

OPReP NEWSLETTER

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Feature Article

SOCA PARANG/ PARANG SOCA

by

Francisca Allard

Soca parang/parang soca can be identified as a distinctive, innovative musical form that has emerged out of the prolonged encounter of differing music cultures (parang, soca, chutney). This branch of indigenous music is confined to the Christmas period and thus it can be described as the adaptation of parang music to other musical genres (soca, chutney), within the society and its consequent syncretism to form musical creations.

There exists the polemical issue as to whether this hybridised music should be termed soca parang or parang soca. This is because the songs (that belong to this new genre) vary with respect to their levels of retention of the characteristics of parang music and their assimilation of the structures of other musical genres.

For the purpose of clarity, the creations that have retained more elements from the parang genre would be defined as parang soca and those that have assimilated more characteristics from the soca genre would be described as soca parang.

Christmas parang, (la parranda navideña), was brought to Trinidad

by the immigrant peons of Oriente, Venezuela during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This music was transmitted principally through imitation and observation by the subsequent generation of Trinidad-born peons/cocoa panyols. Thus Christmas parang persisted, gaining a tenacious hold in the culture of Trinidad rural society.

The inherent qualities that typify Trinidad's traditional parang music are:

1. the estribillo (parang beat)
2. compound duple time (6/8)
3. hexasyllabic quatrains with alternate interplay of verse and chorus
4. abcb/abab rhyme scheme
5. the use of Caribbean Spanish
6. the use of the three primary triads (tonic [I], subdominant [IV], and dominant [V])
7. the focus on any aspect of the Christmas story (annunciation, birth, shepherds, etc.)
8. the use of the cuatro, acoustic guitar, mandolin, flute, box bass, maracas, toc toc, scratcher
9. high-pitched cries and interjections
10. the anonymity of the compositions-

Other secular songs that were brought to Trinidad by the cocoa

In this issue you will find:

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panyols of Oriente, Venezuela, have also been absorbed into the parang motif. Examples of these songs are the Rio Manzanares, sabana blanca, guarapo and the seis corrido, all of which are variations of the golpe oriental.

The guarapo, which is also called 'warap' in Trinidad is octosyllabic in form, employs the estribillo beat and its concomitant compound duple time signature (6/8), as well as the three primary triads (I, IV and V). The music is described as 'sweet' just as the sugar cane juice after which it has been named.

The seis corrido is a simple melody which moves easily through its chordal progression of I, IV and V, accompanied by the uncomplicated melodic theme played by the mandolin. This straightforward theme is supported by the characteristic sharp, prolonged cry of the cantor. As the melody unfolds, certain typical musical runs of melodic lines can be observed. The principal cantor sings a phrase and the chorus replies 'seis, seis, seis,' in the call and response form.

Both compositions, "I drinking anything" and "Anita" sung by Scrunter can be termed reinterpretations of the seis corrido. They may also be termed parang soca, since elements of the parang genre are predominant. "Anita" makes use of the long, high-pitched note that is characteristic of the seis, while both compositions employ the estribillo rhythm, 6/8 time, the chordal combination of I, IV and V, the Christmas theme (though secular) and the parang instruments.

Scrunter's popular ditty, "I want a piece of pork" has adopted the entire melodic line and chord

structure of the guarapo, thus impacting upon the ears of the parang stalwarts as a traditional parang tune sung in English. The characteristics of the parang genre are also made obvious by the dominant strum of the cuatro, the audible mandolin runs, the subdued bass line and the little or no drum programming.

Selections such as "A Lady had a Baby" (Crazy) and "Hooray Hoorah" (Francine) may also be described as parang soca, since the parang element supersedes that of soca. These songs deal with the Christmas story, employ an obvious estribillo rhythm with its characteristic compound duple time (6/8), its chordal combination of I, IV and V, its use of high-pitched cries and interjections (Spanish mainly despite the use of English for the textual content) and the percussive parang instruments that place them within the parang genre. The soca element in these songs is limited to the underlying bass rhythm that runs counter to the estribillo rhythm.

Other compositions that can be placed within the category of parang soca are: "Soca Santa" (Machel Montano), "Daisy Gone" (Susan Maicoo), "Bring out the ham" (Marcia Miranda), "Serenio" (Gypsy), "Bring drinks" (Sprangalang), and "Trini Christmas" (Susan Maicoo). Again, these songs are more recognizable as parang, because of their strong estribillo rhythm, maintained by the percussive and acoustic instruments. The soca bass rhythm adds the touch of soca to the melodies.

Songs such as "Serenio", "Bring out the ham" and "Bring drinks" may be described as simplistic or even inane, notwithstanding the fact that they are greatly appreciated by the Trinidadian public. "Bring drinks"

is especially 'tickling' with its nonsensical humorous lyrics, its off-pitch solo voice and abundant 'talk lines' all supported by the music.

