

The Archaeology of Memory



Photographs are personal, as in holiday snapshots, or they are public, like most photojournalism. The former are framed within a biography and dense with meaning; the latter are distant and impersonal, even with explanatory captions. The photos in this book combine with memories to dissolve the distinction between the personal and the public. Most were originally public photos that were acquired and preserved because of their personal significance. Here have returned, charged with that aura, to the public domain. The result is to make this book akin to a family album. It could be the family of steelbands and their supporters, or it could equally be the extended family of Trinidad and Tobagonians. Or it could be the clan of musicians and music lovers, which embraces all of mankind.

Corregidores Steel Orchestra, 1950

“The picture is of a celebration after we played our mas in ’50, a little drink-up. A lot of people come in the yard in Ninth Street, Barataria, Cecil John’s mother’s house. Corregidores was under the house, what had a big yard. I didn’t take those pictures. When Cecil arranged for a photographer to come by the band I asked for a picture.

“I always liked photography and painting. When I was in the scouts, we went hiking and I used to find the scenery so beautiful that I had to borrow a small box camera, a Kodak Brownie, from a friend.

“Cecil John, the captain of Corregidores, liked art too. He did sign painting. Sometimes he’d call me to help with the billboards. I did the background. I remember going to a Boscoe Holder exhibition with Cecil.

“I lived three houses from Corregidores in 9th Street. The band was just young boys from the district and from San Juan, Morvant, Santa Cruz. It formed around ’45. VE Day we was in town beating pan. We walk from Barataria to Port of Spain and going down people join us. It had just the boom – the biscuit drum – and the kittle. The ping-pong came after. Corregidores name was from a war film. Cecil pick the name.”

Donald Gordon, Corregidores



Prince Batson’s prototype pans. Photo courtesy of *Trinidad Express*.

Some time around 1993, just as I was discovering the richness of pan history, I reviewed a Ministry of Culture exhibition entitled “Pan: the coming of age.” It included some of Prince Batson’s recreated prototype pans, which prompted me to suggest that we needed an archaeology of pan. I gave the matter no further thought, and for the next decade concentrated instead on interviewing the steelband veterans from the 1940s and 1950s. I tracked down and interviewed hundreds of what became a long-running “Pan Pioneers” newspaper series. I travelled throughout Trinidad recording the stories of those panmen and women, trying to

preserve as many as possible. I visited Ellie Mannette in West Virginia, Belgrave Bonaparte in Nassau, Emanuel “Cobo Jack” Riley in New York. I collected tales of adventure and ignorance, of courage and daring, of creativity and imagination; there was romance and infamy and heroism and humour, and mostly love. I wrote nearly 100 articles for the *Sunday Express* on the oral history of pan. The treasure trove of stories I had stumbled upon was dazzling. To be dazzled is to see the light... but, alas, little else. Consequently, I never thought to ask any of those hundreds of people I interviewed – and there may have been as many

The lion danced on Chinese Republic Day, October 10 (“Double Ten”), to drums and cymbals two months after the Allied victory over Japan (VJ Day), August 15, 1945. The spectacle must have been witnessed by calypsonian Aldwyn Roberts (Lord Kitchener), who was inspired to compose “Chinese Never Had A VJ Day” – which became the first road march after the wartime haitus, Kitchener’s first road march, and the first for the steelband movement.

This I bound to mention,
I joke with a Chinese lion
Big men frighten like fire,
Thinking is a true lion come from China.
Just while I mistake the lion groan,
John drop he bass on a saxophone,
People got misled
Was a Chinee play mas in a lion head.



Lion Dance on Charlotte Street, 1945.
Photo courtesy of *Leon Chin*.

as 600 or 700 of them – whether they had photographs of their bands.

In 2003 Helene Bellour, who conceptualized and edited *Renegades*, cast around with me for archival photos of the band and found few before the 1960s. I concluded that the early photographs of pan were lost in the 1983 fire at the *Trinidad Guardian*. Yet in 2006 I decided to work on an illustrated history of pan. What changed my mind? Earlier that year I had produced *Descendants of the Dragon*, an illustrated book marking 200 years of Chinese presence in Trinidad. The photographs I had acquired quite easily for the book gave me a sense that there were untold photographic riches out there, just waiting to be found. Three photographs in particular

were revelatory: one of my great-grandmother, freshly arrived from China in 1902; another was of a Chinese lion dance in Charlotte Street in 1945, and; the third was of a group of beautiful young women, including my mother and two aunts, playing mas in 1946, the first Carnival after the World War II haitus. Those three photographs struck me like a personal revelation and their points of reference – the family portrait, the inspiration for the first steelband road march and young people playing mas – triangulate this book.

And so it was that 15 years after I called for an archaeology of pan I found myself having to follow my own recommendation; only the artifacts I had to unearth were not rusty paint cans and dustbins but forgotten photographs in private albums.



Dancow Milk band, Carnival 1946.

¹ The road march is most popular tune performed by bands on the Carnival days of a particular year.

Designer Russell Halfhide launched the project by bringing me a lovely photo his father had shot of a band in St James, plus Commander Jack Williams' archive of 24 breath-taking photographs. For my part I started by phoning everyone on my ten-year-old list of a few hundred pan pioneers. Many had died since I wrote newspaper stories about them, but many more were still around and a few had photos. It was more than I expected. Some captains had small archives of their bands. Bobby Mohammed had over 15 photos of Cavaliers; Ken MacFarlane around ten of Starlight Syncopators; Ernest Ferreira had albums of the early Dixieland; Junior Pouchet had albums of Silver Stars; Milton "Wire" Austin had compiled large scrapbooks on Fonclaire. Roderick and Mackie Toussaint had erected what was almost a shrine to the Belmont bands of Rising Sun and City Kids. Ordinary panmen sometimes also possessed a few photos, sometimes in desperate condition. Each one was beautiful to me. I felt the delirious joy of the lucky prospector each time I stumbled on one. For weeks I stared at Daisy James photos every day, for example, especially the lopsided, out-of-focus shot of a teenaged Daisy on stage.

I cast my net as wide as I could. I asked everyone I met. I'd stop strangers on the street if they wore a steelband T-shirt or looked as like once been sufficiently wayward a youth to be in a steelband. That was how, for instance, in a bar in San Fernando I met Godfrey Camps, who played in Melody

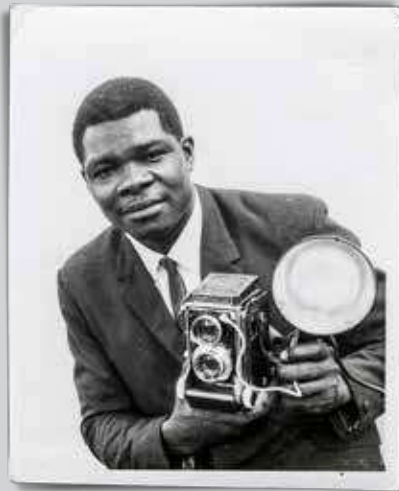
Makers in the early 1960s and Cavaliers after that. I appeared on television and in the press. Few people responded but those who did were important, such as Englishman Arthur Bentley, the organizer of Panorama; Rane Maharah, of the Maharajah Kids steelband from Fyzabad; and Winston Wellington, a member of the great North Stars. Allison Hennessey, who interviewed me, later gave me five postcards. Generally, however, I had to ferret out the owners of photos, rather than waiting on them to find me. I phoned captains of bands listed by Pan Trinbago, and that brought a few great photos, such as those given me by Reynald Kinsale, Blue Diamonds' captain. Generally, people were encouraging and I followed their leads with patience and cunning. One man put me in contact with Roderick "Big Boy" Inniss, the captain Tripoli, for instance, who mentioned a photographer named "Peters" who lived somewhere in the U.S.. I phoned Joseph "Joe Crick" Christopher, another former Tripoli captain. He said that a George Peters lived in New Jersey. An internet search and a few overseas telephone calls linked me with one of my most important sources of 1960s photos.

I wrote the Trinidad Reunion Organization formed by US Army veterans who had been stationed in Trinidad and received nearly 300 photos from Franklin Barrett. Most were military subjects but a few were invaluable, such as those taken from the Venus nightclub, which overlooked Green Corner.

