



Highlights of the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition

INTRODUCTION

In 1962 the late Dr. Eric Williams made his historic "Meet the People Tour" throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Inspired by the diverse range of talent that he witnessed amongst the people he decided to organize a competition in 1963 called the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition. It was intended to promote the nation's culture through drama, song, music and dance. The main aim was to develop the folk and traditional arts that characterized the nation and create a continuous parade of our cultural panorama.

Throughout the years participants have set new standards in the different categories of the competition. Through hard work, innate skills and resourcefulness the competition has developed to its present status and has introduced new talent to the stage. Some notable performers that have had their grounding from participating in the Best Village Programme include Singing Sandra, Calypso Monarch of 1999; Leroy Birch 'Big B' Extempo Monarch of 1998; Machel Montano, our internationally renowned soca artist; and Peter London, former principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company in New York now an Associate Professor of Dance of the New World School of the Arts in Miami.

This could not have been accomplished without several noted contributors who played instrumental roles in its growth from both an administrative and creative perspective. Ms. Joyce Wong Sang who over the years became known as 'Mrs. Best Village' played a pivotal role in organizing the competition from 1963 to 1986. Under her watch the programme became more than just a competition between villages, it grew into a major cultural event that demanded respect from the artistic community. The competition's impact was recorded in calypso of the 'wyner girl' from Princess Town and the famous line that 'Barataria sweet but Mon Diablo Sweeter.' Such was the rivalry in the competition. Presently the mantle of administering this now expanded competition falls on the shoulders of Norvan Fullerton.

Other contributors to the growth and development of the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition include Mr. Rajkumar Krishna Persad whose group was the first of the East Indian groups to participate in the competition under the Barataria Community Council; Dr. Earl Lovelace (Matura Village Council), Dr. Reginald Griffith (Cumuto), Lester 'Efebo' Wilkinson (Mausica Folk Theatre) and Desmond Waithe (Tunapuna Community Council) to name a few.

The vision of the programme was sustained by the passion and the talents of those we now consider as the elders in this cultural festival because without them the levels of excellence reached by the competition would have never been attained. We therefore salute these elders of our many communities - Daisy Voisin (Lead Singer, Parang), Elma Romano (Administrator), Ronald Amoroso (Playwright), Andrew Worrell (Director), Jean Coggins-Simmons (Dancer), Rawle Titus (Drama) and Loderick Emmanuel Foster (Drummer).

The Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition has demonstrated in no uncertain terms that culture has potential for motivating people across ethnic, class, religious and economic lines.



Elma Romano

When one speaks of the Prime Minister's Best Village Competition, the names Barataria Community Council and Ms. Elma Romano immediately spring to mind for Ms. Romano has been a tower of strength in the community of Barataria for well over forty years. Fired by the enthusiasm generated by the late Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, in the early days of Independence, Ms. Romano was quick to take up the challenge to develop the talents of citizens of the nation through sports and culture. As Secretary of the Barataria Community Council, she worked for years with the late Reynold Plowden, the then President to engender participation in the Best Village Competitions. They have had a tremendous amount of success; not only does Barataria hold the unique record of being the only village to have participated in the Best Village Competition every year since its inception in 1963, but it also has a remarkable record of success in several categories.

Under their dedicated leadership the group's Queen has won the Miss Best Village title on three occasions and placed second three times. Additionally, the group has won major prizes at the Village Olympics and National Handicrafts Fairs. However, the group's finest hours have been in the Folk Concerts/Theatre category where it has placed first on five occasions and second twelve times. The memorable contests in the 1970's between Morne Diablo and Barataria inspired Merchant to compose the Calypso 'Barataria Sweet but Morne Diablo Sweeter'; but the Calypsonian had the names mixed up.

The group has toured extensively in the USA, Canada, Venezuela and throughout the Caribbean; representing Trinidad & Tobago with great success. Ms. Romano has always maintained that the members uphold the group's high standards through training and annual productions. She was able to attract distinguished dance instructors and choreographers like Emelda Lynch-Griffith and Felix Harrington who were known for grooming their young dancers to success on the international stage. Peter London, Kathy Ann Gibbon, Jeffery Carter and Gregor Breedy are examples of such performers. Singers like Karen Eccles and actors like 'Mec Mec' and Rhoma Spencer have also moved on to greater heights.

