-views and sense of self” (196). This is reflected in the five aesthetic principles seen in carnival, often overlapping, sometimes clashing, but rarely discussed simultaneously. This poster outlines the five aesthetics—*assemblage*, *transformation*, *hierarchy*, *fierceness*, and *kinetics*—as described by Nunley, Bettelheim, and Bridges (1989), Abrams (1963), as well as observed during various festival iterations. It further discusses how understanding these aesthetics help us understand the deeper functions of the festival. Combined, such knowledge should encourage conscious and deliberate engagement in Carnival as decolonial expression.

Poster Abstract 7:

THE 10th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CARNIVAL AND MASQUERADE ARTS (ICCMA)

Dr. H Patten¹, Dr. Latipher Appiah-Agyei², Lynda Rosenior-Patten³

¹H Patten Dance Theatre
Koromanti Arts, UK/Jamaica
DEPA (Decolonising Education for Peace in Africa)
The Open University, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies,
Milton Keynes, England

²Department of Theatre Arts
University of Education, Winneba,
Ghana

³Maestro⁷ Creative Management Consultancy, London
Stuart Hall Foundation Fellow,
University of Sussex, Falmer,
Brighton, England

The 10th International Conference of Carnival and Masquerade Arts (ICCMA) The ICCMA under the theme: ‘Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation, and Decolonization’, was a unique gathering of artists, academics, cultural practitioners and experts in the field of Carnival and Masquerade Arts. The three-day conference and five-day mask-making workshop ran consecutively from December 4th – 8th 2023 and formed the core of a collaborative research project between Ghana’s University of Education in Winneba (UEW), and the UK’s Open University (OU), Decolonising Education for Peace in Africa (DEPA) project. As stated in the IJCA special Vol 8A, ‘... [t]he Conference Organising Team consisted of Dr. H Patten, Lynda Rosenior-Patten, Haroun N. Shah and Laila M.N. Shah from the UK and UEW’s ... Dr. Latipher Appiah-Agyei, Prof. Emmanuel Obed Acquah, Prof.

Osuyeni Essel and Dr. Johnson Edu ... complemented by [carnival and masquerade practitioners and producers] Clary Salandy, Carl Gabriel and Barbara Nyarko' (Shah and Shah, 2024, p.2). The ICCMA therefore attracted artists and participants from Africa, the Caribbean, North and South America, Canada, UK, Europe and Australia as delegates. An additional day partnering with the annual Winneba Carnival run by The Adinkra Festival, facilitated a dynamic and spectacular carnival; a 'street theatre' parade and extravaganza allowing the embodiment of carnival and masquerade practice with academic theory. This DEPA Ghana Carnival Poster presentation provides a snapshot of key outputs from this ground-breaking research project. Full details of DEPA's research outputs and open educational resources (OERs) from the three phases of the project over the past four years, DEPA across 14 African countries are freely accessible on its website: <https://www.decolonising-education-for-peace-africa.org/ghana>

Poster Abstract 8:

DANCING KNOWLEDGE: THE BODY AS A SITE OF UNDERSTANDING

Latipher Amma Osei Appiah-Adjei

Department of Theatre Arts

University of Education, Winneba

laosei@uew.edu.gh

Kirk Acquah

University of Education, Winneba

Ghana

kwekubentum0@gmail.com

This presentation explores how the body functions as a repository of cultural knowledge through two specific Ghanaian dance forms: Adowa and Agbadza. While these dances contain layers of cultural meaning beyond their outward performance, they are often reduced to mere entertainment, overlooking their role in transmitting cultural wisdom and community knowledge. Drawing on phenomenological inquiry as the primary research methodology, this study investigates how specific movements within these dance forms encode and transmit cultural knowledge through lived experiences and embodied meanings. Data collection involves interviews with dance practitioners, participant observation, and movement analysis workshops, supplemented by video-documented dance sessions and reflective journaling. These are analysed through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to unveil themes about bodily knowledge transmission. Through oral presentations and demonstrations, we will engage the audience in participatory movement exercises within selected movements of Adowa and Agbadza to illustrate how the body encodes knowledge. By encouraging participants to reflect on their bodily experiences, this presentation aims to promote dialogue on how dance communicates meaning beyond verbal language, culminating in a wholesome understanding of the Carnival theme.

Poster Abstract 9:

**SHARING NARRATIVES: IN PRAISE OF THE BLACK FEMALE SOUND
SYSTEM OPERATOR, TAKING SOCA AND CALYPSO TO NEW
INTERNATIONAL SPACES**

Lynda Rosenior-Patten

Maestro⁷ Creative Management Consultancy, London

Stuart Hall Foundation Fellow,

University of Sussex, Falmer,

Brighton BN1 9RH

England

Nzinga Soundz is one of the UK's longest-running Black female led sound systems¹⁴ that has made significant contributions to the traditionally male dominated Sound System culture. The sound embodies political, social and cultural "disruption" that after 45+ years still provides a unique opportunity to present diverse music including Soca and Calypso to new audiences in international spaces in Europe and Africa.

