

Taking our Carnival worldwide

TODAY is Carnival Monday and once again this country's talent and creativity will be on display on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago in what some have christened "the greatest show on earth".

But what if we could take some of best Carnival talent, our masmen, our calypsonians, our steelpan players, even our food, physically to the world?

This is the plan for the proposed "Carnival Caravan", an idea of Brian Sawh, deputy chair of the National Lotteries Control Board. He announced the plan last week during an international meeting of Carnival Arts Organisations hosted by the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism and the National Carnival Commission (NCC) at the National Academy for the Performing Arts in Port of Spain. In attendance were major representatives of steelpan, mas and calypso from the Caribbean, Europe and the US.

Sawh explained to the gathering that the "Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Caravan" will be a fair visiting international destinations with Carnival practitioners performing, fashion shows, branded products, Trinidadian food court, a Tourism Development Company booth, Caribbean Airlines booth to book flights, and a media pavilion for the respective media personnel.

He said the caravan will give foreigners a direct experience and invite them to visit, and a pilot project will be in areas with established carnivals such as Miami, Toronto and New York. Sawh predicted that the caravan will have great economic benefits for the participants, allowing them to have a full-time business, and the country.

He noted that though this country has inspired carnivals around the world — some attendees estimated more than 50 — the promotion of this country's original Carnival was being lost.

Sawh told the gathering that they would be working together with the international Carnivals and not competing with them.

Some of the expatriate carnival promoters complained about the lack of support from Trinidad though they have promoted the festival abroad.

"When we come to Trinidad they push us in a corner like we come to beg," said one representative.

Wayne Alonzo, past president of Carnival in Atlanta, recalled that he had approaches by three mayors in Georgia to bring carnival to their cities.

"The world is begging us still, we need (Trinidad's) support and your capacity," he said.

Chairman of the British Association of Steelbands Pepe Francis reported that for years they have been struggling with the international carnivals but they have never been able to get any engagement with the NCC or Pan Trinbago. US steelpan composer Andy Narell questioned what exactly was being marketed as Trinidad Carnival noting that a Carnival magazine looked like a "Victoria's Secret catalogue".

"Is it real culture or a cheap imitation that should be stamped made in China," he said.

National Carnival Bands' Association secretary Renwick Browne said the cur-

rent structure of Carnival leaves "so many people out" and certain communities were being marginalised and we "no longer see Carnival as a national festival".

He pointed out that 15 years ago for Carnival Monday and Tuesday if you went to the beach you might have been the only person there. He noted that currently, however, there has been an exodus to the beaches and out of the country because to really enjoy Carnival you need a "sou sou" (loan arrangement) or "financial backing". On the suggestion of the

Carnival Caravan, Browne said "a caravan" was needed in this country so the art form is not lost to the youths.

Dr Keith Nurse of The University of the West Indies noted that some of the Carnival traditions were being secured at the regional Carnival level and there was a "lot of stuff going on that we are unaware of".

He also urged the organisers to have sufficient bathroom facilities, noting that this lack has been a "public health hazard for years". He recalled that the engineers associations came up with a plan to address this issue years ago, and also a transport plan, but they were ignored.

Carnival King mas player Gerard Weekes lamented that following the

Kings and Queens Competitions the costumes, "amounts to nothing after Ash Wednesday" and there is "no further display of a beautiful work of art".

University of the West Indies lecturer Dr Suzanne Burke noted that Carnival is universal.

"Carnival is bigger than all of us," she stressed.

She noted that everywhere Trinidadians went they created a Carnival not for profit but for identification. She explained that Carnival was about the "triple bottom line": economics, socio-political and the environment. She stressed that if there is a not a balance of these three things then it will not be sustainable.

She noted that Carnival does not attract the "sex, sea, sand and surf" tourist who does not stay long and do not spend a lot of money, but the cultural tourist. Burke also pointed out some of the disadvantages of Carnival was inflated price, opportunity cost and indebtedness.

"Many of the organisations involved, not just in Trinidad but also in the diaspora, in promoting and organising Carnival are indebted," she said.

She provided the example of the Washington DC Carnival last year which "almost didn't happen" because they were \$200,000 in debt to the city.

She said people attend festivals that are dynamic, sophisticated, open to the world, have a good reputation and a lot of innovation.

She noted the clustering of mas bands in the Woodbrook area, with 50 per cent of all bands and 80 per cent of large bands, and there should also be international clustering.

She expressed concern about the business sponsorship model urging Carnival stakeholders to know their value and reminded them that because a company sponsors an event it does not mean that they own the event and can overtake it in a "crass way". She also said there was a need for ongoing dialogue of what we want our Carnival to look like.

A representative from Nigeria, who did not give his name, urged this country to get its Carnival "home in order" because Nigeria and many other countries wanted assistance hosting the festival.



QUEEN OF THEM ALL: Lenore Singh in her winning costume, "Pan Explosion"—designed by Vijay Rampersad, at the Couva Carnival Committee queen show held at the Couva Main Road on Saturday night. Second place went to Tia Toby and first runner-up was Renee Brown.