

'Doctor Supie' celebrates another milestone

Geoffrey Dunn

IT was during the Carnival season of 1954 that a shy but ambitious 16-year-old kid from Rio Claro made his way into Port of Spain to appear in his first calypso venue, the Victory Tent, located on lower Edward Street near South Quay. The Victory had a star-studded lineup that included the likes of Spoiler, Spitfire, Striker, Viper, Cypher, Pretender and the incomparable Lord Melody, who would win the calypso crown that season with his song, "Second Spring."

The young performer was then known by his given name, Andrew Marciano — or simply as "the kid in short pants"— and he was still nervous, he recalls, when it came to appearing in front of large crowds. As he prepared to take the stage, the tent's master of ceremonies would herald "the youngest calypsonian in Trinidad!"

The "poor boy from Rio Claro," as he liked to dub himself, is no longer the youngest kaisonian in T&T, far from it, but as he gets ready to celebrate his 80th birthday this week, Lord Superior, as he was named by Spoiler and Melody, or simply "Supie," as he is called by

KAISO BLUES CAFÉ: Lord Superior's 80th Birthday Bash

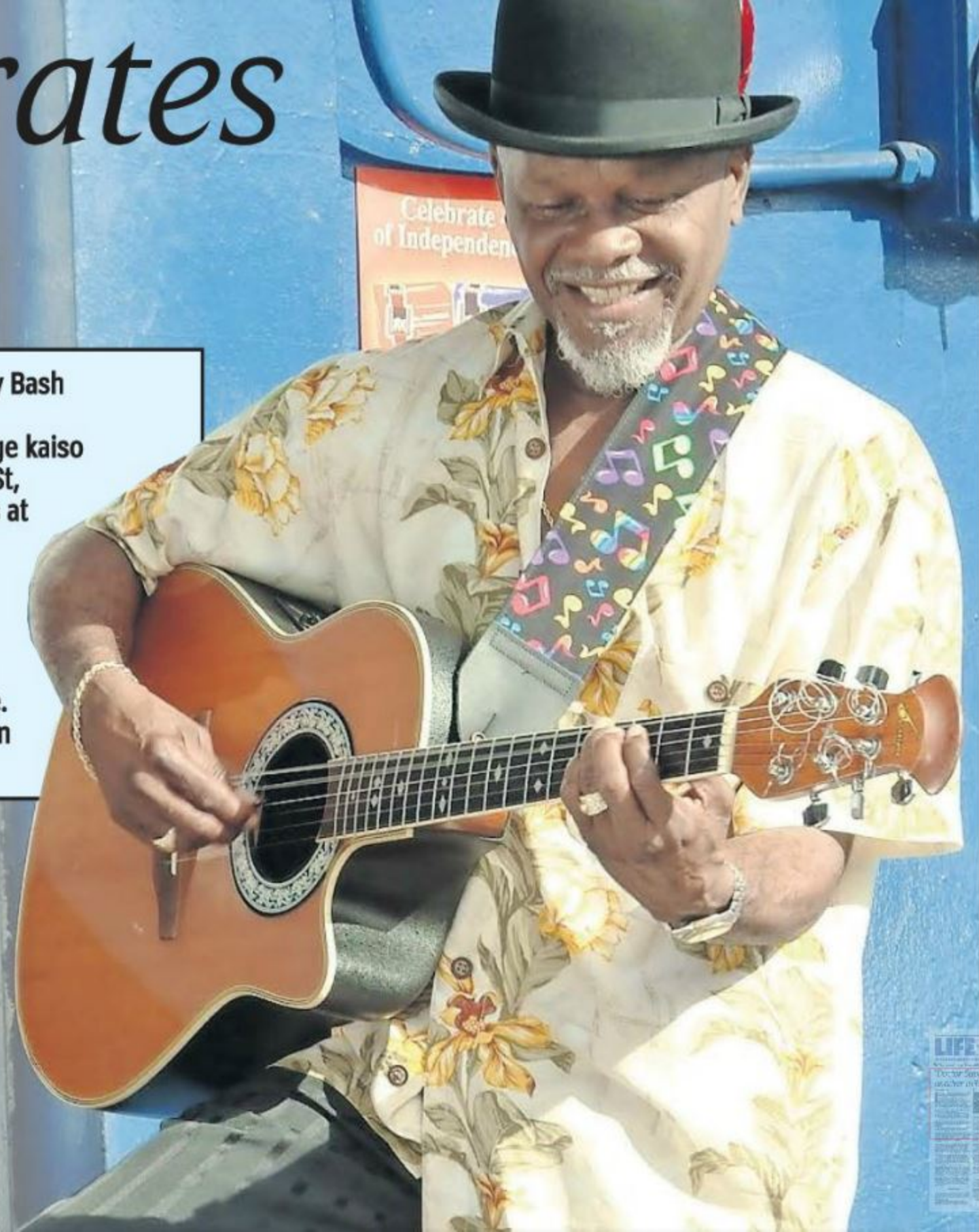
Lord Superior will celebrate his 80th birthday with a vintage kaiso extravaganza and party at Kaiso Blues Café, 85 Woodford St, Newtown, Port of Spain on November 29. The show begins at 7 p.m.

