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CARNIVAL WOMAN: AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN IN STEEL AND CALYPSO IN
ANTIGUA FROM THE 1990s TO PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

Steelman and Calypso developed in Antigua during the mid-1900s. Overtime, these artforms have grown to be accepted by all and act as an outlet for cultural expression. From their inceptions, these artforms have been male dominated and women were discouraged from being involved. I felt that this topic was important as there is very little documentation or mention of the contributions of women and their experiences within the artform. To find out more on the topic, research was conducted at the National Archives of Antigua and Barbuda, there, I was able to find various magazines on calypso atmosphere during the carnival season from the late 1980 to early 2000s. Additionally, Interviews with five female calypsonians within Antigua and Barbuda also aided in developing this research project. Online interviews aided in finding information on women within the steelpan fraternity. Carnival magazines also contained information on the history of steelbands in Antigua.

This paper explores the story of women's contributions to steelpan and calypso in Antigua and Barbuda from the 1990s to present day. Women have been involved and making strides whether by winning competitions or contributing to the development of fraternity in Antigua and Barbuda. Thus, acting as role models for other women to aspire to achieve similar or unique goals.

Keywords: Women, Antigua and Barbuda, Steelpan, Calypso

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INTRODUCTION

“In order to understand the culture of the Caribbean, one must understand the contributions women make to, and their participation in, all aspects of Caribbean life – especially music” (Dikobe 1). Though many women are recognized for their achievements, women around the world have generally been unappreciated and contributions are seldomly recognized. This is no different in Antigua and Barbuda. Women over the years have contributed to the development of culture and in turn, have made a path for other women to also become involved in the art form of calypso and steelpan.

This twin-island state of Antigua and Barbuda is known for its 365 beaches and the world’s sweetest pineapple, is located in the northeast of the Leeward Island archipelago. Each year as another summer heats up, the local Carnival season begins to ignite. Travellers from around the world and the local populous engage in the long feting season before the 12 Days of Carnival commence full of excitement and activities at the end of July and early August. These 12 days contain various shows stemming from junior and regular Calypso and Soca Monarchs, pageant, Panorama, Jouvert, and the Parade of Costumes.

The history of calypso (often referred to as kaiso) is fairly complex. Calypso music is said to have its roots in the West African tradition brought by slaves to the Caribbean (Dikobe 7). It was used as a form of communication between the slaves in their native tongues and as a form of relief. Over time, calypso has developed into what is referred to as a Caribbean folk song. Its lyrics discussed the controversial topic or scandalous person at the time in a satirical, and often vulgar manner (8). Singers of the artform, called calypsonians, would express their or popular opinions through artful and often harsh insults.

Calypso competitions are also held during the Caribana during Easter and the country's Independence celebrations in early November. Caribana is an annual festival held on Antigua's sister isle, Barbuda, that can be considered a mini carnival. The participants of this competition are solely residents of Barbuda. The winner of this competition is then allowed to participate in the Calypso Monarch Competition during the summer.

The steelpan was developed in Trinidad and Tobago by Winston "Spree" Simon. The instrument evolved from Tamboo Bamboo which involved the beating or striking of different sizes of bamboo. Early pans were created from discarded metal cans. By 1939, Simon had developed the first melodic steelpan instrument (Edwards-Warner 12). With the progression of time and access to more materials, the steelpan became a much larger instrument that could hold many more notes as 55-gallon oil drums were now being used. Ellie Mannette, Anthony Williams, and Bertie Marshall were two other steelpan builders who were pivotal in further developing the instruments within the steel orchestra. In the mid-1940s, Steelpan was introduced to Antigua and, since then, has grown to become an integral part of the culture. Steelpan now exists in churches, schools, and even the Antigua Barbuda Defence Force.

This research project aims to explore the contributions of women within the steelpan and calypso fraternities in Antigua and Barbuda. The art forms have been a part of our culture for over 50 years and there is a lack of documentation and recognition of the contributions, experience, and work done by women in these fields.

Rationale

One of the main reasons this topic was chosen is due to the fact that I am a female musician and pannist within the musical arts in Antigua and Barbuda (A&B). Growing up as a young pannist, I seldomly heard the names of women who were also into the art form and made any significance. As I grew older, and eventually attended an all-girls secondary school, I was amazed by the significant amounts of musical talent in the school's steel orchestra and choir. It inspired me to pursue music further and add my name to the list of women who have made their mark in local arts and culture. In turn, I would also be a role model to other women around me who may have been turned away from furthering a career within the arts industry.

The culture of the Caribbean is heavily patriarchal. From politics to the arts to science. Women have made significant contributions to the development of these fields but in many instances are not acknowledged. This project is important because this is no different in Antigua. Calypsonians such as a Short Shirt, Swallow, and King Obstinate are easily mentioned as 'greats' within their fields, but it is very rare to hear the name of a woman such as Queen Ivena or Queen Singing Althea mentioned as a great within the same field. When compared to the region, books and papers have been written on the contributions of women in the arts in Trinidad and Tobago. However, there is a lack of this same information in Antigua. This project aims to attempt to 'level the playing field' and recognize the contributions of those women who have made a pathway for other women within calypso and steelpan. This research project will not only be important to Antigua but can influence ethnomusicologists who may be curious as to the contributions of women within Caribbean music.

This project will also be beneficial to schools and students of all levels. It will act as a document with a compilation of knowledge from various sources that discusses how women

have impacted the calypso and steelpan artform in Antigua and Barbuda. This project will also be a valuable tool to the Ministry of Culture and Education. With their last publication on calypso in Antigua being in 2007, this more recent document will add more in-depth information on calypso, but most specifically, a broader discussion on women's history and experiences in the art.