*Warrior mas, Carnival 1947.
Photo courtesy of Jack Williams*

Downtown Carnival judging. Note the steelband is background to the spectacle of mas.





Photographer **George Peters**.
Photo courtesy of **George Peters**.

“Our Navy squadron was transferred to NAS, Trinidad at Chaguaramas, in the fall of 1946. This was my first tour of duty in Trinidad. I attended the first Carnival in 1947 and then again in 1948 and 1949. This was the first I had ever heard of the Carnival. I understand it just started up again in 1946 after not celebrating it during the WWII years. I was using a Kodak Brownie Box Camera which in those days may have cost a dollar or two. It was just made of cardboard with a metal front plate and metal insides. It was an experience for a young man. Of course we drank our share of rum & Coca Cola. ‘Brown Skin Girl’ was one of the favorite songs in those days. I think ‘Rum & Coca Cola’ was also a favorite.

I was an aircraft Mechanic and Flight Engineer in the Navy and definitely not a professional photographer. I just took pictures of any thing that interested me. The Carnival was not as organized as it is today and many of the small parades were not organized at all but people would just join in and dance as the parade or band passed by their house. Sometimes joining in the music with an old pot or pan and a wooden spoon to carry on the rhythm of the music. It was just a weekend or at least a day or two of fun. Our liberty was restricted in those days and enlisted men had to be back at the base by 10:00 at night in 1947 and by 12:00, midnight in 1948 and 1949. We called it ‘Cinderella Liberty’.

“I know I paraded, or should I say danced, around the streets a lot as did many of the servicemen stationed at Chaguaramas and from the Air Base South of Port of Spain.”

Franklin D. Barrett, Northern Operating Base/
Naval Air Station, The Retired Enlisted Association.



In the 1930s and 1940s the photographers of Carnival often foreigner visitors. The local photographers were usually professionals, who hawked Carnival postcards, or white hobbyists such as Jack Williams and Andrew Pearse. Edric Connor and Kenneth Raymond, as black hobbyists, were unusual. Either way, they all focused on the “picturesque”, such as the masquerade. Only in the 1950s, especially after 1956, when the nationalist People’s National Movement came to power, did pan officially became “national culture”: that is, sufficiently interesting to be the subject of postcard photos. As a result, I have never seen a photograph of tamboo bamboo, which would have to have dated before 1940.

Queen’s Park Cricket Club,
Carnival, 1952.

Photo courtesy of **Patrick Raymond**.

“I didn’t get into photography. Photography get into me. “As a boy I’d go below bed, get a shoebox, cut a hole, shine a torch through it and get a feeling like a cinema. I’d cut strips from comic book and put it there. My brother bought a Baby Brownie camera. We called it “click clack”. It used 120 film.

“Then I remember when I was around 8 or 9 my uncle had a box camera carrying 116 film. You had to look from on top. Photography just got into me. I remember the guys in Marine Square on Sunday evening.

“They put you to sit, put cloth over their head. They’d move their hands like a shutter and take a shot. They put it into developer underneath and they’d give you a picture right away. My father would take me to that. Then I realize where the image came from. I realize the paper was sensitive, there was no film.

“In 1946-7 I really struck into photography because one of my cousins came from Curaçao and brought Roliflex Agfa with the bellows. He taught me the different aperture openings f11, f8, f6. I get to realize the distance is most important in filming, the distance from the subject to the camera and the aperture openings on the lens.

“In 1946 I went to work at the Electricity Commission. I work there 24 years. People were asking me to take pictures. In 1954 I bought a camera, a Mamiagflex. It cost \$60 which was like \$6,000 today. I bought an Agfa flash. Everybody want me to take pictures – weddings, babies.

“When I started it was just a hobby. I remember J’ouvert I’d start taking pictures. In the night at last lap I’d be standing at the corner shooting. It just got into me.

“My first band was Sun Valley. I played mas. I used to run on double second but I left it alone and did more on the photography to keep away from the hooligans. My younger brother played with North Stars, toured with them. Not me. My elder brother was more the Carnival side. I loved photography. I took a course with a photographer on Mucurapo Road. I bought my own enlarger and did my own work: weddings all over Trinidad.”

George Peters, North Stars Steel Orchestra

Johannesberg Fascinators, famous for their fancy sailors, crossing the stage at the Oval portraying Clocks and Watches. Photographers at the Oval were allowed on the grounds in front of the audience. At the Savannah venue, the established uptown venue for mas competitions, there was a special enclosure for the amateur Photographer’s Club. (See photo on page 174)



“The photos were taken by my father at Glencoe between Christmas 1960 and Carnival 1961. Photography for him was a hobby. He was not a professional, but he was one of those dedicated hobbyists. He had a Yashica 635 twin lens plus an Agfa single lens reflex, various lenses, a contact printing machine, darkroom equipment, a booklet and files of negatives, etc. This was stuff that could have been discarded not long after he died, but my mother kept it. I was aware of this strange equipment as a child, only understanding its significance in secondary school more than a decade after he died. “I knew he was a member of a local photography club. They would as a group go on outings and photograph landscapes and people. I have seen among the negatives, series of pix from Mona in the early to mid 1950, Carnival in Port of Spain, me growing up of course, and still lifes and landscapes. There is this study of an Indian fisherman and the man’s daughter, a girl with long hair. “My father, who was a physicist at the POS Hospital advising on radiation for cancer treatment and he did a series of photos of a man dying from cancer, gaunt. So, yes he did take photos of strangers, I assume with their permission. Middle class aspirations were part of his vision, I guess. Black men with degrees from UCWI and UC of London, etc working to build this new nation just independent. These were the future Afro-Saxons of the Caribbean. Photography had to be the hobby along with audiophile music collecting and book club meeting. Sport was for watching, not playing.”

Nigel Campbell, music journalist.

Photos by **Daniel Campbell** courtesy of **Nigel Campbell**

Finding people who possessed photos was step one. Next I had to actually get copies of the photos. For those in Trinidad I lugged a scanner and my laptop around wherever I went. With people living abroad the exercise took longer. Junior Pouchet in Orlando sent his albums to his brother Edwin, and Bob Theroulde in Toronto posted his Gay Flamingoes photos to his brother. But Kenrick Lalsingh had to his photos three or four times for Dalton Narine to make copies with the correct resolution. Could this be considered archaeological? Archaeology is

the study of a past culture through its material artifacts (rather than written or oral sources of historiography), and a photograph is as much the material product of a particular historical period as any potsherd or arrowhead. It can be lost or damaged or destroyed like any other material object, and indeed this whole project was aimed at preserving those steelband photos that had not yet been lost or destroyed. Of course letters and diaries and old newspapers – the raw material of historiography – are also perishable artifacts which,

like photographs, refer to events external to themselves. But a photograph tells of an event in a different way from any document or oral account. The latter is always a product by the writer’s or witness’s mind, his interpretation, talent and memory. Paintings and verbal accounts are subjective descriptions of an event whereas a photograph is closer to being an objective trace of it, more like fingerprints on a glass or footprints in the sand. The photographer may chose the instant that is photographed, he can select the angle, the frame,

the focus, the time-exposure, etc. But (analogue) photography remains a mechanical-chemical process: light from the subject hits a rectangle of transparent celluloid and changes its chemical coating. The resulting image is not so much “created” as it is “shot,” “taken” or “captured”: a thin slice of reality is snatched from time’s unrelenting flow into the past, to be mounted as an image on paper. That is the origin of the primitive fear that a photograph captures some of a person’s soul. For the modern viewer, however, a photograph simply represents

incontestable evidence that an event occurred. “A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened,” says Susan Sontag. “A photograph may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture.” That is why it would be accorded greater credence in a court than a dozen eyewitness accounts. A photograph is true to an extent no other description can attain, and it is significant that the concept of scientific “objectivity” emerged at the same time as photography.

“The boys in the picture was just a stage side. They was all in Cairo too. All live in the area. The Indians was three houses away from Leslie and me, and the other fella just by Dundonald Hill. I born 25th April, 1931. My brother Leslie woulda be 75 this year. My sister is 73.