Discipline was the guiding force at all times; not the stern, unyielding type, but discipline that was firmly intertwined with compassion and a genuine desire to help others find their treasured place in the sun. When Mr. Plowden passed on Ms. Romano was left to pass on the torch, and she has accomplished this to the best of her abilities. In 1994 she was awarded a Humming Bird Medal (Silver) for her contributions to the arts. She has been a positive influence in the lives of many people; both young and old, and as a result has helped to make this wonderful country of ours a better place for all.

Jean Coggins-Simmons

Jean Coggins-Simmons is one of the most legendary and accomplished dancers in Trinidad and Tobago's history. She was introduced to the field from a young age by her father who was himself a very skilled ballroom dancer. As a child she participated in other forms of the arts as a member of the Madrigal and Victorian Institute choirs, but she was particularly moved by Beryl Mc Burnie as a young girl and would often view her rehearsals sessions on her way to school. She was however, not allowed by her father to participate in Ms. Mc Burnie's classes until she became of age. As a teenager she danced at Sunday school and Christmas parties and was well known in her community.

In the mid 1940's she joined Beryl Mc Burnie's dance classes and also trained under Boscoe Holder. She was featured in his 1946 production "Coloque" and performed in other shows with him and his brother Jeffery. She performed throughout the Caribbean and was well-received as a unique Trinbagonian talent. In 1948 the Daily Argosy, one of Guyana's newspapers crowned her "Trinidad's Sensational Dancer". She also worked as a choreographer with young performers and organized dance shows for them. Accolades always followed her performances and in 1954 she was flown to Barbados by special invitation to perform and crown the winner for the Miss Bronze Queen Show.

She continued to perform and increase her knowledge of dance by adding ballet to her repertoire. In 1957 she led a group of dancers in a production titled "Congo Tay at Queen's Hall. She referred to the performance as the first folk ballet to be staged at the venue. In 1959 she was awarded a scholarship to study dance in England and gained training in Ballet, Spanish dance and English Folk dances. In 1962 she was commissioned by late Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams to visit local villages to assess their cultural content. This led to her working intimately with tutors and performers for the Best Village competitions.

Mrs. Simmons has participated in many historical events in Trinidad and Tobago. Her dance group performed at the opening of the Hilton Hotel in 1962 and continued to perform at that venue for the following two weeks and several years after. She has performed for several visiting dignitaries including Indira Ghandi, Haile Selassie, Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. She has worked as a singer, dancer and choreographer and produced several full length productions, the most notable of these was the Mating of Erzulie, her signature full length folk ballet that explored the story of the love of Erzulie in dance. This production was done in 1971 and 1972. Her other productions were The Devil's Woodyard, Why Why Sofiah, Tribute to Ibos, Les Belles Creole, Soiree 1-5 and Harambe 1-3; Danse Negre was done in subsequent years. In 1977 she represented Trinidad and Tobago (with James Lee Wah, Torrance Mohammed, Cyril St. Louis and Joyce Kirton) as an official representative at FESTAK in Lagos, Nigeria.

In 1985 she was awarded the Humming Bird Medal (Silver) for her contribution to dance. She was one of the founding members of the National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago and worked assiduously to revive the Bele. She has personally taught and influenced many dancers in Trinidad and Tobago and her work lives on through them. She unfortunately passed away in 2005 but will always be remembered as a dynamic talent.



Tribute to the Elders

PROGRAMME *ACT 1*

National Anthem
Opening Remarks

Master of Ceremonies
Celia Regis

TRIBUTE TO THE ELDERS performed by Lucy Regis

AMERINDIAN OFFERING performed by Malick Folk Performing Company
Tribute to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago

ANCESTRAL SOUNDS performed by N'belesse Creativity of the Arts
Tribute to the First Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago

BELE FEST featuring Mt D'or Cultural Performers Bon Bassa Productions, and Northwest Laventille Cultural Movement
Tribute to Jean Coggins-Simmons and Andrew Worrell

FOLK THEATRE featuring excerpts from
“**Déjà Vu**” by Zeno Constance performed by Joseph Lopez from Fyzabad Connection Drama Group