Thesis Statement

Title:

Carnival Woman: An Exploration of Women in Steel and Calypso in Antigua from the 1990s to Present

Thesis Statement:

The extent of impact and overall contributions made by female musicians in Antigua and their experiences within the calypso and steelpan fraternity are seldomly recognized.

Parameters

This research project will be exploring the contributions and experiences of women in calypso and steelpan from the 1990s to present within Antigua. The perspectives of women in calypso will stem from those who are singers and/or performers that have participated in the Calypso Monarch, Queen of Calypso, or Independence Calypso competitions. The women in steelpan are those who are soloists, or arrangers who would have competed in the National Panorama Competition or the National School Panorama locally.

Objectives

This work is intended to:

- Outline and examine the impact, experiences, and participation of women in calypso.
- Outline and examine the impact, experiences, and participation of women in steelpan.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken for this research project to satisfy its main objectives. This research project aims to gather the experiences of the interviewees about their involvement in the steelpan and calypso fraternities. During the period Dec 2020 to March 2021, five female calypsonians were interviewed in-person, online, or via written interview. One was conducted in person using a list of 12 questions, two were interviewed online using 13 questions and two completed a written interview of 13 questions (See Appendix A).

The individuals interviewed consisted of five female calypsonians who have participated in Calypso competitions either during Antigua's Carnival or Independence celebrations during the 1990 to 2020 period. The sample was chosen from a list of calypsonians listed in the Antigua's Calypso 50th Anniversary Magazine and from recommendations given by the President of the Antigua Barbuda Calypso Association (ABCA) President 2020- 2021, Eugene "Kaseba" Silcott. The sample contained a variety of participants who competed in The Calypso Queen Competition, The Independence Calypso Competition, and the National Calypso Monarch Competition between 1990 to November 2020. Initially, eight local calypsonians were contacted but only 5 responded.

Information on female pannist was taken from interviews conducted by When Steel Talks/Pan on the Net for their commemoration of Women in Steel. Additional information was found at the National Achieves of Antigua and Barbuda from magazines and previous online interviews conducted with the pannists by When Steel Talks (“In Tune with Pan”, “Antigua Carnival Commemorative Magazine”).

Chapter Outline

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief outline on the history of calypso and how women were creatively involved in traditional celebrations before they became marginalized. The chapter will then continue to look at how calypso has evolved in Antigua and how women began to become involved in the art form.

The second chapter will discuss at the experiences of female calypsonians within the fraternity in Antigua. It will look at how they became involved, their experiences and what they believe would be the future of women in calypso.

The final chapter will dissect the history of steelpan in A&B, the causes that may have influence low female involvement in its early stages, and an outline of women currently involved in the steelpan fraternity.

Review of Literature

Within the Caribbean region, the expression of music and, by extent, general culture has been dominated by men (qtd in “What She Go Do” Munro 1). While women may have made early contributions to cultural art forms, such as the chantwells who improvised kalinda songs at stick-fighting ceremonies, their overall presence faded when more current art forms such as calypso and steelpan became more popular. As calypso began growing in popularity in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), women were essentially marginalized as men took centre stage (Dikobe 12). When it came to steelbands within T&T, its violent nature projected an idea that discouraged women’s participation (Helbing iii). This literature review aims to examine works that discuss women and their involvement or lack thereof in the steelpan and calypso artforms.

In the book, *What She Go Do: Women in Afro Trinidadian Music*, Hope Munro explores the roles of women in society, their fight to gain equality, and their use of music to address feminist problems and sexuality. Munro Smith also continues this discussion in her article, “Performing Gender in the Trinidad Calypso.” Similarly, Maude Dikobe’s doctoral thesis, discusses how women’s involvement in calypso has allowed for them to also speak out, from a female perspective, on topics affecting them and in a Trinbagonian society. However, while there was a plethora of books, magazines, and articles on calypso and steelpan in Trinidad and Tobago, written by local scholars and interested ethnomusicologists abroad, there is a lack of similar information in and about A&B.

The Calypso Talk series of magazines were vital in reconstructing the climate of the time and the general reactions of the public to the evolution and changes to the calypso art form. They are a series of articles and lyric sheets from the popular songs of that year’s Calypso Monarch during the carnival celebrations in A&B (O’Marde, “Calypso Talk ‘84”; “Calypso Talk ‘90”;

“Calypso Talk ‘93”; “Calypso Talk ‘94”; “Calypso Talk ‘95”). While there was no mention of any female calypsonians in the 1990 edition, the 1995 edition featured a female calypsonian who had also won her third competition in a row (‘three-peat’) in the Calypso Queen Competition on the front cover. For the 50th Anniversary of Carnival in Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua & Barbuda Calypso Association produced a magazine that looked at calypso in Antigua since the inception of carnival in 1957. Two articles within the magazine speak on the emergence of women and look at the iconic three-peat made by Queen Ivena (Antigua & Barbuda Calypso Association 2007). The Calypso Talk ‘94 featured two articles written by women about women participating in the calypso competition. “Women and Music” and “Women – Carriers of News” highlight the implications of the newly introduced Calypso Queen competition at the time and a woman coming second in the overall Calypso Monarch Competition.

Information on A&B women in steelpan was also limited. Information was mainly found online. Pan on the Net, a web-based steelpan media platform has made the effort to conduct interviews with several women in Antigua and Barbuda, and women from across the world, who are involved in steelpan to garner their perspectives and experiences being women in pan. This was done as a part of their Tribute to Women in Pan initiative. In exploring the National Achieves of A&B, I was able to find mentions of two all-female steel orchestras that were active in the 1950s and 1960s (Antigua Barbuda Commemorative Magazine 2007). However, there is little to no record of their history or why they came to end. Additionally, Leroy “Jughead” Martin’s articles, “The Story of Pan in Antigua” and “Pan Story” gave insight into the early stages of steelband development in Antigua.