Long time every year Christmas day we used to go where big shots living in Boissierre and serenade them on Christmas morning. They used to take we picture. In every house they used to take we picture. Hugh Wooding was living round there. There was the first place we go by because he had visitors, he tell we come there first. He like we play for the visitors. We used to sing ‘Nettie Nettie,’ ‘Dorothy Went and Bathe,’ all them thing, and little ‘Silent Night’.

If we play by one house Christmas morning, the bossman come out, he bring sweet- drink, ice, cake and give we a few dollars. We play two tune, sing ‘Happy Christmas,’ and is so we go ‘til half day. We stop at 12 because is lunch time. After 12 people taking lunch, they eh want no noise.

Is only on Christmas we used to go round and serenade. Next day is Boxing Day: all of we dressed after we eat, we head to the Savannah for races and gamble there. When we lost we money we get together with pan and we coming back home. ‘Red and gold we lost we money.’ We singing that.

Simeon “Nappy” Grannum,
Five Graves To Cairo



USS Bad Behaviour from Hell Yard, 1940. Photo courtesy of Cmdr Jack Williams.

Having unearthed his artifacts, his arrowheads and figurines, the archaeologist must now identify and interpret them. And so it was too with my photos. A photograph may be irrefutably true but that is a severely limited truth. Torn out of time’s flow, the isolated moment lacks movement, a before and an after, which give the event its intentionality and meaning. A good photograph may suggest what has just passed and is about to occur, but photographs will always be ambivalent, always be wanting explanation. “Understanding is based on how (something) functions,” says Sontag. “And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.”

Photos given by a pan pioneer usually came with explanations, because their owner had been

there. He was in the photograph or it was his band. Some bands were self-identified with banners and flags. Waterloo men had it printed on their T-shirts and Casablanca had a large banner up front (see pages X & Y). But there were very many beautiful photos of bands and panmen, which could not be identified. Then I had to look for clues.

Jack Williams’ beautiful shots of a sailor band on a wet Port of Spain street were intriguing. Studied closely the photo revealed on one man’s vest: U.S.S.B.B. Could this be the legendary tamboo bamboo band from Hell Yard, USS Bad Behaviour, predecessor of Trinidad All Stars? Another magnified photo of the same band confirmed it: “Bad Behaviour” was stencilled on the back of a shirt (page 37). When were these photos taken? In another shot of

the band further along the street a billboard advertised ‘Lady of the ...’ and ‘Taylor’. The movie Lady of the Tropics starring Robert Taylor and Hedy Lamarr, released in August 1939, was advertised in Trinidad just before the 1940 Carnival, although it did not play until April. Alas, that meant that the photo was not of a tamboo bamboo band because it was shot a year after Alexander’s Ragtime Band launched the steelband movement in 1939.

My friend Charlotte Elias gave me a large box of photos and negatives, which I scoured in a sweltering warehouse, peeling apart hundreds of negatives so I could peer at each one against a dusty skylight for an idea of what image it might contain. I moved fast, impatiently casting aside countless images,

some dating back to a century ago. There were photos of weddings and graduations; studio portraits of old whiskered gents or ladies in lacy dresses holding babies; family shots of three generations, from the toothless crones to the squalling infants. Lots of beach scenes – attractive women gazing out to the horizon, handsome men in old-fashioned swimwear. Friends and family eating in holiday-homes. They were great lovers of the sea and posed on yachts, speedboats, ocean liners. I was completely untouched – I was only interested in photographs related to steelband. Those once happy and carefree members and friends of the family were now all dead and it didn’t matter, as if they never mattered. Someone had taken these photos when it was a costly thing to do, for me to disregard them like rubbish. Remembrance of our ancestors, an

honouring of the dead, conveys a kind of immortality, it is a moral duty. Contrariwise, casting aside old photographs felt like wanton disrespect. I was elated to find two beautiful images of some boys with makeshift instruments and a few of the most dramatic shots of stickfighters I’ve ever seen, but I also felt great remorse at discarding the rest.

That box of photos and negatives was passed to me by Charlotte Elias, who had found it in a newly-bought house. I tracked down to the house’s former owner, Judy Stone, who was living in England. I asked about the photo. She replied: “I would say it is 99% definitely the house that my grandfather, Stanley Stone, built at 2 Rookery Nook, Maraval. The house was built in 1938, and there are four factors that identify it for me - the chequered Italian marble gallery floor, the two long, low steps to

the lawn, the low wall at the end of the gallery and the path, with gravestone, from the gallery to the driveway.” Otherwise: “Who the people in the photo are I’ve no idea.”

Those were some of my favourite photos and I showed them to the pioneers I interviewed, and one day, about a year after I’d found them and had long given up hope of discovering those boys’ names, North Stars member Cecil Peters recognized the tall boy bent over the drum. He said, “He living nearby – ask the fruit vendor sitting on the bench near the corner for Nappy.” I did so and found him. Near blind, he couldn’t see himself in the photograph, but I recognized him immediately, and so did his sister, who he lived with. Together they named the other boys, all of whom were already dead.

Serenading at the back of Stanley Stone’s house, Christmas day, 1946. From left: Sebastian Abdul with shak-shak; Patrick Abdul; Leslie Grannum with ping pong; Simeon “Nappy” Grannum, bending over “box-bass” drum; Roderick “Leo” Thomas with toc-toc claves; and Solomon Abdul with three- note kittle. Photo by Stanley Stone, courtesy of Charlotte Elias.



“In 1959 we started. Around January, right after Christmas. How this band came to be: we was bad boys in the area, Dodge City Boys. A fella named Victor Callendar ask, ‘What you doing?’ We just making mischief. He say, ‘Why allyou don’t start a band and keep out of trouble?’ Shortly after he left the guys decided to steal drums. We took eight from the gas station next to the panyard now. I was watchman. I could hear as they threw it in the river. It was night. We ended up with eight drums. It was a great start. After that we had to steal from people. We went so far as to steal a drum with pitch oil. We drain all out and took the drum. Another person’s tub was full of water. One guy brought the drum with the water. He ended up being a boxer, David Beckles. He was a cello payer. After Sailor Boy from Santa Cruz tuned the pans Arthur Byer showed us how to play. Knolly Bobb from Ebonites was the arranger. We’d cook every day. If he need a drink we’d buy it. Along with him we tried other arrangers: Pelham Goddard did a tune and charge \$12, and several others. That was the inception of Wonderland Steelband.”

Justin “Barber” Frederick, Wonderland



Wonderland, 1963: Front row left to right: George Prescott, Fitzroy Prescott, Vincent “Hueloy” Lila, Bertie Cayenne.

How much digital “cleaning up” was acceptable? How much cropping? After all, the Venus de Milo seems more beautiful for her missing arms. Perhaps that’s why I found myself sometimes drawn to the damaged or mysterious photographs; Justin Frederick’s torn photograph of Wonderland in 1963, for instance, held a fascination far in excess of its historic significance. Did these photos simply confirm what I already knew by other means? I think not. The images constituted a different and more immediate way of encountering

history. They generated a knowledge that was closer to a direct product of the senses than hearsay. (Incidentally, they were also far more evocative than the lifeless old drums such as I had originally envisaged when I called for an archaeology of pan.) They offered something that neither physical artifacts (such as old drums) nor verbal accounts could have given me – a sense of having been there, seen that. And as the saying goes, seeing is believing. Indeed some uses of photography – for journalistic and scientific purposes – are intended to enhance

what we can see by making visible what is too distant, too small or too fleeting for the naked eye. But the photos in this book had been collected not extensions of the eye but as enhancements of memory. Panmen sometimes collected the commercially sold pictures of their bands like photos of their families: to remember what they were like. Kenneth Macfarlane’s photographsStarlightSyncopators, for instance, all recorded moments in his personal life. “I was the captain of Starlight Syncopators,” Macfarlane recalled. “When I came from town

San Juan had Black Swan, they had Broken Arrow and Real Glory, and they form Starlight. I take over from Blues Bostock and the band move to by the train line. I was in charge of both the pan and the mas. I take over in 1957.” And once he’d told me his story, the photographs resonated into a wider context through Wellington “Blues” Bostock, a veteran of the defunct Red Army, a steelband so combative it had fought itself out of existence by 1950. Fleeing the police heat, Bostock returned to his hometown, San Juan, where he formed Starlight Syncopators, which Macfarlane took over in 1956, after Bostock had moved on to the San Juan All Stars, which

two years later became embroiled in a legendary steelband clash with Desperadoes.

