

Our Opinion

Keeping alive the kaiso dream

IT IS EASY, given some of today's offerings, to forget that calypso has a long and glorious tradition, particularly since none of the country's radio stations give regular reminders of that heritage. The critically acclaimed film *Calypso Dreams* should go some way towards filling that void when it is released here this Carnival season.

The film features performances by a host of well-known performers including Sparrow, the Mighty Terror, Calypso Rose, the Mighty Duke, Black Stalin, the Mighty Bomber, Lord Blakie, Brother Valentino, Lord Relator, Gypsy, the late Mystic Prowler, Singing Sandra, the Mighty Striker, the Mighty Power, Poser, Explainer, Mudada, Trinidad Rio, Scrunter, Sugar Aloes and Lord Superior.

In fact Lord Superior also had an off-camera role in that with composer Alvin Daniell he served as co-producer of the Trinidad end of the project which had narrative commentary provided by the Mighty Chalkdust, David Rudder and Brother Resistance. Already *Calypso Dreams* has garnered good reviews, with the *Hollywood Reporter* finding it "intelligent". The personalities paraded before the camera have tremendous vibrancy: the ebullient Calypso Rose, the sly and articulate Lord Superior and the jocular Mighty Sparrow.

The *Pacific Sun* weighed in by calling the film "remarkably engaging" and comparing it with a celebrated film avers that "as with *The Buena Vista Social Club*, this charming film is a cultural rediscovery. Get ready for the soundtrack".

It may prove to be a rediscovery for Trinbagonians,

as well, or at least those of us for whom calypso is of the soca variety although even this version has produced its share of classics notably the outstanding body of work left by the late Lord Shorty who, almost inarguably, is the genre's inventor.

Calypso could hardly now be said to be enjoying a golden age but it has had more than one and, if history is any guide, the odds are that it will eventually right itself although we offer as a caveat the fact that there is nobody on the immediate horizon capable of making the necessary intervention as the likes of Kitchener, Sparrow, Superblue and David Rudder did in their prime.

What is undoubtedly true is that for whatever reasons, some of them ignoble in that they have their roots in both race and class prejudice, calypso's critics argue from a skewed perspective of the art. "Wine and jam" songs, for example, are not only recent arrivals but, every season, they constitute but a minority of the songs sung, with a surprisingly large percentage being commentary of the political and social kind. Moreover while divisive calypsoes may grab public attention this is precisely because they fall outside of the mainstream which boasts of a litany of inclusive calypsoes, the poets of the streets yearly trying to articulate public sentiment however unarticulated and even unconscious this may be.

It is regrettable that so many calypso treasures are lost to the general public and the fact that there is not a national demand for them to be aired speaks volumes of the innate self-contempt that continues to bedevil this society and in many areas other than this one.