Nzinga Soundz was shaped by political/cultural/social drivers of 1980s – 1990s, the "Thatcher" years; characterised by high unemployment, austerity, strikes, police brutality/harassment, debilitating legislation¹⁵, "uprisings", racially motivated incidents¹⁶ and the re-emergence of the "Sus" Law¹⁷. Importantly, the Black community and activist movement of the day that focused on challenging racism and social injustice was inextricably linked to international events¹⁸ and struggles happening in Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere including the Palestinian conflict in the Middle East.

This paper traces the sound's beginnings, Pan Africanist influences/influencers and how the sound evolved¹⁹. It crucially explores their innovative approach to engaging international audiences in new spaces (e.g. London, Ghana, France, Gambia, Sierra Leone) and why/where/how/to whom they play music, whether live or virtual.

Using an insider/practitioner lens this paper unpacks key themes:

- 1) appeal/impact of Caribbean soca and calypso internationally
- 2) dynamics that interplay in a traditional male-dominated space /"othering" of female DJs
- 3) gender roles/female presence in the sound system space

¹⁴ Sound Systems – a mobile music set up with turntables, mixer, amplifier and speaker boxes that traditionally is operated by a crew of DJs, MCs, "Box Men", Engineers who have a following and play at paid events/dances, originated in Jamaica

¹⁵ the British Nationality Act 1981

¹⁶ Demonstrations or locally termed "uprisings" in Brixton, Handsworth and Toxteth in response to police brutality. Racially motivated incidents included the New Cross Fire (1981), the Cherry Groce shooting (1985) and numerous (disproportionate) deaths of black men in police custody

¹⁷ Sus Law – originated in 1824 Vagrancy Act that enabled police to stop and search certain individuals "suspected" of frequenting or loitering in a public place with intent to commit an arrestable offence

¹⁸ Key events included the Grenada Invasion (1983), the Ethiopian Famine (mid 1980s), and the fight against the racist Apartheid regime in South Africa, which reached a crossroads in 1990 with the release of Mandela

¹⁹ Examples of early community events that Nzinga Soundz played included events hosted by Black Action for the Liberation of Southern Africa (BALSA) African Liberation Day (ALD) and Kwaanza Celebrations

Poster Abstract 10:**TAKING STEELPANS FROM TRINIDAD & TOBAGO TO THE WORLD;
TUNING AND INNOVATION****Jimi Phillip**Jimi Phillip Pan Institute,
Endeavour Road,
Chaguanas,
Trinidad

+1(868) 665-6293

panman10jp@yahoo.ca

My engagement with Pan Music began at the age of six, and this passion has defined my life's work. I have dedicated myself to the art of Pan through teaching, performing, and tuning bespoke Pans throughout Trinidad and Tobago, as well as within its diaspora communities, particularly in Canada. My involvement with these conferences commenced when I was invited to present at the 5th International Steelpan Conference, University of East London (10-12th October 2014). The meeting titled *"The Profound Influence of Caribbean Carnival Art Forms (steelpan, calypso, and masquerade) within the Diaspora and in the Wider World,"* examined the cultural significance and global impact of these art forms. Following the meeting, I spent an extended period in London as a guest of the Nostalgia Steelband, collaborating with the band and other Pan Tuners in the region. In 2018, I co-hosted Nostalgia Steelband's visit to Trinidad, where they performed alongside Southern All Stars Steel Orchestra in San Fernando. As a master tuner, my contributions to the steel pan community has focused on refining and enhancing the instrument's sound and innovations to enhance performance. Tuning the steel pan requires a combination of technical expertise and an acute ear for tonal accuracy, resonance, and harmony. This intricate process involves precise adjustments to each note, employing techniques such as hammering and shaping the steel to achieve optimal pitch. Far from a purely mechanical task, tuning is an artisanal craft developed through years of practice, intuitive understanding, and a profound connection to the music. In recognition of my contributions to tuning and innovation in Pan music, I received the Gold Award from NIHERST in 2013 for the *"Science of Pan,"* acknowledging both the technical and artistic dimensions of steel pan music on a national and global scale.

Over the years, the steelpan has emerged as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, playing a central role in major cultural events such as Carnival and Panorama, both domestically and within the diaspora. As a tuner, my work is critical to the success of these events, as the quality and precision of a steelband's performance are deeply dependent on meticulous tuning. This task becomes particularly challenging in international contexts, where the facilities and resources readily available in Trinidad and Tobago are often lacking, necessitating resourcefulness and improvisation. My presentation will explore these challenges, providing illustrative examples from my experiences working in Canada, both in urban settings and remote locations.