



Calypso... Music to Educate, Empower, & Embrace our Space in the World. By Calypso our stories are told.

October was officially declared "Calypso History Month" in 2002 by TUCO (Trinidad Unified Calypsonians Organisation). Calypsoes, through their poetic lyrics and rhythms, capture a lot of our history by telling our stories in song, like no history book can. The roots of "Calypso" are diverse. Some argue it came from "kaiso" a Hausa word for "bravo"; some say the word came from the French "carrousseaux" a drinking party; or the Spanish "calliso" a tropical song; or the Carib "carieto", meaning the same thing.

Calypso is a life source to Trinbagonians. It is through calypso we voice our concerns about what is happening around us. Calypso is our editorial on life – to make us laugh, to make us cry, to respond to issues we disagree with, to praise those who made a better life for all of us. In other words, Calypso reflects who we are as a people.

Calypso has been called a poor man's newspaper in times when literacy was not wide spread. It developed to become both a dance and cultural record of events at first in single tone style with implicit meanings and a spicy flavour.

According to one of our earlier calypsonians, Lord Beginner, "When I sing about a cricket match, you didn't have to read the newspapers again." David Rudder describes it best as a 'living vibration' with 'lyrics to make a politician cringe or turn a woman's body to jelly.' And so it is with many calypsoes. Calypso unites us as a society on many levels, as do soca, chutney soca, soca parang and rapso, recognised artforms spawned by the original calypso genre. We are indeed the "Land of Calypso" and should trumpet that proudly.

The Calypso in Trinidad and Tobago, is mainly of African origin, and can be traced to the traditions of West Africans in terms of music, structure and function. The basic foundation of calypso was brought to this part of the world by the enslaved Africans. The African slaves, as they worked on plantations under the whip of their masters, they used the 'call and answer' strains of the calypso to urge each other in terms of staying strong and not giving up hope despite the misery and brutality of their existence. The art-form was used by the slaves to entertain themselves when they had the opportunity.

When chattel slavery ended during the 1830s, calypso began to flourish and by 1912, the first calypso recording was done. However, during the period of colonial rule the calypso artform; which tells stories in song about different aspects of life, was used to highlight the poor living conditions of the masses. The colonial rulers did not take kindly but the early pioneers of calypso persisted. Even when the British colonial rulers in Trinidad dumped the recordings of calypsonians in the sea, as singers were returning from New York with their new records, calypsonians never gave up.

As fate would have it, Uriah Butler had risen as the champion of the down-trodden masses. He took up the cause of the calypsonians by going to the then legislative council (parliament) and moving a motion to legalise the institution of the calypso tent. Butler's motion succeeded and from then to now, the calypso tent has been an integral part of the cultural landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. According to recorded history, it was *Railway Douglas* who first set up a calypso tent in Trinidad and Tobago.

The celebration of Calypso History Month in October is a time to reflect on the contribution of this beautiful artform. The stage of the calypso artform has been graced, with great pioneers. The first wave of professional calypsonians became known as the *Old Bridgade*, including singers such as *Growling Tiger*, *Lord Beginner*, *Atilla the Hun*, *the Roaring Lion* and *Lord Pretender*, *Lord Invader*, *Lord Executor* and *Sir Galba*. By 1945 a new wave of singers rose to meet the demand for more entertaining songs. This *Young Brigade* included *Lord Kitchener*, *Mighty Spoiler*, *Mighty Dictator* and *Lord Wonder*, *Mighty Terror* and later the *Mighty Sparrow*.

The Black Power marches in 1970 once again triggered a new generation of singers such as *Black Stalin*, *Chalk Dust* and *Brother Valentino*. A broad range of voices and musical experimentation was ushered in by *Shadow*, *Maestro*, *Merchant* and *Explainer*. In 1978 saw the Calypso Monarch competition being won by a woman for the first time. *Calypso Rose* signalled the entry of many more women on the Calypso stage. Entering the stage a bit later was *Cro Cro*, *Singing Sandra*, *Sugar Aloes*, *Singing Francine*, *Super Blue*, *Denyse Plummer*, *Gypsy*, *Abbi Blackman* and shining the light for the next generation is *Marq Pierre* who was crowned junior calypso monarch this year., to name a few.

Over the years the calypso art form has been transformed and presented in various categories the major ones being:- Political Commentary, Social Commentary, Humorous, Soca, Ragga Soca, Chutney Soca, and Nation Building.

Some factors have contributed to a lowering of the standards in terms of the artistic value of the calypso art. Large financial prizes have attracted individuals who are not concerned about learning or developing the finer art of the calypso. Unless, the trend can be reversed, the genuine art and skill of calypso could be lost in the maze of the almighty calypso dollar.

It is important for the mass media to reorient their programmes in order to give more prominence to the calypso artform. It is essential for the education authorities to find ways to introduce positive calypsoes in schools because the history of the nation is embedded in the work of calypsonians over years gone. Let us pay tribute to these masters not only for one month, or during the Carnival season. Calypso records who we are all year long.