“**The Keeper of the List**” by Prizgar Lands Cultural Performers

“**Good Bye Ma, Good Bye Pa**” performed by Bon Bassa Productions

“**Spiritual Evolution**” by Clevus Charles performed by Ah We People Theatrical Horizons
Tribute to Rawle Titus and Ronald Amoroso

TRIBUTE TO THE ORISAS performed by Belmont Freetown Cultural Arts & Folk Performing Company

PROGRAMME *ACT II*

SARACA performed by Northwest Laventille Cultural Movement
Tribute to The Elders

INDIAN CLASSICAL performed by Shiv Shakti Dancers
Tribute to Rajkumar Krishna Persad

JHAROO performed by Sando Cultural Ambassadors
Tribute to Rajkumar Krishna Persad

DRUMMOLOGY featuring Petrotrin Boodoosingh Tassa Group and St. Patrick's Frontline School of Drumming
Tribute to Loderick Foster

LIMBO performed by Diego Martin Footprints Folk Performers
Tribute to Julia Edwards Pelletier

FOLK SONG PRESENTATION performed by North Eastern College and Friends featuring
“*Lillian, Buddy Lindo, Better Woman, Murder in de Market, Tingo*” *Tribute to The Elders*

CALYPSO DANCE performed by Diego Martin Footprints Folk Performers
Tribute to The Elders

PARANG performed by La Divina Pastora Parang Group
Tribute to Daisy Voisin



Andrew Worrell

Andrew Worrell was known as the “Warrior of Best Village” and was originally from south Trinidad. He served as both a writer and producer and worked with several villages throughout his Best Village career, spreading his wings and influencing many groups. He showed a passion for the arts from an early age when his work was selected from 7000 entries in a painting contest which awarded the winner the opportunity to have their piece used as a monogram for the West Indies Football Team. His art work has also been featured in banks, during Carnival and in churches.

He started working with the Siparia Welfare Council and in 1963, he formed the Siparia Drama and Folk Dance Group. They were very successful and won the island championship at the Arts Festival Competition. He made history soon after as the leader of the first ever Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition winners in 1964. He also led the group to victory in 1967 and 1970. Mr. Worrell infused enthusiasm, commitment and determination in his performers and was able to lead a Mon Diablo contingent to Washington DC for the American Bicentennial in 1976. He continued his work in 1977 at the Festival of Black Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria where he once again lead his troupe of performers to represent Trinidad and Tobago. In 1983, he was awarded the Humming Bird (Silver) for his contribution to culture. He returned to Siparia in 1984 where he was successful once again in the competition. He remained with the group until 1994 when he resigned from the competition; however he continued doing work in the performing and visual arts.

Mr. Worrell has contributed to Carnival by way of costume design and still worked with young performers in the theatrical arena up until his unfortunate passing in 2006. He will always be remembered as a performer who had a successful and very colourful cultural life. His work and his legacy live on to this day in the Best Village circle and other facets of the local artistic community.

Rawle Titus

Mr. Titus is an author, playwright, musical arranger, director, producer, performer and educator. He has worked assiduously with different groups in the local performing arts. He started working in the field of education as an Assistant Teacher and eventually rose to the level of Principal.

Mr. Titus showed an interest in community based activity from an early age when he formed the Mt. St. George Youth Organization at the age of sixteen. He was also responsible for the merging of Mt. St. George Youth Organization and the Mt. St. George Village Council for participation in the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition. Under his guidance the group placed second in the competition in 1970 and first place in 1971 and 1972. In both years he was awarded the Most Outstanding Performer and received a full scholarship to study abroad. He has also done work outside of Best Village to develop the arts in his homeland of Tobago. In 1983 he formed the Tobago Folk Performing Company and led Mt. St. George to the Tobago Heritage Festival in 1989 to 1991 and 1996 to 1998. He has also served as Chairman for the Tobago Heritage Festival Committee and the Tobago Carnival Development Committee.

He has also made strides in the field of education, winning the National Teacher of the Year award for the 1974 to 1975 period. He has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology with a Minor in Sociology, as well as a Diploma in Theatre Arts. He is the author of Wake People Wake: The Sacred and the Profane and also wrote the History of Tobago Calypso for the History Department of the University of the West Indies in 1999. He is a six time winner of the Tobago Calypso Monarch and served as President of the Tobago Football Association from 1995 to 1996. Through his activities, interests, accomplishments and accolades Mr. Titus has proven himself to be a well-rounded individual; a jack of all trades who has excelled in many of his endeavours.