So the photographed moment could be private, and the flow of events from which it was swiped comprises a life story, usually as part of a family or (with the photos in this book) a steelband. Or it could be public, and the flow of events is history. I sought to unite the two, so the historical photos would be seen as moments in the lives of private individuals, while the personal photos are given their historical sweep. Interviews with the people in the photographs sparked the fusion. As John Berger explains: “In the

relation between a photograph and words, the photograph begs for an interpretation, and the words usually supply it. The photograph, irrefutable as evidence but weak in meaning, is given a meaning by the words. And the words, which by themselves remain at the level of generalization, are given specific authenticity by the irrefutability of the photograph.” Words are unavoidably vague. On the other hand, a photograph is specific in all of those left-out details. “Together,” concludes Berger, “the two then become very powerful: an open question appears to have been fully answered.”



Starlight Syncopators, Carnival 1956 postcard, courtesy of Kenneth Macfarlane

“In the picture the pan in front have a bass kittle, it had four or five notes on it. The biscuit drum behind him was a bass drum. We used to beat with we fist. Afterwards, we start to use a sponge ball. The fella in Starlight, he used to bus the drum. We knew him as Nigger Ben, he was a Indian, a Madrassi. He used to beat Indian drum for Hosay in San Juan. Them steelband boys used to take part in it.

We had a bass and we had a bass kittle, which had two notes. Some call it a dup dup. That was from the pitch oil tin about two feet tall, it was thick. That used to tune. We used the small sponge ball on that. We got it from the gas station, that’s what they sell pitch oil in.”

Kenneth Macfarlane, Starlight Syncopators Steel Orchestra

Photographs, for all the sharp clarity they can achieve, they are unmoving, like moments embalmed. Once quickened with words, however, so that the frozen image acquires a past and a future, the photograph springs to life like a particularly vivid recollection. And it is more than that, because it preserves a vision with greater fidelity and detail than memory (unless you have a photographic memory), and feels closer to witnessing an ongoing spectacle than recalling the past. It pulls you into the present tense within its frame. You are there and can easily evoke the music, see the movement, feel the sun, smell the sweat. The glare can hurt your eyes. And yet it still remains out of reach. The people we see appear to be so alive we feel they can see us if they only looked hard enough, but they cannot. If we speak they won't hear. If we try to touch them they won't feel it. We have become like ghosts who know the future but are unable to tell those it affects.

In front of the teenaged Ray Holman in the 1960 photo of Invaders is another handsome, young teenager concentrating on his tenor pan. He is John Montgomery Williams, who will go on to front a pop music combo, the Casanovas. Look at Williams closely, his concentration on what he is playing, his confidence. His father is a top professional musician in Trinidad, John "Buddy" Williams, leader of the Blue Rhythm Dance Band, and Monty already shows promise. Then read the Bridgeport Sunday Post report about what the future holds for him.

But in the photograph none of that has happened. Instead, we are there with a teenager, like visitors from the future. We know his destiny and urgently want to warn



Ray Holman and Monty Williams, Invaders Steel Orchestra, 1960. Photo courtesy of Ray Holman.

him but we cannot. Our silence is deeply saddening because the photograph makes us confront an innocent boy heading towards tragedy. We do not see a man who

has been dead for half-century. To see that we must pull back from the figures in the photograph and instead look at a piece of paper that exists in our own present tense.

BRIDGEPORT SUNDAY POST, *October 21, 1973, G-5*
Sisters Tossed to Deaths; Suspect Is Subway Suicide
 NEW YORK (UPI) — Two petite and attractive sisters — one an airline stewardess — were hurled to their deaths from the sixth floor window of a Manhattan hotel early Saturday. A few hours later a man sought for questioning in the case committed suicide in a subway tunnel, police said.
 The sisters, natives of Trinidad, were identified as June Gibbs, 26, a stewardess with British West Indies Airlines, and her sister, Jenny, 30, who ran the Grenada Travel Agency. The man sought was Jenny's boyfriend, John Montgomery "Monty" Williams, 29, a piano and organ musician from Trinidad.
 The bodies of the two women were found on the roof of the Windsor Hotel's second story balcony after screaming and sounds of argument were heard coming from June's hotel room, police said.
 According to authorities, Williams and Jenny visited June and another unidentified airline employee at her hotel room late Friday. At around 11:30 p.m., the two sisters and Williams asked the fourth person to leave because they had "personal" matters to discuss. The commotion ensued...
 Police said Williams walked in front of an IRT subway train in Brooklyn at 3:30 a.m. Saturday and was killed.



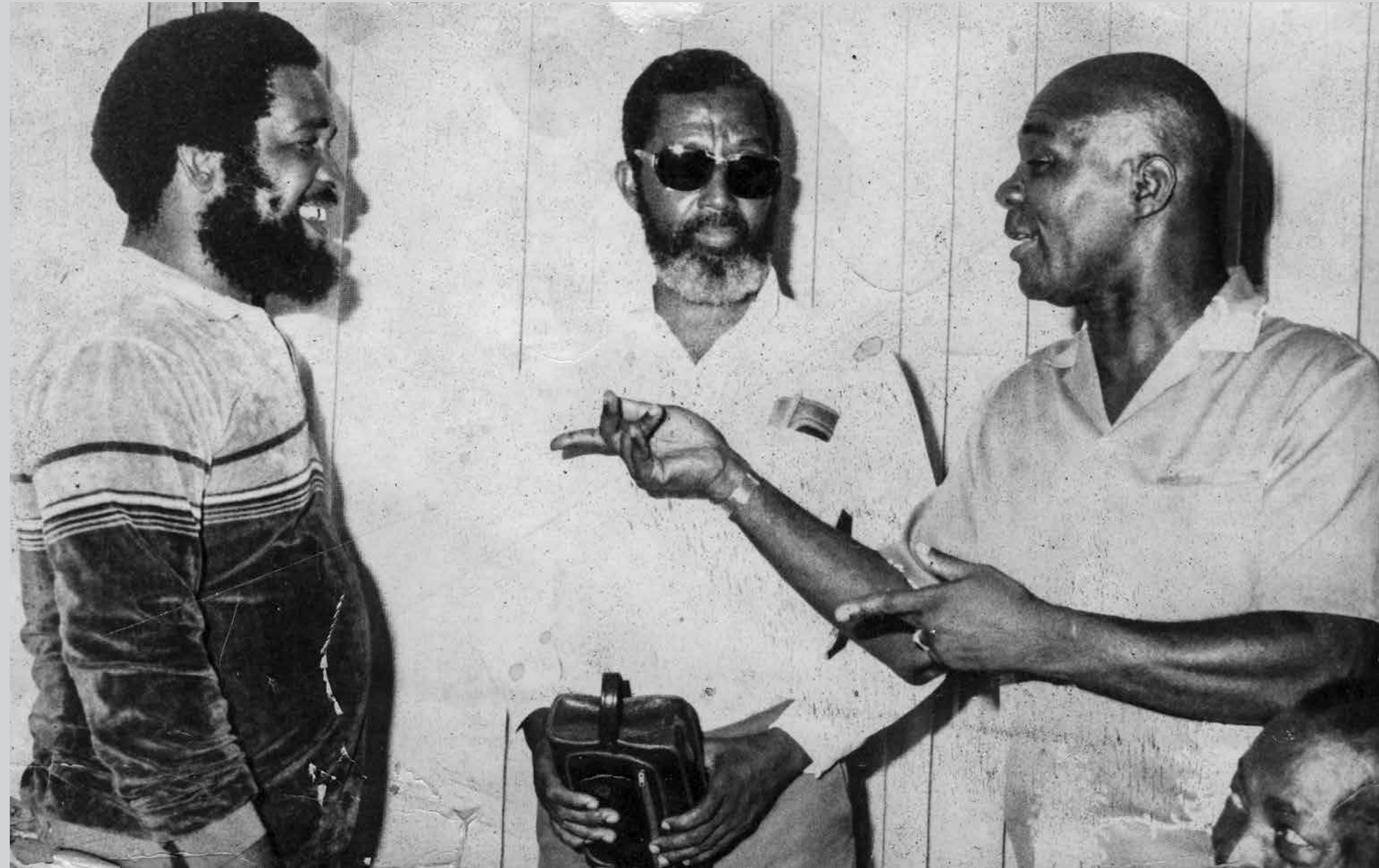
Mack Kinsale, (with binoculars), circa 1947.
 Photo courtesy of Reynold Kinsale.

