

Both Pan Trinbago and calypsonians had a say in NCC decisions

BACCHANAL AND THUNDER



JENNIFER JOHNSON...looking for improvements...

By VALENTINO SINGH

CARNIVAL 1988 is still in its budding stages, and already chaos and bacchanal are highlighting the occasion.

Pan Trinbago, which incidentally has obtained its wishes to stage activities at the savannah, continues to thunder all sorts of suggestions and objections through its President Arnim Smith, while the Calypsonians Association — a group which has suddenly resurfaced in revitalised unity — shouts opinions and views in a manner which is unusual in the calypso front.

Essentially both bodies have divorced themselves from any decisions made by the National Carnival Commission, Smith claiming that his group was never represented in any decision making process, and Composer — President of the Calypso Association, saying that they too were not consulted, nor did they support the changes which the NCC made for the Monarch competition.

Anyone with a minute interest in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago would know that steelband, calypso, and mas are the three most important products

in the assembly line for carnival.

And it would therefore be madness, or even ludicrous, for any group thinking of improving this "the greatest show on earth" to arrive at decisions without consulting these three inputs.

One remembers the two day symposium on carnival, which was held earlier this year, to thrash out the problems which surround this important period in the life of Trinbagonians.

Written Submissions

Culture Minister Jennifer Johnson was obviously looking for improvements when she summoned a multitude of the country's talented artistes, including calypsonians, bandleaders, steelbandsmen and other related members of the carnival fraternity to the National Stadium for that gathering.

It was there that the machinery was put in motion for what was to be a new dimension in carnival. Emotionalism electrified the atmosphere, as contributor after contributor gave ideas, made recommendations and generally shared their views, compounding the theory that the time was right for our culture to straddle the pathway to elevation.

Coming out of that gathering an Advisory Work group comprising the following was formed — Amin Mohammed, Lester Wilkinson, Ormond Hackshaw, Owen Serrette, Peter Minshall, Steve Muradali, Roy Boyke, Hollis Liverpool, Pat Bishop and Frank Dolly.

This group studied all the written submissions from the symposium as well as the transcripts and later presented its report to the Minister.

Out of this report, proposals for the restructuring and management of carnival were made, including the formation of the National Carnival Commission, a body which took over the responsibilities of the CDC.

Later an Advisory Council (CAC) was introduced with provisions for the representation of organisations and public agencies usually associated with the conduct of various aspects of carnival.

Although Arnim Smith claims that Pan Trinbago was not represented on any decision making groups, his association's secretary, Patrick Hamilton, was appointed to this committee, while Composer's statement should also be re-examined as Brian Honoure (Calypsonians Association) was also included.

First Meeting

In fact, the very first meeting of the CAC was chaired by Pan Trinbago's Public Relations Officer Selwyn Tarradath.

Honoure was present at the meeting of this committee on August 18 which recommended that a special calypso show with ten — 12 contestants be held after the traditional semi-finals, to select three singers for the Dimanche Gras show.

And on October 1, three of the representatives from the Calypsonian Association (Enrique Bishop, Toussaint

Singh and Joseph Charles) were at the CAC's meeting which agreed to 36 semi-finalists at two shows, in North and South over a two day period, a semi-finals with 12 competitors and a four member finalists.

Quite frankly, as a calypso lover, I fail to see the wisdom in the Calypsonians asking for the same format as last year. The NCC's proposals of four shows, instead of the two would obviously have encouraged more for the calypsonian himself.

It would have meant that 36 bards would collect two sets of \$1000 appearance fee in the quarter-finals and 12 would get a further chance to take home another \$1500 in the semis.

It was more exposure for the calypsonians, and such the chance should have been grabbed. As it stands only 26 would be in the semis, collecting just a \$1,000 appearance fee and eight for the finals. Who loses?

The fact is that whatever decisions the NCC made was never overnight conclusions, they were the result of months of serious hard work, consultation with the various inputs, and of course, motivated by much from the two day symposium in March.

Pre-carnival Shows

I seem to remember that the consensus then was that the savannah was not a suitable place for carnival, primarily because of the annual four million dollars which goes into preparing the place for the activities.

That symposium resulted in a recommendation from the group (which

again included a Pan Trinbago representative — Owen Serrette and a calypsonian — Chalkdust) — that the Dimanche Gras show, Kings and Queens of Carnival, PANORAMA and all other pre-carnival shows be held at the National Stadium.

Elsewhere in this paper, Arnim Smith is given every opportunity to have his say, but he states emphatically that no one has the right to make any proposals to Pan Trinbago — one wonders therefore who gives Pan Trinbago the right to have a say in the other aspects of carnival, if this is his attitude.

As I see it the "noise," notwithstanding a "senior" journalist attempts at pulling up the Minister of Culture for a crime she did not commit, is uncalled for.

There is still much time for discussions. The fact that several of the top calypsonians differ on the staging of the finals at the stadium is ample proof that there must be more dialogue.

Open To Dialogue

The NCC chairman told me last week that his body was open to dialogue with any organisation wanting to share its opinion. "We are interested in the best for carnival and any group wanting to give ideas to better the festival would be welcomed."

Mohammed explained that the decision to stage Dimanche Gras at the Stadium may very well be changed "if that is what will help to improve it."

And no fixed decision has as yet been made. So that in actual fact, it may



SELWYN TARRADATH...chaired first meeting of CAC...

very well be the carnival 1988 is off to a false start — and underserving bacchanal which we can all do without.



COMPOSER
Calypso leader