Overall, this highlights the uniqueness of this topic in relation to Antigua and Barbuda. While there are some documented achievements by local women, there is no current or up-to-

date record of histories, experiences, or impact on the local calypso art form. The same can also be said about women in steelpan in Antigua. There are women involved in various positions within steelpan whether they be drillers, arrangers, or part of the executive committees but very little information can be found on them.

CHAPTER ONE

*Women across the Caribbean, I'm calling on you to take the stand.
Scrutinize the young men that you meet, to see if they are real or counterfeit.
Put them through a rigid litmus test, take your own time to raise your dress.
It is time we stand up to men and fight for a woman's right.
Change the woman's plight..."*

– “*Woman's Plight*” – *Singing Althea*

Female singers and performers have always been a part of the Afro-Caribbean culture but seemed to have disappeared at the beginning of the 20th Century (Munro, “What She Go Do” 35). According to Debbie Jacobs, a journalist for the Trinidad Express, near the end of the 1800s, chantwells or chantuelles, many of whom were women, “improvised verses to frighten their band's foes and raise the fighting spirits of their own band” during kalinda (stick-fighting) celebrations (qtd. in Dikobe 10). Accompanying them, were drummers, and dancers who usually were mostly women. They flaunted their talents and even spoke about their sexual skills and liberation. When kalinda was eventually banned, chantwells no longer had an avenue to share their craft. They began to move their performances to “tents” or concert areas where they used their lyrical improvisational techniques to speak about popular events and political figures (10). With time, this new musical genre grew in popularity, and women became marginalized in an art form that they were before the heads of.

Unlike Trinidad, Calypso in Antigua is said to have developed from its predecessor, benna. “Benna derives from a West African word for “song-dance” which is slaves brought to these parts” (Samuel 26). According to Samuel, evidence suggests that similar styles have been formed in other islands but have developed differently (26). Reflecting on the topics sung in calypso today, similarities can be made to topics that were sung in the early forms of benna; the topics were made of “the bawdy, the scandalous, the cruel and occasionally the humorous” (26).

Like Trinidad, sex was a popular topic of discussion and was often referred to as ‘wild songs;’ this is mainly due to the heavy sexual and dance content of the music. Early Benna singers and, later on, calypsonians, often named their songs after women. While a few benna songs are sung today (adapted and considered Antiguan folk) the actual sound is lost in time, lyrics have been added or removed, there has been no recordings and lack of written information (including music notation) to give an accurate history or reproduction on benna’s extensive impact on Antiguan calypso today.

The first Carnival Calypso competition in A&B was held in 1957. A calypsonian who went by the name, “Styler” won that first competition (Antigua Barbuda Calypso Association 28). However, in the 1920s, an artist named John “Quarko” Quarkoo is deemed to be Antigua’s earliest benna artist and calypsonian (4). He was considered the ‘town crier’ and wrote his ‘editorials in song’ (6). Quarko wrote on many controversial topics and was persecuted for it. In one instance he faced imprisonment for a song he wrote on the daughter of a ‘notable’ member of society. Quarko’s passing is said to have coincided with another decline in the calypso artform until the emergence of the Penny Concerts in the 1950s (5). In these concerts, a rendition of any popular Trinidad calypso was common and many of Antigua’s famous male calypsonians began there. Calypso Monarch competitions have been held each year up to 2019 where the impact of the global pandemic halted Antigua’s carnival celebrations. Since its inception, calypso has been a male-dominated art form. It took almost fifty years from the competition’s inception for a woman to win the competition (8, 28).

Women have been a part of calypso in Antigua for several years before their increase in participation in the 1990s. When mentioning early female calypsonians, it is easy to mention names such as Lady Falcon, Queen Ivena, and Althea. However, there were female calypsonians

such as, 'Madame Bolero' and 'Bottle' who sang in the 1950s but usually at the calypso tents (7). Calypso Gail and Joyce were also two female calypsonians who also participated in calypso tents; yet their participation was only dated around the late 1970s and they had fairly short calypso careers. Around the early 1980s, calypsonian, Andria "Soca Sandra" Walters began competition in the Calypso competitions alongside another female calypsonian, Val.

Despite an increase in female calypso participation, the growth was slow in comparison to the rapid increase in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago. According to an article written by David Spencer and quoted in the Antigua Barbuda Calypso Association Magazine, there are several factors that either hinder women's participation or could explain the slow growth in female involvement., male calypsonians played a role in the culture of resistance and speaking out (qtd. in Antigua Barbuda Calypso Association 7). Calypsonians such as King Short Shirt, Obstinate, Smarty Jr and others, used their platform to speak about social issues and against whatever corruption they have observed within the government. Being the calypsonians that made it to the big stage, their songs were more often heard. In the song "Power & Authority" sung by Short Shirt, he speaks about the effects of exploitation by those in higher positions of power. His second reason stated that there was no serious women's movement in Antigua (7). There was a severe lack of women in political positions and there still is today. While there has been an increase of women in the political arena, they are still within the minority. With the lack of a major mobilization by women, there was little drive for more women to be involved in social and political matters. This may also be affected by the idea that a woman's place was to be at home and that it would be unbecoming for them to be involved in the controversial nature of calypso. His final reason was that there was an absence of women in secular music overall; therefore, a lack of women in calypso would be understood (7).

As the participation of women increased, the decision was made by the then Carnival Development Committee to host a King and Queen of Calypso Competitions along with the regular Calypso Monarch Competition. It was decided that the top five winners from the Calypso King and the Calypso Queen competition would progress to the Calypso Monarch competition to compete against each other for the ultimate crown. This was a significant move made by the committee. Women were able to compete against their peers, outside of the ‘big names in the game.’ The first Calypso Queen competition was held in 1992. However, unlike the final calypso monarch where two songs are usually performed, participants only had to sing one (Lee Browne 17). While this change did impact the status of the competition, the competition was said to be tenacious. Michelle “Lady Falcon” Oscar was victorious at the end of the competition, winning with her famous song, “Apple.” This up-tempo calypso told the story of a woman enjoying the carnival celebrations but is being ‘troubled’ by a man who wants to dance with her. Despite her repeated rejections, he persists, and she resorts to telling him that she would call her husband if he does not leave her alone.