“A saga boy is a fella who does be well dressed. A robust man is a fella who looking for trouble. Well, even though you is well dressed or not, and you is a steelband man, you included.
 Now, a lot of fellas used to do in these same war days when the bands and they would interfere with other people, lick down a man and say, I is a Red Army, jus they didn't like that band through the jealousy. I eh making no bones about it. Because whenever we go to a dance we used to command control because we going...we go competition and we go with tie.
 We used to change outfit, we had no one outfit, but one shirt we used to use, a cream shirt with a cream tie and a officer cap with the signature. And the tie. We had blue tie, we had red tie, and we had cream tie, to suit the pants, black pants.
 We have to go out tonight, if we have to go out tomorrow night we change the pants but we still have the same shirt with the cap, but we must have we tie. When a little band would come on the stage with a short pants because they can't afford, no one was to blame for it because we was the glamour boys.
 When you come off that base, brother, cause then the American ships coming from the base, they coming up and the first stop is Green Corner.
 Everything, everything, all the activity is on Green Corner, everything. Who want a dollar have to come from every any area to Green Corner. There was the action.
 Well, you for instance you had shoes, Brazilian, in those days you used the Brazilian shoes, you have on a nice Brazilian shoe. A Stetson, that's an American hat, a Stetson. And you have a garbadine pants and that kind of thing, real real real hot. In the latest style. You move away from bell bottom and you have start with the jitterbug.
 Jitterbug pants is a little gun mouth. Everything that you do is the American styling. The pictures used to come down and you go to theatre and you see jitterburg pants and you go. Up to this present day, all the fashions is American, even though you is a Japanese but you gone to American, same trend.
 You have nothing else. Trinidad way back in the early days there was nothing for a fella to recreate himself with, nothing.”

Mack Kinsale, Red Army

“ I remember a Christmas, bands was on the road, we wasn’t playing anything, Bar 20 steelband was in the road, it was heading towards Gonzales, and I was in the band and I saw Zigilee playing a tenor kittle—three notes. He had it on his shoulder here... but all I was more interested in is the sound he was getting from that and whenever he stopped playing, like the band just do so. And whenever he start to play again the band get a lift. So I say, I want a pan like that. He didn’t give me a beat and I went immediately and I tune one.”

Neville Jules, Trinidad All Stars



Arnim Smith was the acting president of Pan Trinbago when he led the pan boycott of Panorama in 1979, largely under the momentum of the organization’s radicals. Otherwise, he was a lightweight compared to George Goddard and Zigilee Barrow. George Goddard played mas in Alexander’s Ragtime Band in 1941, and after the war joined Invaders. Once the Steelbands Association was formed he was elected vice

secretary in 1950 and president from 1957-1959. Thereafter Goddard straddled the steelband movement like a titan for the next 40 years, leading the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandmen (NATTS) from 1962-1971, and when that was destroyed and replaced by Pan Trinbago, he led that new body from 1978-1979. The third man, Carlton Zigilee Constantine was the one who

turned my head a Saturday afternoon in the Trinidad Express newsroom. He was small but robust and he told stories in rapidly in a high-pitched voice. He told mesmerizing stories of the early days of the steelband movement, starting in 1940 when he was 14 and was first arrested by the police for parading with the Hell Yard band. Zigilee was a founding member of Bar 20, which retaliated against

police aggression during and immediately after the war. But he was also a virtuoso on both the three-note tenor kittle and the ping pong, as Lord Kitchener noticed in his 1945

“The beat of the steelband”:
Yes I heard the beat of a steelband
Friends, I couldn’t understand
It was hard to make a distinction
Between Poland, Bar 20 and John
John

Zigilee, Pops and Battersby
They coming with a semitone melody
When they start the contrary beat
They had people jumping wild in the street
Port of Spain nearly catch afire
When the bands were crossing the Dry River
Zigilee, master of the ping pong
Had people jumping wild in the town.

“ Now from a boy I serve my apprentice in Hell Yard. In 1940 - we have a fete here that’s called Siparia fete... it was the first time the old lady gave me the free will to walk down on my own to the railway station... I was going down Charlotte St. to the railway station. Well, the band was raided there by the police. Out of about 600 people, two of us got arrested and I happened to be one. I got bail about 3 o’clock in the evening—it’s too late for anything now because all the trains gone already... When the old lady hear that she put some restriction on me: ‘You see you and this band going down in this Hell Yard? Well, somewhere along the line it have to stop.’

I got lock up in the year 1940. We just leave bamboo and we just gone into pan. That is the year when I got lock up. So all these things start to happen afterwards. 41 or 42. That is how Bar 20 come to born, because I had to go about 8 or 900 yards to get to Hell Yard, but in [my] yard itself Bar 20 born. I was 14.

So everything was going all right with the old lady, and the band start to grow. And since the band start to grow, swearing and everything in the yard – it was coming too heavy for the yard. And then a woman moved down from the yard, a woman called Muriel White. She had a good yard, cursing and thing was no object to she, so the band shift from my yard and went in that yard. And that is where Bar 20 make its name then. People start coming from all about now because it come something like a new sound, something different. Now, the bamboo era was eradicated, no more bamboo then.

I was in the hot seat and from there on I start to get arrest and arrest and arrest for nothing I don’t know at all. I could remember a time in a week I got arrested about three times and not one of them I did know anything about till when I went in the station... When I was 19 I had 23 convictions... all these things I had, especially through steelband.”

Carlton “Zigilee” Constantine,
Bar 20/Casablanca/City Syncopaters



In several of my photos, such as this one, I felt that the supporters of the steelband were as important as the panmen. Perhaps because the musicians and their audience together made the musical moment. The call made no sense without its response, and it was equally important to remember those who supported their bands as those who constituted them, if there was any difference, that is. The images drew me so close to those young men and women I could see the whites of their eyes, as if they were there in the newsroom with me and Zigilee. I was transported by some photos from the time when those moments were frozen 60 year ago, to my present contemplation of them. Yet they also made me acutely aware that the young people in the photographs were no longer with us. Some have become unrecognizably old, many are dead. Straddling two eras can evoke regret, remorse or grief for what has been lost. When you gaze into History it might just gaze back into you. One young man at a viewing of some of my photographs

burst into tears, overwhelmed by the image of his dead father as a young man. But the more common response was a sense of patrimony, a feeling of pride in the achievements of these young men in the photographs for the legacy they left us. The historical context which links us to the men in the photographs invites us to share a sense of gratitude, to not taking things for granted; it leads to an appreciation of the beauty of life even amidst its woes. Cognates of the Latin gratia – which gives us gracias – bring out its spiritual and secular dimensions: in the grace of God, which saves us from sin and death, and the grace of the beautiful dancer, which is equally a gift. It reminds us that this gift is gratuitous: freely given, gratis, without request or recompense. And this book, in detailing and recounting the gift of pan, is my way of saying to those who created pan, the inventors who wrought the instrument, the men and women who struggled and in cases fought to nurture and protect the movement and those who created the music, and to those who helped me with this project: thank you.

*Fonclaire Steel Orchestra,
Skinner Park, San Fernando, 1968.
Photo courtesy of Milton “Wire” Austin.*



Repercussions 1880-1939

The operative principle underlying the music Africans brought to the New World is that music must help people to live. This is a functional approach to music: it is made to give people strength when they are weak; it must lift their spirits when they are down. With music people can celebrate the joys of life, and indeed it is itself one of life's greatest pleasures, yet it must also connect people with their ancestors in the land of the dead, and with the gods in the heavens above. Most importantly, music must strengthen the bonds between people because only with and through others do we become fully human.