The song, "Political Parang" sung by Cro Cro (Weston Rawlins) may also be categorized as parang soca. It employs the estribillo rhythm (6\8), and high-pitched ejaculations and interjections (in the form of Spanish vocables). The effective mandolin runs, the rhythmic strum intermixed with rolls of the cuatro, and the predominance of the percussive parang instruments also place the song within the parang genre. However, the major use of the English lyrics sung in calypso style has changed the contour of the composition and given it a non-traditional form and structure.

In the realm of the Trinidad Christmas parang, the composition "Political Parang" is indeed an innovation since it is the first of its kind. Like the calypso in the category of social commentary, it deals with socio-political issues in a satirical manner. Still, Cro Cro has skilfully included the Christmas theme in lines like these:

Black man open your eye
You could eat your turkey and ham
But doh forget your plan
To rise back in dis lan'

Black man open your eye
De situation bad
Dey treating de black man bad
But Feliz Navidad

It is the tune "Salt fish" however, (another parang soca composition) sung by Super Rod, that has aroused the ire of a number of Trinidadians. Their complaint is that it has been composed along the lines of the calypso, with its

'double entendre' and sexual innuendo, and to them this is sacrilegious. They argue that the traditional reason for singing parang was to praise God for sending Jesus into the world, and thus to use the artform in such a way is to show a lack of responsibility as well as a lack of respect for the traditional custom.

Two other parang soca songs, also considered to be a prostitution of the parang artform are "The cork" (Kenny J.) and "Kill the cock" (Super Rod). These songs, however, are little known since they never grew in popularity.

Branching out of the parang soca category are chutney parang songs. Three examples are "Mamacita" (Sharlene Boodram), "Indian Parang" (Dhanmatee Keesoondath, Kenny J. and Daisy Voisin) and "We Jam" (Daisy Voisin and Hazel Rambaransingh). These three compositions are illustrations of hybrid songs, blending East Indian music and parang almost evenly. "Mamacita" is an example of this kind of syncretism, where, within the confines of the dominant estribillo rhythm, the tassa drums alternately roll and syncopate in typical East Indian style.

Both "Indian Parang" (sung in English, Spanish and Hindi) and "We Jam" (sung in English and Spanish) are characterised by poly-rhythm. A variety of instruments have been used – violin, electronic guitar, steel pan, cuatro, maracas, toc toc and tassa drums. The maracas, cuatro, toc toc and bass guitar provide the steady pulse or time line, which is that of the estribillo rhythm (6/8/?·?·). Within the limits of the estribillo beat, the tassa drums are played in a series of rolls and staccato strokes while the steel pan, violin and

electronic guitar interplay freely, creating a mixture of rhythms over the basic, underlying rhythm.

The category of soca parang includes songs such as "Ay Ay Maria" (Singing Francine) and "Christmas is Love" (Singing Francine). In these selections the soca rhythm (2/2) is carried by the guitars, cuatros, drums and percussive instruments. As a result the soca component is dominant and the parang element is relegated to the steady toc toc beat, the Christmas theme and the sound of the traditional parang instrument.

Songs such as "Take a drink" (Poser), "I come out to dance" (Susan Maico), "Spanish Confusion" (Flores de San Jose), "Black Cake Lover" (Sugar Aloes), and "Give me a parang" (Dinámicos) also fall into the category of soca parang. Exclamatory Spanish phrases, roll of the tongue and the use of parang instruments inject the parang aspect. The themes of these songs are simple and light-hearted, dealing generally with the non-religious aspect of Christmas.

"We paranging now" (Dinámicos) is another example of soca parang, since it blends cultural elements from two distinct musical genres (soca and parang). The lyrics are basically English (only two lines of Spanish are used) and the rhythm of the piece, maintained by the bass-line movement, is definitely soca (s\s). On the other hand, the songs bear a number of features that are characteristic of the traditional house-to-house serenal – the simple chord structure (D, G, A) of the music, as well as the gaiety of the cantors and their spontaneous vocal interjections.

In the category of soca parang, there are also two songs bordering

on the obscene, which have offended the sensibilities of traditional parang stalwarts. Two of these are "I want mih brush" and "Alexander", sung by Kenny J. The sexual innuendo and 'double entendre' are obvious in these songs. Nevertheless, these songs are quite popular and very much appreciated by the less critical populace. Even the critics have admitted that the music of these songs is indeed appealing with its harmonious blend of instruments and catchy melodic lines.

"Cuchi La La" (Taxi) and "Sokah Chutney Parang" (Leon Coldero) fall into a sub-category of soca parang that may be described as soca chutney parang. In these songs there is the injection of a soca bass rhythm that runs counter to the estribillo beat and the chutney tassa rhythm. These rhythms complement and enhance each other as the parang instruments interplay with the tassa drums and the soca bass line.