That 1992 Calypso Queen competition changed the view of women and their participation in calypso. After winning the women's competition, Lady Falcon then entered the Calypso Monarch competition, competing on the big stage with her male peers and even her influencer, Sir McLean “Short Shirt” Emmanuel. At the end of the night, Lady Falcon had beaten the reigning champion, Zakari, and came second right behind King Short Shirt. This was a very notable breakthrough as women had not participated in the Calypso Monarch competition in several years. By coming second in the competition, the question of the time was no longer “if a woman could win the coveted crown – but when” (Lee Browne 17). The first year of the Calypso Queen Competition had six participants, it increased to ten in its second year, then 13 by the

third year of the competition. With the numbers almost being doubled the second year and thus becoming a more serious competition, calypsonians were able to sing two calypsos each. This made the transition from the Queen Competition to the Calypso Monarch competition more bearable as there was no longer the need to rush a secondary song for that competition (17).

The 1990s sparked the rise in female calypsonians who were willing to participate in calypso tents and the Calypso Monarch competition. The creation of the Queen of Calypso competition aided in further increasing the level of interest that women had in being on stage and singing about topics that they felt needed to be addressed or they was brave to sing about. Women were able to show that they were not only capable of competing against themselves but also with the 'greats' of the time.

CHAPTER TWO

*When they say that we all about moods and we are emotional,
 But that kinda talk don't include every woman at all.
 Many prime ministers, I could check, and global Heads of States,
 Innovators and world architects, women are heavy weight.
 Still we are wife and mother, and nurse in your hospital.
 Woman today is something special, Woman today is something special.*

- "Something Special" – Singing Althea

With this project exploring the experiences and contributions made by women in the area of calypso, it was important that I interviewed women who have participated in the various competitions over the years. Interviews were conducted with four women who have been a part of the calypso fraternity for many years and one newcomer. Initially, there was an attempt to get in contact with eight calypsonians but there was difficulty with scheduling or lack of communication. However, the women interviewed gave great insight into their experiences throughout and what they see for the future of women's involvement in calypso in the future.

Michelle Oscar-Augustine, more commonly known by her sobriquet Lady Falcon, was one of the earliest participants in the Queen of Calypso Competitions starting in 1992. However, Falcon's entrance into calypso was not as a singer, but as a writer for the Junior Calypso competition. Just shy of her 18th birthday, Falcon had written a calypso that spoke about the political climate of Antigua and Barbuda at the time from the perspective of a child; it was to be sung by a young calypsonian in the Junior Calypso Competition, but the mother of the child was concerned about the public backlash of singing that song and was no longer interested in allowing their child to sing it. With no other person interested, one of her colleagues suggested that she sing the calypso, named "Got to Go," and she adjusted it to suit her. With a blessing from her

parents, her father also being a calypsonian (The Mighty Falcon), she recorded the social commentary for release and proceeded to write a second song for the competition. Her next song, "Apple," was more of an impromptu creation. Garnering inspiration from her role model, King Short Shirt, she knew that she wanted to create a benna-like jumpy calypso. With limited time in the studio, she created the song to the already created backing track and is now one of her most known tunes (Oscar-Augustine).

Samantha Cummings, stage name Sammie-C, was another participant in the Calypso Queen Competitions. She entered the calypso arena at the age of 16 then, bypassed the Junior calypso competition to compete with the senior women. She was inspired by one of her teachers at the secondary school she attended who saw her performance in the school's pageant. In this pageant she sang, "Nobody Wins the War" by the late Singing Sandra of T&T for her talent and was crowned the winner. Being blown away by her voice, the teacher began to train her for the calypso competition and Sammie-C was born (Cummings).

Another calypsonian who was involved in the early Calypso Queen Competitions was Singing Althea (Althea Williams). After winning the 1992 Village Queen Pageant, where she sang "The War Goes On" by Singing Sandra of Trinidad and Tobago, she was encouraged to participate in the calypso arena the following year by close family and friends. In her first year, 1993, Singing Althea managed to capture the crown with her songs, "Groove Me." And "Price to Pay." With this came a hattrick where Singing Althea was able to win the Calypso Queen Competition again in 1994 and 1995 (Williams). This made her the first woman in the any local calypso competition to do so.

Another veteran in the competition was, Andria Walters, or who is more commonly known as Soca Sandra. However, this was not initially the case. Frequently, persons would

confuse her with Singing Sandra from Trinidad because of the name she chose; eventually with the help of a colleague, she decided to change her sobriquet to Soca Sandra to avoid further confusion. Walters began singing calypso at the age of 17 after entering a school competition. Realising her talent, one of her teachers encouraged her to compete and the following year, 1985, she entered the Jr Calypso Competition. At the time she started, it still seemed unusual for women to participate in calypso competitions with there being approximately two other women who had also participated in the various competitions held.

Mandy “Sahara” Hudson is a newcomer to the calypso arena in Antigua and Barbuda. With the spare time she received during the COVID-19 Pandemic she began to host a series of Facebook LIVE events singing various songs that she wrote. While she did begin writing and singing her own composition from the age of 9, she had never participated in the junior or senior calypso competitions (Hudson). However, after the announcement of an Independence Virtual Calypso Competition, Hudson decided it was time to participate and entered the competition with the song, “Antiguan to my Fist.” While she did not win the competition, she has gained much experience and is interested in participating in future calypso competition.