Left to right: Boysie

“Little” Cook, Pierre Bandeau, Wellington “Killey” Yeanwood, “Musso” Straker, Unknown and Joe “Patam Pam” Gibbs. Although this ensemble was created around 1935, it was unnamed at the time and known only by the group of men who called themselves the “First Eleven”. The band ceased to exist by 1940, but it was revived by folklorist Edric Connor as the “Gonzales Rhythm Makers” in July 1943 when Connor presented a lecture-demonstration to the Trinidad Music Association at the Bishop Anstey High School. His topic was “The African influences on Trinidad Culture”, and he called on the Gonzales men to demonstrate some of his points. He spoke of song games, folk tales, dances, kalenda, bele, limbo, bongo, canboulay, work songs, spirituals, calypso, and the instrumentation for all of these. The photograph on the previous page and on pages 32, 40 and 42 were probably taken around the date of the lecture in 1943 although the instruments and personnel were more or less the same as in 1937.

“The climax came naturally in the form of drumming and dancing. With the rapt attention of every member of the audience the men from Gonzales Place gave forth upon the ‘steel orchestra,’ the ‘tamboo bamboo’ and on substitutes of their own making for the shango drums.

Trinidad Guardian August 1, 1943 p6.



“Negro Dance in the island of Dominica” by Agostino Brunias, 1779.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

It was the same everywhere: “In the afternoons on Sundayes, they have their Musick, which is of kettle drums,” wrote Richard Ligon in 1673 of Barbados.

“They dance with uncommon pleasure, and most times foot it away with great art and dexterity... Every Saturday evening, the slaves who are well treated close the week with an entertainment of this kind,” wrote J.G. Steadman in 1769 of Surinam.

“I have seen a hundred or more dancing at a time... the principal dancing time is on Sunday afternoons,” wrote John Luffman in 1789 of Antigua.

“They are extremely fond of music and dancing,” wrote William Beckford in 1790 of Jamaica.

“If not prevented by whites, according to the law of the island, they will meet on Saturday-nights,

hundreds of them in gangs, and dance and sing till morning; nay, sometimes they continue their balls without intermission till Monday-morning,” wrote J.B. Moreton in 1790 of the West Indian slaves in general.

The whites feared and loathed black music-making. The noise disturbed them. The drumming and dancing outraged both their musical tastes and their sense of propriety, especially Protestants, for whom the Sabbath was sacred and the African music satanic. Additionally, the whites were terrified of unsupervised slave gatherings. Indeed, a drum dance carded for Christmas in 1805 by the slaves of several planters in Trinidad’s North-West Peninsula was brutally suppressed for fear of being a planned rebellion.

Yet there was no attempt to entirely stop the drum dances, which emotionally and therefore physically sustained the labour force. Indeed, Africans were made to dance on the slave ships to keep from becoming too dispirited and suicidal. But the dances had to be controlled. By law they were to stop at 9 p.m. until morning. So the Africans started back just after midnight, although Mrs. Carmichael, the wife of one planter, describes a dance that began at 8 p.m.. Antoine St Bresson, a planter, explained to a committee that the drum dances in Trinidad regularly continued through the night and into the morning.

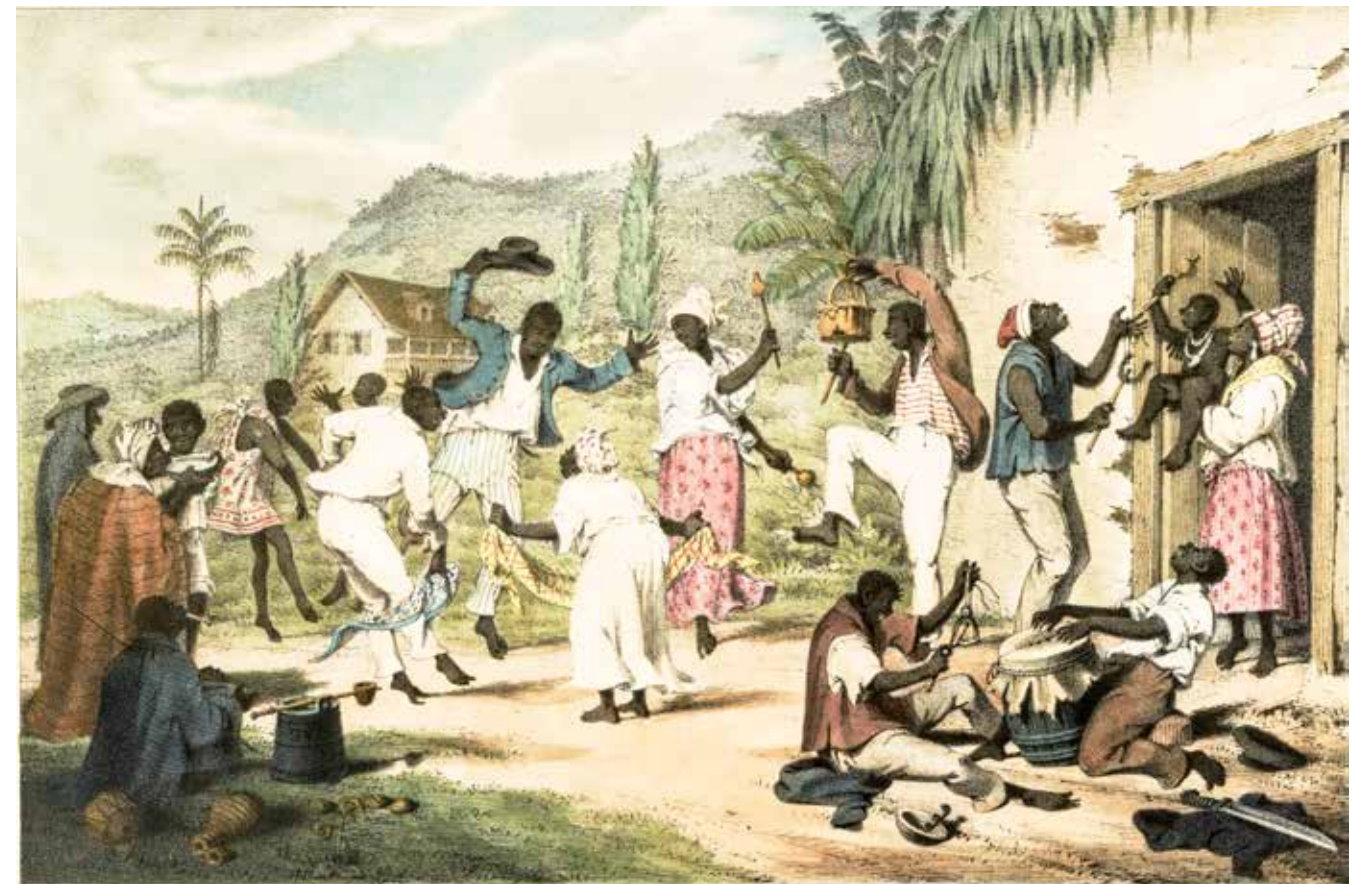
“Do not the regulations restrict dancing beyond nine o’clock at night?” queried the investigating councillors. St Bresson replied:

“They do. But on common occasions you cannot restrict them to that hour unless you leave your bed yourself; and on the particular occasions I allude to, they would be so discontented if not permitted to follow their usual custom that no master would venture to prevent it.”

Besides, despite their fear and loathing most whites had come to like the music, as James Stewart, an English visitor to Jamaica, observed with surprise at a white ball in 1823: “Even if the music of the violins were better than it is it would be spoiled by the uncouth and deafening noise of the drums, which the negro musicians think indispensable... and the dancers strangely continue to tolerate.”

“It may almost be said that Negro recreation is comprised in the word dancing... A drum, made of a barrel, covered at one end with a piece of dried goat’s skin, and a coarse instrument (termed a shak-shak) formed of a hollow calabash, in which some shot or stones are enclosed; these, when the former is beaten violently and the latter shaken unintermittingly, produce a din highly gratifying to the negro ear, but which it is almost impossible for the more delicate organ of a white man to bear. This is generally accompanied by the voices of several of the party, whose vocal efforts are, if possible, more overpowering than the noise of the instruments... all their movements in dancing are marked by great activity. They seem to seek in muscular exertion a means of letting off a portion of the superabundant animal spirits of which they appear to keep a supply in reserve for such occasions. The bending of the body forwards... which is accompanied by an indescribable wriggling motion from side to side, is worthy of notice.”