Another off-shoot of soca parang is lavway¹ parang. This art of lavway parang is best reflected in the repertory of Scrunter. "Backyard Jam" and "Madame Jeffrey Oh" are two examples. The rhythm of these songs is close to that of the calypso, which is slower than soca – hence the term lavway. It is the lavway element that is superimposed above that of the parang, and that which lends the tardy infectiousness of the calypso beat to these songs. The introduction of the 'pan around the neck' steelband music and the 'bottle and spoon', intensify the lavway in "Back Yard Jam". In both songs, the use of parang, percussive instruments and acoustic, stringed instruments help to maintain the parang element.

Before the advent of the hybrid parang soca/soca parang, the Christmas calypso existed and it was recognized as such. Two examples of early Christmas calypsoes are “Drink a rum and a punch-a-creamer” (Kitchener) and “Bottle and Spoon” (Relator). These songs followed the contour of the calypso and the beat was less fast and less syncopated than that of soca.

Summarily, artistes of Trinidad and Tobago have made a valuable contribution to their music culture by the creation of the indigenous parang soca/ soca parang.



ENDNOTES

1. lavway – (derived from the French ‘la voix - the voice’); especially composed for chanting on the streets by a band of masqueraders. (*Kaiso! The Trinidad calypso* by Keith Q. Warner, p. 19); generally used to describe ‘calypso’ that is slow, infectious and ‘saucy’.



FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

It is with great pleasure that we bring this June/December 2004 issue of the OPRéP Newsletter to our well-wishers, contributors and supporters, especially since the newsletter did not appear in 2003 due to circumstances beyond our control. Since this issue is produced to coincide with our festive season, the articles represent aspects of our very spirited Christmas offerings in the musical genre of parang, a fare which transcends our ethnic differences and heralds the season of “peace to all men of good will”.

There are two main articles on the theme. Our feature article by Francisca Allard is entitled “Soca Parang/Parang Soca”. This article represents a well-documented article on the hybridisation of parang music. It is an in-depth analysis of what constitutes traditional parang music, as well as the popular modern adaptations of it. If you did not know it, there is also Christmas parang and the Christmas calypso. Comparisons and contrasts are made, which altogether make for a very interesting exposé on one of our popular art forms.

The other article by Sylvia Moodie-Kublalsingh entitled “Old Time Parang” where she gives a brief historiography not only of parang music, but of the link with Spain and its influence on the island of Trinidad and Tobago and more especially, of the relationship and influence of Venezuela on the evolution of parang in Trinidad. She also looks at the changes that have crept in over the years to the artform as many of today’s parang

singers do not “speak or understand Spanish”.

The interview column complements the articles in an interview that highlights another of our artforms – folk singing. The formation of one of Trinidad and Tobago’s earliest folk choirs, La Petite Musicale is described in this column.

The Notes and Queries column speaks to the heart of our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society by examining three of our major religious festivals - Christmas, Eid and Divali, and ends by alluding to the prospect of their future convergence one day, on the same day 25th December?

The pictorial column comprises photographs of the highly acclaimed Los Dinámicos parang group of which Ms. Allard is the manager and lead singer. The group boasts of having produced compact discs, and has performed throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and internationally. At national competitions, the group has been in winners row on several occasions.

As is customary at this time of year, the Editor and members of OPRéP take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy and Peaceful 2005.

Kathleen Helenese-Paul
Editor



CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

Although the Newsletter has not appeared recently, the OPRéP Programme continues to keep up its momentum by conducting substantial interviews in order to fulfil its mandate of capturing significant events for research and posterity.

Four interviews were conducted during the period 2003-2004.

- An associate of C.L.R. James, Mr. Ezekiel Campbell of San Fernando was interviewed.
- An interview on horse racing in Trinidad, the first for the programme was conducted. The informant was Dr. Steve Bennett.
- George Padmore was the subject of an interview of Mrs. Blyden Nurse-Cowart and Sybil Nurse-Cowart, Padmore's daughter and granddaughter.

Significant discussions took place (2002-2003) between the Centre for Gender and Development Studies and the OPRéP Programme to reach a preliminary agreement on material generated from their own interview agenda - Making of Feminisms in the Caribbean - and joint storage and access within the OPRéP Programme. We are hopeful that this would come to fruition and discussions are continuing.

The Programme maintains the links with the final year undergraduate Caribbean Studies Research Paper (UC300) by the continuation of tutorials on the interview process conducted by the Coordinator.

In recent times links have been forged with the Centre for Festival and Creative Arts in the person of Ms. Jeanine Remy, whose class has recently received a tutorial on interview techniques. Ms. Remy has also donated several audiocassettes of interviews of persons of the steelband fraternity, which her class conducted as part of their course work. She has also donated the accompanying transcripts of those interviews. The Editor and Executive of the OPRéP programme wish to sincerely thank her for her generous donation to the programme.