A star-studded cast of veteran kaisonians will also be performing with Supie, including his longtime sidekick Lord Relator (Supie has called him "one of the most talented calypsonians of all time"), Brother Valentino, Poser, Mudada, Explainer, Twiggy, Abadele, Lady Adana and more.

For reservations or more information please call Sharon Kerr at 366-4680

and Tobago's calypso hierarchy. He had a hit, even before Sparrow, with his bawdy calypso, 'The Coconut Tree'. His popular kaiso 'Brass Crown' helped to unify the calypso fraternity into demanding a more substantial award for its monarchs. He studied film at New York **University** and travelled the world as an ambassador of calypso, often touring with Kitchener and Melody.

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The “poor boy from Rio Claro,” as he liked to dub himself, is no longer the youngest kaisonian in T&T, far from it, but as he gets ready to celebrate his 80th birthday this week, Lord Superior, as he was named by Spoiler and Melody, or simply “Supie,” as he is called by his many fans, is still performing his beloved calypso both at home and abroad.

On the eve of completing his eighth decade, Supie says he is looking forward to his “next verse,” which, he notes with his trademark enthusiasm, will commence this very week, when he headlines a special birthday show and vintage kaiso extravaganza on Wednesday evening (November 29) at the Kaiso Blues Café, Newtown, Port of Spain (see sidebar).

“Turning 80 means I’m a very fortunate man,” Supie declared. “Not too many are able to reach that number. I feel very, very blessed. I still possess an intensity, a curiosity, that keeps me going.”

Indeed, Supie has just released a new song fall the way in New York City. “I’m very excited,” says Supie. “A pair of steelbands are already slated to play the song for the upcoming Carnival.” Just last week, Pan Trinbago issued Superior a laudatory acknowledgement for receiving an honorary doctorate from The University of West Indies, along with his dear and departed friend, Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts) and Winsford “Joker” DeVine.

As a result, he now has a new sobriquet: Doctor Supie.

Popular Kaiso

In many respects, Superior’s career in calypso has been more than a bit unconventional. Like one of his heroes, the American crooner Frank Sinatra, Supie has done it his way. And he’s paid his dues.

During the 1950s through the early 1970s, Supie rose steadily in the ranks of Trinidad

University and travelled the world as an ambassador of calypso, often touring with Kitchener and Melody.

Superior was always pushing, always making noise, always an innovator. He consistently refused to accept the status quo. In 1959, he became the first kaisonian to produce his own record. “I felt that I needed to control my own destiny,” says Superior. “I felt compelled to break away from the old colonial mentality.”

In 1974, he won the South Crown in San Fernando, besting the likes of Duke, Lord Shorty, Maestro and hometown favourite Black Stalin. Singing his hit, ‘San Fernando Carnival,’ he placed fourth at the Big Yard that season behind Sparrow, Shadow and Kitchener (pretty stiff company) and just ahead of Bomber and Chalkdust. The following year, he defended his South Crown and won again—but the titles meant little to him.

Shortly thereafter, he retired from the annual competitions. “I didn’t have bad feelings,” Superior noted about his decision. “I just wanted to go in a different direction with my career.”

Calypso trenches

Superior never looked back. He embarked on a decidedly different path than most other calypso performers from the Caribbean. He spent a good portion of the next quarter-century performing as a solo act around the world, most steadily in the Virgin Islands. He also made big noise in T&T when he sued the government trying to get a radio license. The battle lasted 25 years, and in the end, he won.

Following the death of Kitchener in 2000,

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Superior at Brooklyn Bar.
—Photo: Richard Rawlins