"The Old Bridgade"



Growling Tiger



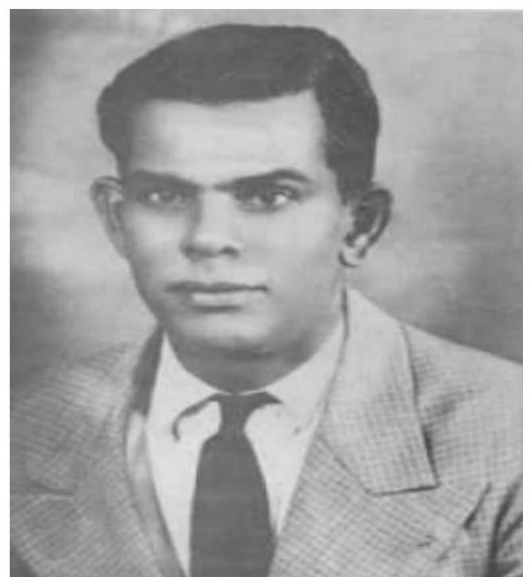
Lord Beginner



Lord Pretender



Roaring Lion



Atilla the Hun



Lord Invader



Lord Executor



Sir Galba

"1970 New Generation of Singers"



Black Stalin



Brother Valentino



Chalk Dust



Mighty Shadow



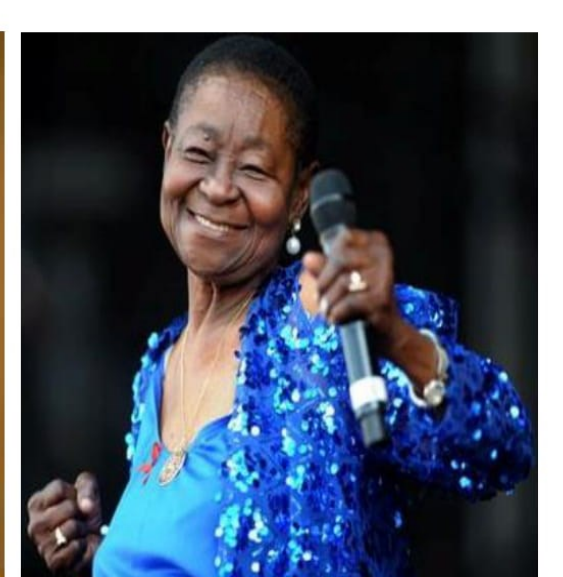
Maestro



Merchant



Explainer



Calypso Rose

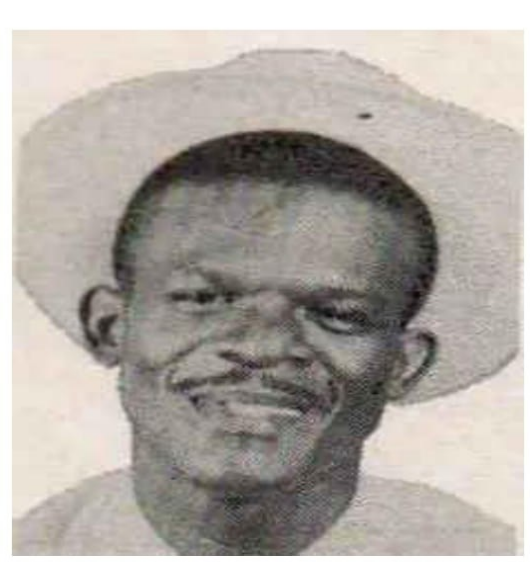
"1945 Young Bridgade"



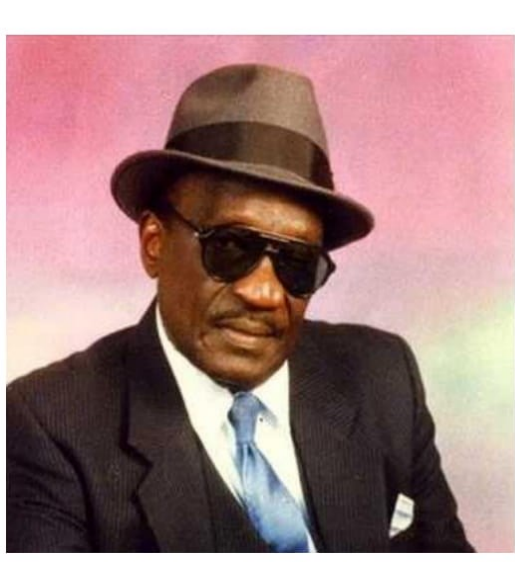
Lord Kitchener



Mighty Spoiler



Mighty Dictator



Mighty Terror



Ras Shorty I



Mighty Duke



Mighty Sparrow



Lord Blakie



Cro Cro



Singing Sandra



Sugar Aloes



Singing Francine



Super Blue



Denyse Plummer



Gypsy



Abbi Blackman