In May 2004, the OPRéP programme was indeed fortunate to have been granted a Grade 5 clerical assistant with specific duties to transcribe the backlog and current OPRéP interviews, among other duties. The programme wishes to thank the library management for making this possible.

Although the Executive has not met within recent times, a meeting is planned by March 2005. A report on the deliberations will be published in the next issue.

Once again, I wish you all a prosperous 2005. Thank you for your continued support of the Programme.

Kathleen Helenese-Paul
Co-ordinator



Special Article

OLD TIME PARANG: TRADITION AND CHANGE

by

Sylvia Moodie-Kublalsingh

It is 7:00 p.m. on Monday, the eve of the September Republic Day Holiday, 2002. The place: Arouca Eastern Main Road, the pavement under the eaves of a club, a barbershop, a fast food outlet. Cars, taxis fill the narrow thoroughfare jostling with each other to bore their way between cars parked on either side of the road. "Serenno serenno, serenno sera" is sweetly sung by a group of elderly men, complete with the string instruments that are typical of parang. Unusual for the time of year, a little too early, it seems. It is unexpected too, on this section of the East West Corridor where we are used to hearing soca, calypso and dub rhythms on evenings such as this.

Arouca or Arauca of Amerindian Spanish origin is indeed on the southern border of North Trinidad's parang land. A hundred years ago, panyol serenaders descended from the cacao valleys of the northern range to make parang during the festive season, at Christmas, at Easter and to mark other joyous occasions. In the 1920s, the Arouca String Band practiced every week in Convent Street. Among the young musicians was Sotero Gomez who, with his brother, José and Nathaniel Bandol had formed the band, reputedly the first string band in Trinidad. The original instruments played were

the cuatro, violin, bandolin, mandolin, flute, base and much later on, the box bass.

Sotero was one of the many Spanish speaking *parranderos* who were born at the beginning of the twentieth century and whose talent and knowledge were celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago's post independence period. He was from Lopinot Settlement, but was born in Caura, the Spanish valley, which like Lopinot, is in northern Trinidad. Sotero's instrument was the violin, an embellishment in any parang band. The cuatro, maracas and voice formed the core. Often enough Sotero gave the violin a rest and simply played the maracas or cuatro together with his *compadre* Segundo Dolabaille also known as Papa Goon. I remember spending a precious, quiet June afternoon in 1974 with Sotero and Papa Goon, as they sang alternate verses of their wide parang repertoire. They improvised at will in verses they called *picong* (*Sp. picón*), taunting one another good naturedly and jovially.

Yet again at various times in the 1970s and '80s, as well as in the year 2001, I have enjoyed listening to *La Familia de Rio Claro*. *La Familia* is the prototype of the parang band that includes two or three generations making music together. They are an attractive family of aging parents, young men and women and children of primary school age. They practise in their living room, wear beautiful home sewn clothes and blend perfectly. The Trinidad parang is an activity that involves family, friends and community. Parang is an expression of Trinidad's *mestizo* culture. It transcends ethnicity, it crosses racial boundaries and is universally appreciated and acknowledged by a broad spectrum of classes and age groups. As it continues to evolve and is renewed

to suit modern musical styles, there have been conscious attempts to blend the traditional parang with other local and Latin American rhythms. Parang is attaining its own character distinct from that of the Spanish/Venezuelan music from which it originated. In parang can be found the promise of an indigenous musical tradition that is emblematic of a fusion of cultures and interests of a single Trinidad nation. Parang is a reminder that Trinidad was once colonised by Spain. Even more significantly, it bears witness to the fact that the island, just ten to fifteen miles off the coast from its nearest neighbour, Venezuela, is susceptible to Hispanic cultural influences. Movement of people across the Gulf of Paria was frequent in the pre-Columbian period, continued during the Spanish colonial era, and has remained so to date.

Christopher Columbus caught sight of Trinidad on July 31, 1498 on his third voyage across the Atlantic. A few days later, having skirted the coast of the Paria region to the west of the island, by the Guarapiche River, and the channels of the Orinoco Delta, close to present day Pedernales and Macuro, the Genoese navigator became more and more convinced that apart from the islands of Trinidad, Coche, Cubagua and Margarita, he had encountered something on a large scale. The large landmass itself was eventually called Venezuela. All these island and *Terra Firma* were taken in the name of Spain. But the whole area, especially after the pearl fisheries at Margarita were exhausted, was to remain neglected outposts of Spain's lucrative empire. Subsequently, Trinidad and Eastern Venezuela, together with Guyana, seemed to have a common destiny.