Richard Bridgens, artist



“Negro Dance in the island of Dominica” by Agostino Brunias, 1779.
Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



*Special Music on **Marine Square**, 1949. Photo courtesy of **Cmdr. Jack Williams**. The shekere gourd “shakers”, **Cmdr Williams**’ “special music”, suggests the masqueraders were a “**Shango Band**”. Shekere percussion was used by Orisha devotees occasionally in **Trinidad** and regularly in **Grenada**. Carriacouans were referred to as “boli people” – “boli” being the term used for the calabash gourd.*

The music achieved its work through its very nature. Call-and-response antiphonal chants, for example, joined the chantwell to the chorus, or the musician to the audience, which claps, dances, shouts, boos and generally interacts actively with the music. But deeper than the call-response structure is the musical bedrock of rhythm, which brings people together. It is rhythm that binds two dancers together cheek to cheek and unites a village of worshippers. Rhythm amplifies the strength of workers collectively pulling, lifting, rowing or even just walking. Then somehow the labour becomes not just easier but pleasurable.

This rhythm-making was practised in both sacred rituals and secular events; it was integral to work and play, labour and pleasure. It was there in the slaves’ Saturday night drum dances and in their invocations of the gods; in children’s ring games and in work songs. The impulse to create rhythms was found most importantly in the

aural aesthetic of Africans. That is, the African taste in sound, their idea of what music should sound like, determined how they would make it. Music without a steady pulse was, to the Africans in the New World, like food without seasoning, because the drums were, as James Stewart observed, indispensable.



***Rising Sun Steel Orchestra** in **Kingstown**, **St Vincent**. Photo courtesy of **Roderick Toussaint**. Left to Right: **George Pujadas**, **Glen Armstrong**, **Lennox Lowhar**, **Albert Jones** (trade unionist and militant president of the Steelbands Association 1959-1961), **Dudley Smith**, **George Armstrong**, **Horace Toussaint**, **Percy Thomas**, **Patrick Antoine**, **Robbie Greaves**. Photo courtesy of **Roderick Toussaint**.*

Rising Sun was came from the Rada (Vodun) compound on Belmont Circular Road, Port of Spain, which was also the home of the band’s captain and virtuoso Dudley Smith (who came first in the ping-pong soloist categories of the Music Festivals of 1952 and 1954) and several other members (such as Sedley “Ovzovy” Antoine, Vernon, Vivien and Hugh “Delimo” Baptiste, Patrick “Zaba” Anthony and the Antoine brothers). Next door was the Rose Bowl, a nightclub owned by impresario Ranny Phillip, who organized the first island-wide steelband competition in 1946, and sponsored the first overseas tour of a steelband (Red Army’s visit to British Guiana) that year. Phillip also arranged for Rising Sun to tour St Vincent in 1947. Two doors from the compound was



Henry Antoine, “Huto” or Father of the Drums, in the Rada compound in Belmont Valley Road. Photo by Andrew Pearse, courtesy of Jean Pearse.

the residence of trade unionist, cultural activist and politician Albert Gomes. His African Name was “Dawendo” and the compound on Belmont Circular Road, occupied by the extended Antoine clan, was established in 1886 by Dawendo’s father, Robert. Their Rada religion from Dahomey (now Benin), also known as Vodun, shares many beliefs with the Orisha religion of the Yorubas, including a ritual centrality, both sacred and secular, of drums and drumming. Such practices contributed to preserving African percussive traditions, and several early panmen played drums in Orisha rituals. Hill 60 captain Henry “Patcheye” Pacho’t, for instance, the greatest virtuoso on the biscuit drum, learnt drumming in an

Orisha palais in Laventille; brothers Andrew and Jeffrey Beddoe were top Orisha drummers and played pan for Destination Tokyo and Desperadoes respectively. The Belmont steelband Rising Sun was formed in the Rada compound, which provided many of its leading members. Knowing first-hand the repressiveness of colonial society, Orisha devotees perhaps empathised with the ostracised young panmen, and several steelbands found succour in an Orisha palais, starting with, the early Gonzales Rhythm Makers, which formed in Tantie Willie’s yard; Tacarigua’s Dead End Kids was formed next to Mother Gerard’s shrine; St. James North Stars was given succor in “Giant” Polydor’s Orisha yard.

“Every morning I have to go for bread. Eventually I went for the bread Carnival J’ouvert Morning to give them [my sisters] to go to work. They looking for me after eight, nine, ten, they can’t find me.

“When I did come back my mother ask me, “Where you went?” She tell me which part I come out? So I tell her ‘I see a man tall, tall up in the air dancing and I followed the man and I buy sweetbread and I eat it.’ So she start to beat me. The neighbour did so like me. She say, ‘You go kill him? He tell you where he went.’

“I was 11 years. Eh-eh, just so I sit down which part my mother have she place selling and thing and she in the back. I hear this ‘brrrrr piting batak batak!’ You see them pitch oil tin? A fella beating that and the moko jumbie. He swing down Charlotte Street and which part my mother right ... he a little further. Yes, swing from the Piggy [Cooperative] Bank down into Charlotte Street.

“When I do so I see him. I say, ‘Mama, mama! Veni, veni!’ I telling she, ‘Come quick, come quick!’ And she come and see the man. The neighbours and all run out too and they see the man, this moko jumbie they does call Tall Boy. All he head inside the people upstairs and he dancing.

“She start to cry. My mother start to cry. I get weak. Well she sorry now that she had beat me. She thought I was lying. The neighbours come out and say ‘He eh lie, he tell you what he do with the money. Look he see the moko jumbie, he call you to see what happen’

Andre “Lulie” Abbott, Hell Yard bamboo band



Moko Jumbie stilt-mas in Port of Spain with his musical accompaniment, circa 1949.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Raymond.

Fife-and-drum bands were found wherever there were Africans in the New World. They were common in the Lesser Antilles but rare in Trinidad. In Barbados, however, in the Christmas season fife-and-kettle “tuk bands” accompanied costumed characters such as Shaggy Bear, Donkey Man, Mother Sally (a masked man dressed as a woman with an enormous bottom, clearly related to Trinidad’s Dame Lorraines) and “tiltman” (stiltman) – a moko jumbie.

Apart from their weekend drum dances during slavery, Africans throughout the Caribbean also marked births and deaths with drumming and dancing whenever they could. In the USA it only took place in Congo Square in New Orleans, and their drumming impulse was shunted into tap dancing. Here, collective manual labour was performed to call-and-response singing and the annual feasts were passionately celebrated with highly rhythmic music.

After Emancipation black Barbadians celebrated Crop Over with “landship” organisations (friendly societies with hierarchies similar to the sailor bands in Trinidad Carnival); in Jamaica and the Bahamas there were Jonkunno masquerades at Christmas. Attempts to suppress the Jonkonnu in Jamaica in 1848 was met with major rioting. In St Kitts there were Christmas mummings. And so on, throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

Such festivals encouraged all of the African communal arts: highly rhythmic music, dance, masking, verbal display, martial sports and parades of hierarchic, competitive organizations. In Trinidad January 1833, seven months before the Act of Emancipation, “the lower order of the population” felt an urge to masquerade in the streets. The Assistant Chief of Police arrested some of them for violating the Sabbath, upon which the said lower order responded by stoning his house and beating him up. We took our spontaneous Carnivals seriously.

Migrants everywhere often feel a burning need to periodically band together to affirm and celebrate their communal solidarity, and no one felt this more strongly than the Africans transported to the New World. Fortunately, they also possessed cultural tools specifically designed to foster group solidarity – music and dance and, even during the slavery era, the propensity to form large, supportive organisations. In 1805 a white madwoman alleged that a revolt was planned for Christmastime by slave “regiments” of kings, queens, princes and dauphins. Some groups were creole; others comprised Africans, Grenadians or Martiniquans. It was suppressed brutally.