Ronald Amoroso

Mr. Ronald Amoroso aka “Ronnie Amoroso” originally hails from San Fernando and is educated and accomplished in the field of engineering. His passion for theatre however, propelled him to join the Company of Players where he was given the opportunity to perform for theatre, television and film. He has also done work directing and scripting plays for Queen’s Royal College.

In 1972 he began working with the Barataria community and Ms. Elma Romano for the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition and has worked intimately for the last three decades with that particular group. During this same period he wrote and directed over twenty five plays for them and was instrumental in maintaining their high reputation in the Best Village arena. His plays have always focused on important social issues and demonstrate that the competition can educate and entertain. Some of his most successful work includes The Blood Clot, The Master of Carnival, Goodbye Pa, The Dry Season, Sangre Grande by Two, The Honeycomb and the La Diabliesse Chronicles.

Through his work he has increased the variety of plays that have become synonymous with the competition and added significantly to the local theatrical arena. Throughout the years he has extended his expertise to other groups who participate in the competition and many of his protégés have gone on to achieve distinctions in various aspects of drama, both locally and abroad. His plays have been performed in Guyana, Venezuela, Curacao, St. Thomas, England, the United States and Canada. In 1993 he was awarded the Humming Bird Medal for his contribution to the field of culture and he also received the Lifetime Award from the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago in 2001.

Loderick Emmanuel Foster

Mr. Loderick Emmanuel Foster was an extremely talented and versatile individual. His contribution to the cultural life of Trinidad and Tobago is well noted. He was both a tutor and researcher in his own right. He was a member of the Arawaks Dance Group for almost twenty years where he served as Chief Drummer, Chantuelle, guitarist and Deputy Leader before he left and formed his own group: the Pleasantville Folk Performers. He has contributed significantly to the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition, the National Dance Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the San Fernando Arts Council and the Southern Dance Company. He was also the founding member of both the Southern Drum Chantants together with Emmanuel Cricke and Katumba Drummers and singers. He represented the country in many cultural missions at home and abroad in territories like Cuba, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Dominica, Martinique, Grenada, Barbados, Guyana, Venezuela, Suriname, The United States of America and Switzerland. He also taught Afro-Caribbean Folk Drumming at UWI Vacation School of the Arts in St. Augustine.

In the mid 1980’s, Rollo, as he was affectionately called, was also instrumental in introducing West African rhythms and dances to the Trinidad and Tobago a phenomenon that, over time, has become an integral part of the of the Best Village Competition.

In the early 1990’s Mr. Foster left Trinidad and Tobago to live abroad but he unfortunately passed away in 1997. Today he is still remembered amongst the local arts community, for his contribution to Best Village.



Daisy Voisin

Daisy Voison was considered by many to be the darling of the local Parang world. She, along with La Divina Pastora played an instrumental role in the acceptance and popularization of Parang music throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Her early years were spent in communities with a strong Spanish influence and background like Caratal, Rancho Quemado and Erin. She displayed her love for music and her piety from early age and learnt to play the quartet and guitar.

She was first recognized after her participation with the Siparia Welfare Council in the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition in the 1960's. She attained the status of lead singer with the group by 1971 and worked simultaneously with the Siparia Chorale Group. In 1973 La Divina Pastora was formed and they were successful in National Parang Association competitions for 1974, 1976 and 1977. She had already attained a household name status in Trinidad and Tobago at this point in her career and was considered a leading cultural personality. She had remarkable stage presence and charisma and stood out for her signature bouquet of flowers, which she always held during her performances.

In 1988 she was awarded a National Hummingbird Silver medal by the then government of Trinidad and Tobago for contributions to the local arts and cultural landscape. She also held the title of "Parang Queen" and represented the nation as a cultural ambassador in places such as Margarita and Venezuela. On Wednesday 7th August 1991 she passed away. Her legacy lives on in the La Divina Pastora Parang Group and evidence of her influence can still be heard today mainly during the Christmas season when Parang music is more prevalent.