By the end of the 1700s Trinidad was carrying on trade with Margarita, Cumana, Barcelona and Guayana. During the tenure of Trinidad's last Spanish governor, José Maria Chacón, Trinidad also initiated a development programme. Its 1783 *Real Cedula* encouraged new settlers to the island. Most of them were from the French Caribbean, Haiti, Grenada and Martinique, but some were of Venezuelan provenance. Venezuelans travelled to Trinidad to trade and work on the sugar plantations and cacao estates. The labourers, known as peons, were similar to the local Spanish peasant: of mixed ancestry and culture. Some were recipients of small parcels of land in the cacao producing valleys where Trinidadians had engaged in cacao production since the previous century. The two groups cemented the Spanish rural *mestizo* culture from which the modern parang developed. This Hispanic tradition continued to be cultivated at a time when African and French Creole influences were being strengthened through the increased number of French landowners and their African-French slaves. The French element was overpowering not only from the point of view of demography but also because of the dominant role played by the French landowners in the economy and politics of the Spanish island.

By 1797 when the island was ceded to the British, Spanish culture itself seemed destined to be smothered into extinction by the overwhelming French/African component of the new Trinidad. However, subsequent waves of Venezuelans continued to arrive throughout the nineteenth century. They looked towards Trinidad to save them from the wars and aftermath of the wars that occupied Venezuela during its liberation

struggle. British Trinidad was a window to the world and a place of opportunity for scores of poor peasants who could find no work or freedom in the new South American Republic. Among the Venezuelan political refugees there were also wealthy professional men who took up residence in the urban areas of Trinidad, for example, Port of Spain and St. Joseph, the Old Spanish capital. While St. Joseph, Arima and other former Spanish Missions might have been important centres of Hispanic oral traditions, it was among the rural Hispanic folk in sequestered hamlets of the cacao valleys that parang continued to thrive.

From October to early January, parang comes to the surface to become a ubiquitous Hispanic relic of the past. In 1977, Daphne Pawan Taylor commented that:

“Apart from calypsoes, no other songs have become so strongly a part of Trinidad. For comparison calypsoes may be termed the songs of the urban troubadour of Trinidad while those of parang are of the rural.”¹

Just as calypso is at the centre of the Carnival Celebrations, so is parang the musical expression at the core of Christmas merrymaking. Calypsoes were sung in French Creole up until the pre-World War II period; so at present, Spanish is the language of parang. However, there is a major difference; the audience and a growing number of singers, and composers of parang do not speak or understand Spanish. In an island where the majority of the population speak English and varieties of English Creole, the singing of songs in Spanish by monolingual English speakers is somewhat artificial and anachronistic. Like the use of

Latin, Hindi/Sanskrit, Arabic and Yoruba, Spanish in the modern parang is mainly ritualistic. Even though the lyrics contain a story or explore a specific emotion, the language is not used to communicate the story or the emotion.

The language conveys a notion of allegiance to a sensibility that is not British, French nor African, an allegiance to something that is expressed by the Spanish Caribbean *mestizo* soul of many Trinidadians. Through the parang Trinidadians can express more fully the sounds and emotions of the Spanish Caribbean region. They are linked with Columbia, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Panama, Mexico, just as in the calypso they are in unison with the English and French speaking Antilles, and with Africa.²

Over the past forty years or so, parang has been evolving as a pervasive indigenous musical form. On the one hand it is blending with the calypso, soca and chutney, and it is appearing to some extent in local East Indian music³. It is also becoming more receptive to other Spanish Caribbean rhythms; the first phase of its revival began in the post-Independence years, that is, after 1962. Participation in this artform has become so widespread and the influences are so varied that traditionalists have been facing a dilemma: to change or not to change. Some traditionalists like *Familia de Rio Claro*, in order to be accepted by the public, have quickened the tempo, or introduced new instruments such as the steel pan. Others use English lyrics and experiment with a variety of modern popular rhythms. This is a phase of experimentation that is healthy for the parang genre. The involvement of young people is

also a hopeful sign for the survival of parang.

The changes being introduced may not please members of the older generation such as Doroteo Diaz, the old bard of Cerro de la Cruz in Blanchisseuse, but he may concede that what is heard can still be recognised as parang. Moreover, it is important for local young parang practitioners to define exactly what constitutes Trinidad parang and to be creative within the genre. “It is worthless copying music from Puerto Rico, Cuba, or Venezuela and calling it parang. What is essential to Trinidad parang should remain at its centre if it is to be recognised as something peculiar to Trinidad and which can be carried to other parts of the world.”⁴



ENDNOTES

1. Pawan Taylor, Daphne. [Port of Spain]: National Cultural Council of Trinidad and Tobago, 1977. p. 24.
2. It would be interesting to investigate the appeal which Latin music and parang has for Indo Trinidadians and compare this with their acceptance of calypso.
3. See Allard, Francisca. “The Evolution of Parang (Music and Text) in Trinidad from 1900 to 1997, MPhil thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 2000.
4. The words of Mr. Alberto Valderrama Patiño, folklorist and musician from Margarita, Venezuela, facilitator at the Parang Workshop held at UWI, St. Augustine in August 2001.