Unlike Christmas and Crop Over, however, Carnival can encompass the widest range of African performance arts. There is music, dance, oral artforms, costuming, and ritual combat. What’s more Carnival, such as took place in the Catholic territories – Trinidad, Grenada, St Lucia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba – is about transformation. Here are invited to enact your fantasies as an individual or in a group; as such it especially suited 19th century Trinidad, a society of recent immigrants. It



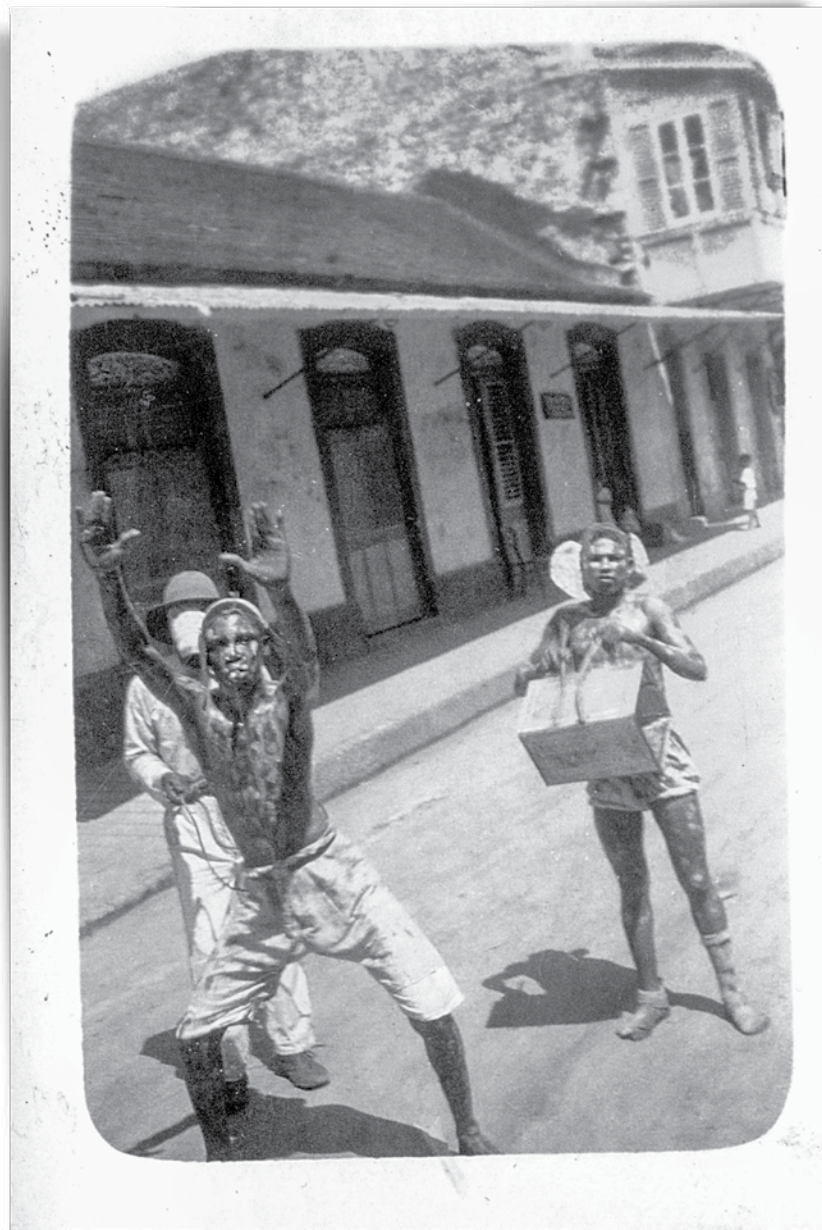
“A Cudgelling Match between English and French Negroes in the Island of Dominica, 1779.”
Print made by Agostino Brunias, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. Public domain.

is a celebration of the novel, the eccentric and the transgressive, which worked well in Trinidad, which had an unusual rift within the white upper class. There was a governing class of Protestant Englishmen which outraged by Carnival excesses, confronted by a ruling class of mainly French Catholic plantation owners (known as French Creoles), who were protective of “their” Carnival, and. So there were Europeans from France, Britain, Portugual and Spain; Africans liberated from slave ships, black West Indian immigrants from Barbados, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago and other islands. Then there were Indians, Chinese and, most importantly, French patois-speaking black and coloured ex-slaves, whose fervour and boisterousness after emancipation intimidated the whites.

With different groups jostling in the society for cultural space, Carnival became an arena of cultural contestation. The middle and upper classes were satirized, or harassed for handouts. Stickfighting, a martial art practiced throughout the region, merged in Trinidad with a dance known as calenda and was practiced by gangs from different districts. According to Bridget Brereton these gangs included “the Free-grammar from Corbeau Town, the Bois d’Inde from Upper Prince Street, the Bakers from east of the Market, the Danois from the Dry River, the Peau de Canelle from the Royal Jail area, the Corail from Newtown, the s’Amandes from the Wharves, the Maribones from Belmont and the Cerf-Volants from Duncan Street.”

“They used to call that a ‘sweet-oil’ tin. They used to have olive oil in that. Them shop used to sell it. Anybody go for ten cents’ oil, penny oil, they had a ladle and they dip it out and put it in whatever container you bring, if you bring a saucer or a cup. They started with a sweet oil can -- that was terrible to the ear! It’s a really noisy thing, and in those days the more noise you make the better because it’s the further away from you people will hear you and they will come. But I couldn’t take it. I didn’t like this sweet oil tin. This thing was terrible, this pan was terrible and I didn’t used to go nowhere near it. It’s a can, square, they used to put sweet oil in it, vegetable oil, oh boy. They used to bore a hole and run a string and bore a hole put a string and run it round your neck. Noise! But it was nice you know. People used to enjoy it.”

Alfred “Sack” Mayers, Red Army/Merry Makers



Jab Molassie (“Molasses Devil), Carnival, 1933, accompanied by a percussionist.
Photo courtesy of Edmund Nankivell

Calypsonian Roaring Lion, a keen observer and exponent of Afro-Trinidadian musical culture, saw the jab molassie as one progenitor of pan. In 1940 he made the first recordings with an iron band called the Sa Gomes Rhythm Boys for Decca. The iron band was based in Hell Yard and would later evolve into Trinidad All Stars. It’s conductor was Lt. Joseph Griffiths, who would go on to become the musical director of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra. That year Lion sang about the origins of the steelband:

We know it as jab molassie band,
Bad behaviour and boboley band,
But New Town boys changed the name
And decided to invade Port of Spain.
So they marched down town banner in hand,
Signed ‘Alexander Ragtime Band’

Stickfights were regularly broken up by the police in 1878-9, and in 1880 the Carnival-Sunday-night torch processions known as canboulay were ordered to surrender their torches, staves and drums. Caught off-guard, the gangs acquiesced, but the following year they united to attack the police, which they did with considerable success. Governor Freeling had to concede that the police would be confined to barracks and there would be no attempt to stop the Carnival. But in 1882 the government introduced a “Music Bill” which made a police license necessary to beat drums, tambours and shak-shaks from



6 a.m. to 10 p.m., after which it was absolutely prohibited. Public outcry forced the government to withdraw the bill, but Ordinance 11 of 1883 was passed to make property-owners liable for “rogues and vagabonds” on their premises singing and dancing to drums. Also prohibited were torch processions and assemblies of more than ten persons armed with sticks. Musical instruments could



Calenda stickfighting, Trinidad, circa 1946. Photo by Stanley Stone, courtesy of Charlotte Elias.
By then calenda was a martial art performed by individual champions, especially in the rural towns and villages. Its combative spirit infused both calypso and the steelband, however.



only be played in public between 6 a.m. on Carnival Monday and midnight the following Tuesday. There were riots when the police tried to stop the drum dances, but gradually the African drum was excluded from Carnival. Stickfighting retreated to the countryside. By 1920 some of the chantwells who formerly led the canboulay processions, had metamorphosed into calypsonians.

The yards where they rehearsed became known as calypso tents. The Carnival groups the calypsonians had abandoned were now accompanied by musical ensembles that ranged from Venezuelan-style string bands to a variety of ensembles, including bamboo groups and the occasional metal and blittle-and-spoon percussionists.