A common element among a few the female calypsonians interviewed was the importance of school programmes in influencing their participation in calypso. With there being a limited number of women participating in major calypso competitions, school programmes offered a smaller audience for these women to test their mettle before gracing the carnival stage. Teachers who identified their talents were able to act as mentors. These women were then able to hone their skills and compete in the more mainstream calypso competition.

When it comes to expectations and performance, there are common experiences held by the different women. In the article, “Women – Carriers of News,” Browne outlines that persons

did not seem to pay attention to the women's performance (Lee Browne 20). There was very little discussion of details nor a line-by-line dissection and many were relegated to 'that's a nice song' in comparison to the praise received by male calypsonians (Lee Browne). "Female [calypsonians] have to come twice as hard in every aspect of calypso, from lyrics to music, down to the performance" (Williams).

Overall, the women agreed with the separation of the Calypso King and Calypso Queen competitions that were held from 1992, with the queen competition lasting until 2006. It allowed for healthy yet fierce competition among the female calypsonians at the time. As the years progressed the competition continued to grow as more women began showing interest in being a part of the calypso artform. This competition gave female calypsonian the exposure that many would not have gotten into their attempts to make it to the big stage and overall "created a balance for both male and female representation" (Cummings, Williams). Lady Falcon won the first iteration of the competition followed by Singing Althea who has been able to achieve a 'hat-trick' by winning the competition three years in a row from 1993 to 1995 (Antigua Barbuda Calypso Association 11). She also won the final competition in 2006. Other notable winners of the Calypso Queen Monarch were Sonia 'Singing Sonia' Wilkins in 1996 and 1997, Gloria 'Gee Bee' Benjamin in 1998, and Vanessa "De Empress" Shipley in 1999 and 2000 (See Appendix B, Fig 5).

In the interviews, a question was posed on the prospects of there being more women participating in the calypso competition in the future. There was general agreement among the responses. While the senior Calypso competition has men within the majority, it is the complete opposite when looking at the Junior Calypso Competition. Singing Althea notes that, with the juniors being female dominated, there is no doubt that the trend will spill over into the senior

competitions (Williams). Cummings noted that with the continuance of the Jr. Calypso and Soca Training Workshop, it would give younger persons who are interested in participating, an avenue to build their creativity. Not only will it benefit young girls but will help to boost the competition across the board.

CHAPTER THREE

We want de woman on de bass.

We want de woman on de bass.

We want de woman on de bass.

She beatin'

– “Woman on the Bass” – Scrunter

The introduction of steelpan to Antigua dates back to 1945 when Antiguan working on boats, which stopped in Trinidad, brought the artform back to Antigua (Edwards-Warner 12). An Antiguan working in the police force in T&T, Alexander “Alec” Roberts, brought home information on how the various pans looked and how to build them (12). Similar to the progression of the pan in T&T, the earliest pans were built from materials that they could find, such as dustbins. With most of the development occurring in the Point area, a village on the outskirts of city and near the shipping ports, some early builders were able to also use oil drums. Builders began to experiment with depth of the pans and various sized notes. Overtime, steelpans of different sizes and functions were developed from the “ping-pong” or tenor which played the melody, the guitar pan which provided harmony with rhythmic variations to the “boom” or bass pans that provided basic rhythms (12).

The first band to be formed in Antigua was the Hellsgate Steel Orchestra, known back then as simply ‘Hellsgate,’ in 1945 from the Point area. Few years later, ‘Red Army’ was founded in Gray’s Farm and ‘Brute Force’ in South Street (12). Steelpan, just like benna, calypso and iron-band music, was not seen as acceptable to the upper-middle class in Antigua. Actions were taken by the government and religious leaders to prevent to grown of the instrument. However, in 1948, the three established bands received support from then Governor Baldwin

who, as a musician, was fascinated by the playing of the steelpan (12). Over the next several years, ‘Sun Valley,’ ‘Rising Sun’ and ‘North Stars’ were three other bands that were established in the island; ‘Golden Gates’ was founded in Barbuda (13). The first Panorama competition was held in 1949, eight years before A&B’s first carnival celebrations. Each band had to play their arrangement of the test piece, “Peanut Vendor.” Hellsgate emerged victorious.

During the next five years, more steelbands would emerge across the island, both in the town and in various villages. However, with this came fighting between bands, both musically and physically to prove which band and village was the best. They used to look at pan players as *badjons*, or ‘bad boys’ and were ridiculed and told nothing good would come from the instrument (Johnson). The instrument was seen as a nuisance. As time progressed, and steelpan became more widely accepted, bands began playing in some churches and Hellsgate even began performing at the Government House and various hotels across the island (Gordon, “Pan Story” 12).

“Steelbands have always been male-dominated” from the original arrangers, tuners, builders, and players for the bands (Helbing 10). In T&T, Helbing explains that while women have become more prominent in steelbands, they do not receive the same level of respect. There are two factors that may have contributed to this. The first reason is violence that was associated with steelpan and steelband’s men, and the other reason lies within sexism and traditional roles of women in Trinidad. To a similar extent, women in A&B faced the same issues. Up to the early 1990s, women were rarely seen within steelbands if ever and were discouraged to do so. While there were some attempts to form all-female steelbands, many of them disappeared within a few years.

The earliest instance recorded of women's involvement in pan in A&B was between 1949 and 1959. A lady referenced as Mrs. Henry, who was considered to be the "Fairy Godmother of Steelbands," would tutor the pannist on music theory and teach them new tunes for them to play at upper-class black-tie functions (Gordon, "Pan Story" 12). Another woman, Bertha Higgins, a qualified musician, was the first person to teach music to the Hellsgate Steel Orchestra in the late 1940s. This shows that despite the idea of steelpan being strictly male artform in its earlier years, women still acted supporting roles in teaching and assisting the bands, but this was due to their previous musical knowledge.