INTERVIEW COLUMN

Interviewers:

Hazel Elcock (HE)
Patrick Rouse (PR)
Margaret Rouse-Jones (MRJ)

Interviewee:

Bernard Luces (BL)

Subject:

Mr. Bernard Luces, the oldest surviving member of the original group, *La Petite Musicale*, details the origins of the group, and the incorporation of “folk” in its repertoire.

Date: Saturday June 25, 1994

- HE:** “Mr. Luces, where were you born?”
- BL:** “I was born in St. Joseph, the oldest capital.”
- HE:** “And this was in what year?”
- BL:** “Eleventh of June, 1907.”
- HE:** “You are a member of La Petite Musicale. You are one of the oldest surviving members, how did you become to be involved in that group?”
- BL:** “Well I’ll tell you. I was a member of the Sacred Heart Choir in those days and one Sunday morning, one of the Bart sisters, they used to call me ‘B’ and they asked me how would I like to join the group La Petite Musicale? I said I don’t mind, you could
- rope me in, it is okay so that is how I managed to join, somewhere in 1940.”
- PR:** “So at that time you already knew of La Petite Musicale?”
- BL:** “Yes I knew of La Petite Musicale.”
- HE:** “How long were they in existence prior to that?”
- BL:** “I believe it is in 1939 or late 1939 because I see that they had their ‘Spirit of Christmas Concert’ in December 1939 so it must have been around the ending of 1939 or somewhere there.”
- HE:** “Okay lets go specifically to La Petite Musicale now, who were the founding persons; the persons who were instrumental in creating this group La Petite Musicale?”
- BL:** “According to what I read there they had Dr. Mahabir and I believe it’s young Hudson Phillips, Ken Ruddett and a few others.”
- HE:** “Now you joined the group in 40?”
- BL:** “Around 40.”
- HE:** “How large was the group at that point in time?”
- BL:** “It was quite a big group. I would say between thirty (30) and forty (40) members.”
- PR:** “And who was the leader at that time?”
- BL:** “Olive Walke.”
- HE:** “Was she the person, the brain child then behind everything?”
- BL:** “Yes, Olive Walke; she was everything in La Petite Musicale. In those days we had no constitution or anything like that.”
- MRJ:** “Were there other women? Who were the other women in the group in those early days? You mentioned Mahabir, Hudson Phillips?”
- BL:** “Hudson Phillips, Ken Ruddett, Edric Connor.”
- HE:** “But when the group initially started; was it a group that started out of the Walke family?”
- BL:** “Yes, the Walke family and she is still alive now. She is our patron.”
- HE:** “That is Ivy Walke?”
- BL:** “Yes.”
- HE:** “So it was Ivy, Olive and who else?”
- BL:** “Her sister. You had Hugh Walke who was a little boy and another brother, I cannot remember his name.”
- HE:** “Okay that family was a prominent musical family in Trinidad at that time?”
- BL:** “Yes.”
- HE:** “Tell us more about it?”
- BL:** “It was starting with Olive; she went away to study music in England and when she came back she formed this group of La Petite Musicale and I do not know the origin of the La Petite Musicale, whom got that name but I believe that it is from Mr. Hudson Phillips who probably said ‘let us call the group La Petite Musicale’. I imagine in those days it was a very small group.”
- HE:** “And they operated where, out of some place in Port of Spain, exactly where?”
- BL:** “At her home in 55 Dundonald Street.”

HE: “So therefore it was like a community group?”

BL: “Community group yes.”

HE: “And what sort of activities were they involved in? Was it just the traditional Christmas carols, they’ll have a programme at Christmas time?”

BL: “Originally yes Christmas carols. The group used to meet at Olive’s home in Dundonald Street. We used to practice of course for this get together for the Christmas carols and we used to hire a T&TEC, in those days was the big bus, and go around to different homes; of course we were invited. Lady Young girls with their red capes, hats and we used to carry candles with red coverings and go along singing these carols.”

HE: “What were some of the carols you used to sing?”

BL: “We’d have **Silent Night**, all the carols.”

HE: “The traditional carols?”

BL: “Yes.”

HE: “When did the group make the transition from singing traditional carols towards doing research into our own carols?”

BL: “After we had the Christmas Carols we ventured into singing Folk.”

HE: “When did this start?”

BL: “I wouldn’t remember the exact time or the exact year but it is long after 1940, maybe to the war days or something like that and Olive took us to Blanchisseuse to get more into the Folk. Guaico Tamana, Sangre Grande, Tobago where we got all the information on folk and that’s how we managed to venture into singing folk.”