In 1952, the band, 'Pastel Intruders' was the first established all-female steelband in A&B. This was a sign of breaking social barriers especially due to the girls involved were considered 'uptown girls' i.e. being of a so-called 'higher class.' Melonites Steelband, captained by Valerie Harris Pole, started in 1964 in the Point area. This all-girls band was an offspring of Jr Hellsgate, later renamed Harmonites International Orchestra. The band was given many performance opportunities to include performing at a Labour Day Queen Show, Labour Day Parade, and an afternoon picnic at Fort James beach. In 1965, another all-female band called 'Cosmonauts Steel Band' formed as an offspring from Texaco Astronauts Steelband (See Appendix C).

Fast forwarding almost 50 years in the future, women have begun to become core parts of steelbands across Antigua and Barbuda with many of them either playing or being a part of their band's management. With a rise in feminism and the stereotype surrounding the 'bad boys' of pan dwindled, some women have sought to go further within the steelpan fraternity by venturing into becoming proficient players, composers, and arrangers.

“Sisters in Steel – A Tribute to Women in Pan” is an initiative by When Steel Talks (“Sisters in Steel”). This is a series hosted during International Women’s Month that is dedicated to sharing the female perspective on steelpan. Each year they choose different women from across the world to be featured and their interviews accessible for everyone to read. Women from A&B have been featured several times over the last few years to include Zahra Lake, Maurisha Potter, and myself, Nakiya de Freitas.

Zahra Lake (see fig. 7) is a multitalented pannist, soloist, educator and arranger in Antigua and Barbuda. She became involved in pan from a young age where she attended the Le Chateau D’or Music Academy. From there, she continued to hone her skills and became the first captain of the Antigua Girls’ High School Steel Orchestra (Lake). Lake envisioned being a better all-rounded musician and decided to join the Hellsgate Steel Orchestra, playing her first Panorama at the age of 15. Upon completing her secondary education, Lake attended the Midwestern State University (MSU) where she focused on Music Education with a concentration on percussion instruments and was an active member of the MSU Caribbean Pan Ensemble (Lake). She then attended Northern Illinois University where she received her master’s degree in performance. In 2017, Lake became the first woman to arrange for a steelband, Panache Steel Orchestra, in the National Panorama Competition and in the following year became the first female arranger to win the same competition with the same band; they played the song “Good Time” by Tian Winter (see table 1, Appendix D).

Lake’s ‘righthand-woman,’ Maurisha Potter (see fig. 8) is also an upcoming soloist and arranger. Potter also began playing the steelpan at a young age and began playing the instrument at the Christ the King High School. She began participating in Panorama from 2010 when she was a member of the Hellsgate Steel Orchestra. In 2016, she joined the Panache Steel Orchestra

after receiving an invitation from the Captain at the time, Robert Margetson (Potter). In her time at Panache, she has been Secretary and later Vice Captain. She acted as a drummer for the band from 2017 to 2019 assisting Lake with her arrangements. Potter was also given the opportunity to arrange for her alma mater in the Junior Panorama Competitions during the Independence celebrations in 2019.

As women in steelpan, both Lake and Potter, aim to encourage young women in who are thinking about being pan musicians. Both women, attended all girl schools and, as educators, are aware of the talents many girls have when it comes to steelpan. They both agree that the journey is difficult, but practice and dedication will help aspiring women to keep moving forward. When Lake became involved with Panache, she recounts that she was the only female in the band at the time and over time the numbers have increased drastically (Lake).

Over the years, many women have come forward and have become involved in the steelpan fraternity. There are women who are arranging, composing, tutoring, and are soloists in Antigua and Barbuda. There currently is no female pan tuner but as time progresses it would not be a surprise to see a woman with a hammer.

CONCLUSION

Women have made significant strides within the steelpan and calypso artforms despite experiencing marginalization. In Antigua and Barbuda, women within the arts have been able to let their talents express their capabilities, from Lady Falcon's high placement in her first Calypso Monarch competition in 1992 to Queen Ivena achieving the first female crown in 2003. Women in Calypso have grown to be warriors with their words and speak out on whatever topic they please.

A similar growth has been observed within the steel pan community. After years of disparity among steelbands, and between government and religious heads, bands the negative outlook associated with bands decreased. More women have developed an interest in participating in steelpan. Today, the ratio to women and man in a band yard is almost equal. Women, such as Maurisha Potter and Zahra Lake, have aspired and are achieving their goals of being soloists, arrangers, drillers, and other important members their steelbands. Their achievements have inspired others, like me, to pursue careers within the artform.

Time was a significant limitation throughout the research process. With the COVID- 19 pandemic still rampant around the world and the implementation of various protocols, include curfews and restrictions on the number of persons could gather, I had very limited interaction with many senior individuals who could have aided in providing information for my research project. Communication also hindered the research process. While I was able to contact a few primary sources, there were calypsonians and pannist who were difficult to reach. A third limitation affecting my research was that the male perspective of women within steelpan and calypso was never discussed. While the women would have had their various experiences, it

would have been interesting to hear the male view of the growth in female participation in the artforms.

In the future, one can dream that women will continue to make significant strides in the steelpan and calypso world, where the words 'first female' or 'first woman' will no longer be an achievement but there can be equal acceptance and significance in the dedication and work done by women. However, while steelpan and calypso lent for interesting topics to research, there are other areas of carnival where women's contributions are now being made known. One could analyse the composition of the calypso or soca stage bands. From personal observation, many of these bands are mostly males with women as back-up singers. An investigation could be done into women within costume and mas building, as well as within soca and jam bands.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your name and sobriquet?
2. At what age did you enter the calypso arena?
3. What inspired you to get into calypso?
4. Have you won any calypso crowns locally or regionally?
5. Did you take part the calypso queen competitions in the early 90s?
6. How did you feel about the king and queen competitions being separated from 1992 to 2006?
7. Do you think that women in calypso are given enough recognition in Antigua and Barbuda? Regionally?
8. What has your experience been as a woman within calypso artform?
9. What positive and negative experiences have you encountered as a female calypsonian?
10. From your perspective, what changes have you noticed in the calypso arena over the years?
11. What do you think the future of calypso would be like?
12. Do you believe more women will get involved in calypso?
13. Do you believe that there are more expectations placed on female performers whether it be looks, lyrical content/topics etc.?

Interviews were held with several local female calypsonians to include:

- Lady Falcon – Michelle Oscar-Augustine
- Soca Sandra – Sandra – Andria Walters
- Sammy C - Samantha Cummings
- Sahara – Mandy Hudson
- Singing Althea – Althea Williams

Women in Steelpan:

- Zahra Lake – First Female Arranger/ First Female Champion/
- Maurisha Potter - Vice Captain & Driller at Panache Steel Orchestra

APPENDIX B



Fig. 1 Photo of Singing Althea at the 1993 Queen of Calypso Competition. *Calypso Talk '94*.

Wadadli Productions. 1994, p.18.

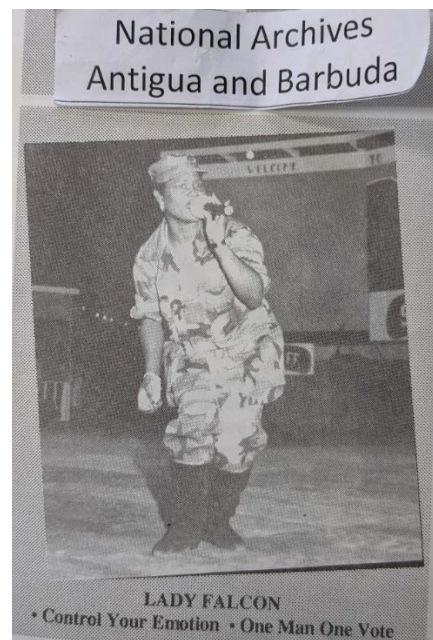


Fig. 2 Photo of Lady Falcon at the 1993 Queen of Calypso Competition. *Calypso Talk '94*.

Wadadli Productions. 1993, p.19.

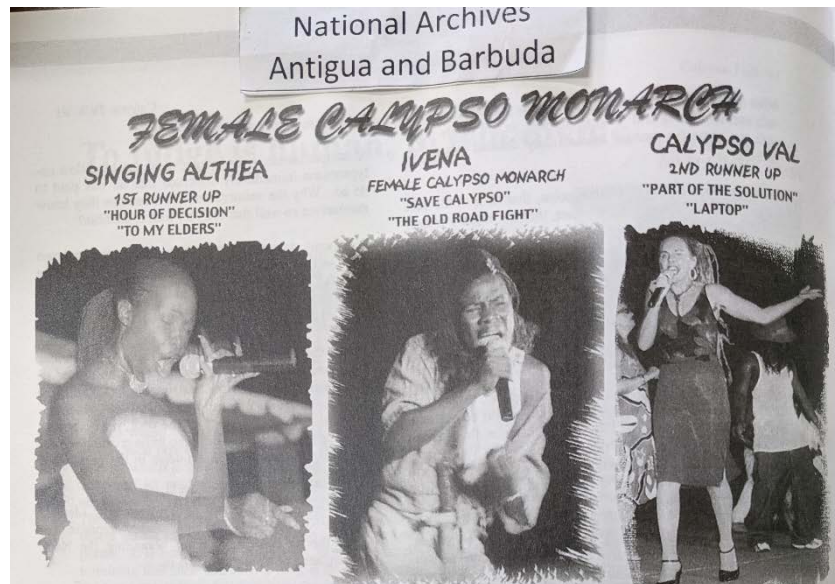


Fig. 3. Winners of the 2001 Female Calypso Monarch Competition. “Female Calypso Monarch.”

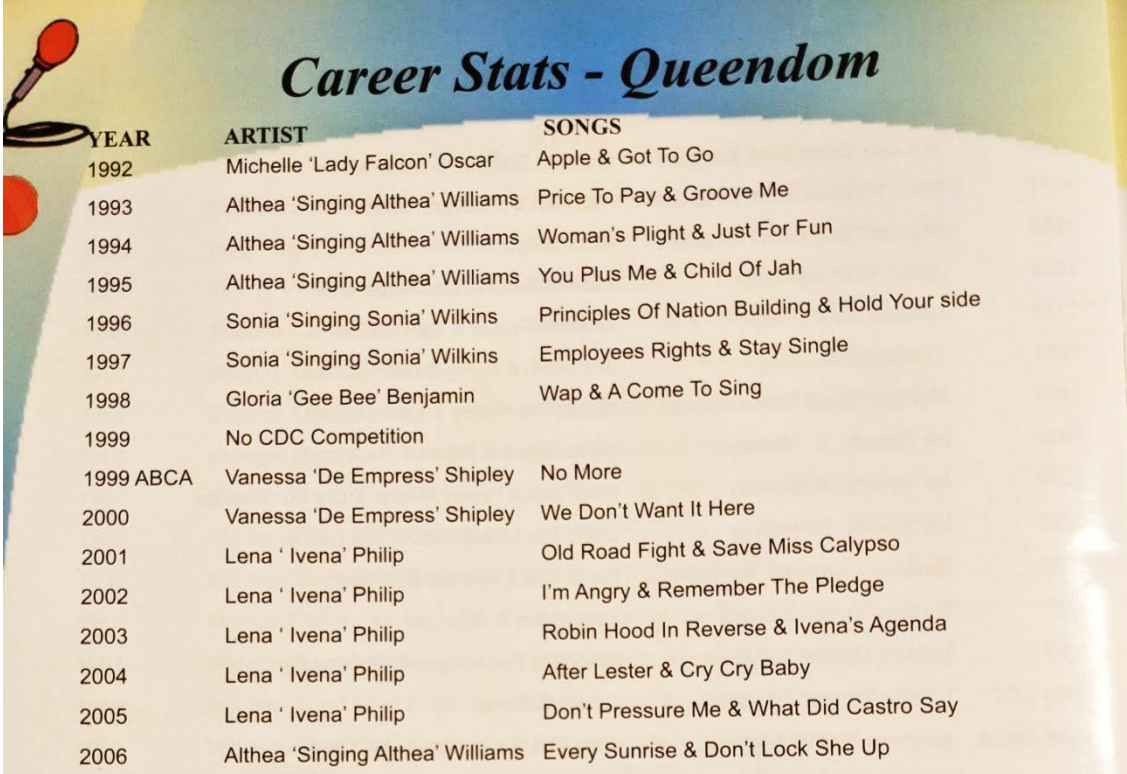
Calypso Talk '01. Kingdome Consultants Inc. 2001, p.12.