BL: “Yes these are the songs. I can’t call to mind which of the songs she started but when I remember I will tell you that but in Guaico Tamana, well there are a few Spanish decent people there who knew all the old time parang tunes.”

MRJ: “And they would teach you?”

BL: “Yes.”

MRJ: “They taught the group or they taught Olive or?”

BL: “Olive was there with her note taking. She knows the music.”

MRJ: “So you all would meet with the people?”

BL: “Meet with the people.”

MRJ: “And Olive would write down so there would be a fair amount of interaction?”

BL: “Interaction between, yes.”

MRJ: “Did you have many visits to any one place or did you just go to Guaico Tamana?”

BL: “I went there once.”

MRJ: “And did you spend the whole day?”

BL: “Yes and Guaico Tamana, that is the Estate which I owned or my father owned and we had a whole day there. I remember that very well.”

MRJ: “And what about in Tobago?”

BL: “In Tobago we went to a Government place there on a weekend and from there we got in touch with Mr. J. D. Elder and we had a folk interview with him.”

MRJ: “And you learnt new songs in Tobago as well?”

BL: “Yes, new songs in Tobago. Yes we did. Do you want to

HE: “Let us get some more detail about the actual research. What did you all do; you went into the communities?”

BL: “Yes. There was an old lady in Blanchisseuse, I think called Ma Stoute, I could remember the name who taught us to sing a few of the folk songs in Blanchisseuse and in Guaico Tamana, I don’t remember the old folks there who taught us a few songs as well.”

HE: “But how long did you spend in each village? Did you have workshops and so on?”

BL: “We had workshops in Blanchisseuse I think about twice (2) and Junior Howell was our musical instructor. He conducted folk seminars in Blanchisseuse, Guaico Tamana, Tobago and Mr. Elder of course was instrumental in giving us certain background into folk music in Tobago and that was how it started.”

MRJ: “So in all these villages that you went, you mentioned Blanchisseuse, Guaico Tamana, Sangre Grande, Tobago; did you have the old people in the villages telling you what the songs were? I mean did they teach you the words, did they teach you the tunes?”

BL: “In the case of Ma Stoute, yes she did. She taught us a few things.”

MRJ: “So she would meet with the group?”

BL: “Yes, the group.”

MRJ: “And tell you that these are the songs.”

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| | know the names of the songs?" | | to Martinique. We went to St. Lucia. We didn't go to St. Vincent. Before that we were invited to The World's Folk Festival in Covington, Kentucky in 1964; we participated there in 1964." | | musically inclined and when we went to rehearse she use to say 'well this a tune from Ma Stoute in Blanchisseuse, she taught us this song and this is how it went' and she would sing it." |
| MRJ: | "Yes if you remember them." | | | | |
| BL: | "Donkey Town was the main one, John Brulay." | | | | |
| MRJ: | "So that John Brulay song came from Tobago?" | HE: | "Now when Olive got the music, what did she do? Did she do any adaptation or did she maintain the original piece? Were any changes made?" | HE: | "La Petite Musicale has achieved a lot over the years. They have been in existence for over fifty-four (54) years. What was their first major achievement?" |
| BL: | "Yes and a few other songs from Tobago." | | | | |
| HE: | "Did you all visit different villages in Tobago?" | BL: | "Well being a musical teacher, she must have made some changes I suppose but the originality remained there of the parang music and the folk music." | BL: | "The first major achievement that I would say was that we got the Chaconia Medal in 1975 from Government." |
| BL: | "No, Scarborough." | | | | |
| HE: | "Scarborough alone?" | | | HE: | "Prior to that was La Petite involved in the whole question of the West Indian Federation?" |
| BL: | "Yes, we didn't go anywhere else." | MRJ: | "Okay let's ask that question slightly differently. When you were having a practice session learning a new song how did it take place? How did it take place and how did you learn new songs like how you all met for practice or say you all were preparing for a concert or something and Olive brought some new song that the group had not ever sang before? Tell us how she would go about that" | BL: | "I believe so, yes. I am not so sure but I think that is mentioned in the Festival of Arts." |
| HE: | "So Mr. Elder brought representations from each different village?" | | | HE: | "You were not part of that?" |
| BL: | "Yes, he must have brought yes." | | | BL: | "No, I don't remember that." |
| PR: | "But that particular village to Tobago, how long ago was that?" | | | HE: | "That was in 1958?" |
| MRJ: | "Was Olive still alive?" | | | BL: | "Yes 1958. I don't remember that. Maybe I wasn't a member then." |
| BL: | "We went with Olive once and we went two or three times in Tobago since." | BL: | "I think most of the young people there had a little background in music and Olive use to teach us; the Junior section i.e. the bass, tenor, sopranos and all the parts different music and that's how it started. She use to teach us and Dr. Hayes, that's her uncle had his office upstairs by St. Mary's College upstairs in Fredrick Street and it was there that we learnt all the songs." | HE: | "What activities or special occasions do you remember?" |
| MRJ: | "But you went once with Olive?" | | | BL: | "The Medal of Merit we got from Government." |
| BL: | "Yes, we went once. I remember we went once." | | | HE: | "That was for what?" |
| HE: | "Now you also didn't restrict the songs that you learnt or the songs you acquired to just songs found in Trinidad or Tobago, you also went to other Caribbean islands, what are some of these Caribbean islands?" | MRJ: | "Did she sing the tunes to you or did she have the pianists play it on the piano?" | BL: | "The Medal of Merit for our contribution towards Folk in Trinidad. During the wars days with Edric Connor, I remember we went down to Chaguaramas during the war days and we gave performances there." |
| BL: | "Yes. We went to Grenada; I think there was some expo in Grenada in 1967 or somewhere there. We went | BL: | "Yes, you see being musically inclined wherever we went, to me she use to jot down how the tunes went being | MRJ: | "Performances to whom?" |