Fig. 4. Participants in the Calypso Queen Competition. Antigua & Barbuda Calypso

Association. *Antigua's Calypso Celebrates A Winning Season*. Sun Printing & Publishing.

2007, p.30.



YEAR	ARTIST	SONGS
1992	Michelle 'Lady Falcon' Oscar	Apple & Got To Go
1993	Althea 'Singing Althea' Williams	Price To Pay & Groove Me
1994	Althea 'Singing Althea' Williams	Woman's Plight & Just For Fun
1995	Althea 'Singing Althea' Williams	You Plus Me & Child Of Jah
1996	Sonia 'Singing Sonia' Wilkins	Principles Of Nation Building & Hold Your side
1997	Sonia 'Singing Sonia' Wilkins	Employees Rights & Stay Single
1998	Gloria 'Gee Bee' Benjamin	Wap & A Come To Sing
1999	No CDC Competition	
1999 ABCA	Vanessa 'De Empress' Shipley	No More
2000	Vanessa 'De Empress' Shipley	We Don't Want It Here
2001	Lena 'Ivena' Philip	Old Road Fight & Save Miss Calypso
2002	Lena 'Ivena' Philip	I'm Angry & Remember The Pledge
2003	Lena 'Ivena' Philip	Robin Hood In Reverse & Ivena's Agenda
2004	Lena 'Ivena' Philip	After Lester & Cry Cry Baby
2005	Lena 'Ivena' Philip	Don't Pressure Me & What Did Castro Say
2006	Althea 'Singing Althea' Williams	Every Sunrise & Don't Lock She Up

Fig. 5. Antigua & Barbuda Calypso Association. "Career Stats - Queendom" *Antigua's Calypso*

Celebrates A Winning Season. Sun Printing & Publishing. 2007, p.30.

APPENDIX C



Fig 6. Captains of the early all- female steelbands in Antigua. Harris-Pole, Valerie, editor.

Antigua Carnival Commemorative Magazine 2007. BB&B Advertising, 2007.



Fig. 7. Image of Zahra Lake. When Steel Talks. "First – First." *Pan on the Net*. 2018.

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Fig. 8. Image of Maurisha Potter. Potter, Maurisha. Interview with When Steel Talks. *Pan on the Net*. 2017. <https://www.panonthenet.com/woman/2017/maurisha-potter.htm>

APPENDIX D

Panorama Champions of Antigua and Barbuda from 1990 to Present

Year	Bands	Songs	Arrangers
1990	Hellsgate	Play Mister Pan Man	Allan Michael
1991	Hellsgate	Mr. Manning	Allan Michael
1992	Halcyon	21 Years of Sweat	Victor "Babu" Samuel
1993	Halcyon	Woman Run Things	Victor "Babu" Samuel
1994	Halcyon	Where Will Pan Be in the 21st Century	Victor "Babu" Samuel
1995	Halcyon	Dis Party on Fire	Victor "Babu" Samuel
No Panorama was held during the following years: 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000			
2001	Harmonites	Conversation	
2002	Hellsgate	Time to Dance	Veron Henry
2003	Gemonites	Celebration	Patrick "Stone" Johnson
2004	Harmonites	Freedom Celebration	Lingfield "Kojo" Martin
2005	Gemonites	Outta Control	Robin "Schwarp" Margetson
2006	Hellsgate	Sylvie Breakaway	Veron Henry
2007	Hellsgate	Old Time Calypso	Veron Henry
2008	Halcyon	Hit Man	Fitzroy "Blakey" Phillips / Curtis "CC" Cochrane
2009	Hellsgate	Party in Space	Khan Cordice

2010	Halcyon	Rock Me	Victor “Babu” Samuel
2011	Hellsgate	Satan Coming Down	Khan Cordice
	Halcyon	Don’t Stop the Party	Victor “Babu” Samuel
2012	Hellsgate	J’ouvert Rhythm	Khan Cordice
2013	Hellsgate	Vivian Richards	Khan Cordice
2014	Ebonites	All Ah We	“Dayne “Wadika” Gomes
2015	Hellsgate	Sand to the Beach	Khan Cordice
2016	Halcyon	60 Years	Devon Bachelor
2017	Hellsgate	Jumbie	Khan Cordice
2018	Hellsgate	Steelpan War	Khan Cordice
	Panache	Good Time	Zahra Lake
2019	Hellsgate	Fire Under Me Foot	Khan Cordice
Cancelled due to COVID – 19 Pandemic - 2020			

Source: When Steel Talks. “Steelband Panorama Champions of Antigua and Barbuda.” *Pan on the Net*. 2020.

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