BL: "To the American soldiers during the war days."

PR: "And what type of music did you perform for the soldiers, was it local music or was it the traditional carol?"

BL: "Carols."

PR: "This is at Christmas?"

BL: "Yes, no folk."

HE: "As we are on the subject of folk, when Olive Walke started to do research into folk songs and that became part of the repertoire, describe for us the response of the wider society; people in Trinidad and Tobago to that change from the traditional carols to our folk songs?"

BL: "Having ventured into the folk songs we were invited to different concerts to perform and we performed in several places in Port of Spain, Sangre Grande, San Fernando and the environs of Port of Spain and we got very famous; I think we were the original folk group in Trinidad."

HE: "But there was no initial disapproval to this new trend?"

BL: "No."

HE: "What you think caused people to appreciate this type of music?"

BL: "It was new in Trinidad; that's folk music. It was quite new in Trinidad or Port of Spain I should say and we really became famous for that."



Notes and Queries

THE 'HOLY TRINITY'

by

Reginald Clarke

In a very special Pantheon we can identify three divine figures who could be aptly referred to as the 'holy trinity'. They are, not necessarily in order of seniority, Jesus Christ, Mother Lakshmi and the Holy Prophet, Mohammed. In less than two months the entire world would have observed ceremonies in veneration of the 'holy trinity'.

The birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ was the beginning of a long process of bringing eternal light and perfect bliss to the world. On that birthday Christians would sing, dance and make merry the coming of Christ. Churches, radio, television (and latterly the internet and DVDs) regale us to such hymns as "Hark the Herald Angels Sing", "Oh come all ye faithful, and so on. Yes, life is worth living, our Saviour will ensure in us the necessary degree of wholesomeness and inner peace. Amen.

There are a number of legends connected with the origin of Divali. One is that Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu were married on this day. This is also the day that Lord Krishna killed the demon, Narakasura. Divali is widely celebrated as the day that Lord Rama returned triumphant to Ayoda after defeating Ravana. Many people believe that Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and good fortune, visit the homes of devotees

on this day. Worship of Lakshmi is performed in the evening. Divali, the festival of light, brings us joy and peace.

Eid is the time when the Prophet Mohammed, founder of Islam, is venerated. Many people are not actually aware, but there are two Eids in Islam. The more commonly known one, of course, is Eid-ul-Fitr. This serves to celebrate the month of Ramadan. The other is known as 'Eid-ul-Adha' or the Eid of Sacrifice. This Eid is actually the more important of the two, and it occurs on the 10th day of Dhul Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic Year. On this occasion Muslims understand and appreciate the concept of sacrifice on different levels. It means sacrificing ones own desires for the benefit of others, and most importantly, for Allah. May Allah, the be all and end all, be praised.

Given the cosmological scheme of things it is quite likely that someday soon, Christians, Hindus and Muslims will be saying 'Merry Christmas', 'Shubh Divali', and 'Eid Mubaraak' on the very same day – December 25th.



**PICTORIAL
COLUMN**



**The ladies of Los Dinámicos during a
tour of Ecuador in 1994**

(left to right) Francisca Allard, Genevieve Allard, Monica Rogers, Sabrina Allard, Sepherina Allard



**An appreciative crowd enjoying the music of
Los Dinámicos performing on their tour of
Brooklyn, New York, 2004**



**The members of Los Dinámicos on the cover of
their 2003 CD, 'Ritmo Caribeño'**

Front row – (left to right) Hilton Lewis, Monica Rogers, Ernest Boland, Sepherina Allard, Francisca Allard.

Back row- (left to right) Genevieve Allard-Seales, Vivian Peters, Philip Allard, Floyd Ravello, Davey James, Sabina Allard



**Francisca Allard and Los Dinámicos during
their Brooklyn tour, 2004**