

MAS IN NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL: ART, EDUCATION AND HISTORY

Michael La Rose

Presentation at Carnival Arts and Masquerade Foundation CAMF PIONEERS OF NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL AWARDS

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Yaa Centre, 1 Chippenham Mews, Maida Vale London W9



First, I would like to thank the members of CAMF and those who organised these **Pioneers of Notting Hill Carnival Awards** for the award I received today. It was unexpected but much appreciated.

CAMF asked me last year for permission to use one of my articles “40 years of Notting Hill Carnival” on the CAMF website. I agreed, because in my view CAMF is an important organisation that must grow strong and succeed to fight for the future of mas in Notting Hill Carnival. I therefore must do all I can to support the organisation.

My exposure to the culture of carnival was as a young boy in London, taken by my parents to the Carnival Gala at Commonwealth Institute, going to the Backyard and Mangrove Restaurants in the Grove and later to the Hibiscus Club in Stoke Newington. The message here is that we must expose young people to our Caribbean Carnival culture and also inform and educate them on the art and history of the masquerade.

1973 was my first Notting Hill Carnival, chipping behind Ebony Steelband’s mas section. From that year until today I have been involved with Notting Hill Carnival as a DJ, with a sound system music section on the road with Lion Youth masquerade band in 1978. I was elected vice chair of Carnival Development Committee (CDC) between 1978 and 80. I was designer and bandleader for over 15 years with Peoples War Carnival Band from 1982 to 1998. I founded the Association for a Peoples Carnival (APC) in 1989. I later became an author and researcher on Caribbean Carnival and I am now director of Savannah View which produces the annual “We ❤️ Luv Carnival film screenings” at the British Film Institute (BFI). The next programme of screenings will be three important films on steel pan on 8th August 2015. Jointly with Dexter Kahn of Cocoyea Savannah View also produces “Talk Yuh Talk”, “Parang with a difference” and the monthly “Kaiso Lime”.

I was introduced to carnival on the road by Keith Lackhan and his family, which included brother-in-law John Roach, who all lived at the bottom of the road in North London. Their mothers, aunts and their uncle, pan legend “Boots” Davidson, were close friends of my mother in Trinidad. They were involved with the North London section of Ebony mas. That mas was designed and made by Bertie Delandro.

I became a young DJ with my brother Keith La Rose and friend David Barnwell in a club called The Hibiscus in Stoke Newington, which was run by Trinidadian Vernon King. Some great DJs at this club educated us on Funk, Afro Beat, Soul, Calypso, Cadence, Hi Life, Spooze and Reggae. We later formed People’s War Sound System where we practised this wide musical philosophy.

It was at the Hibiscus Club that the carnival community socialised and “limed”. There I met Lawrence “Stretch” Noel, Gerald Forsyth, Pepe Francis, Len Homer and many others.

ESTABLISHING CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL MAS IN BRITAIN

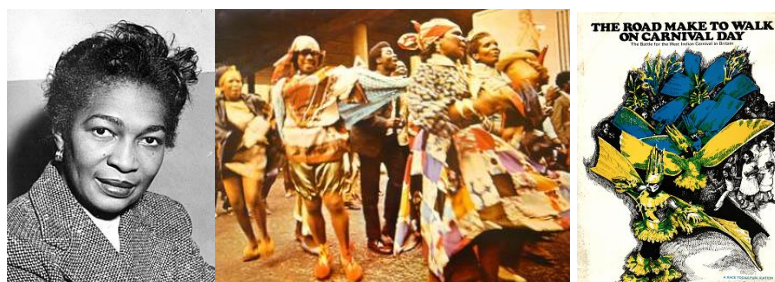
However before my experience at Notting Hill Carnival, the Caribbean carnival had been established in London.

There was Claudia Jones’ **“West Indian Gazette Caribbean Carnivals”** every year from 1959 - 64 in halls all over West London. Victor Critchlow won best individual mas with a sailor costume at one of the early mas competitions.

Then, in 1965 Rhaune Laslett, with people like Andre Shervington and John “Hoppy” Hopkins, organised the first Notting Hill Carnival. It was also called at one time, the “Peoples Free Carnival”. Later “Grove” people took over the organising of Notting Hill Carnival amongst whom were Selwyn Baptiste, Granville Pryce, Merle Major, and Junior Telfer. In 1973 Leslie “Teacher” Palmer made Notting Hill Carnival into the modern Caribbean Carnival we know today and introduced Reggae sound systems and live bands in the bays under the flyover stretching over the Grove.

In 1975 with the growing success of Notting Hill Carnival came the attacks on its existence from the British media, local residents associations, the Metropolitan Police and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). The calculated swamping of the Notting Hill Carnival by police in 1976 saw rioting break out. It was the Carnival Development Committee (CDC) that defended the carnival and won the struggle to keep it on the streets by campaigning and publishing **“The Road Make To Walk On Carnival Day; The struggle for the West Indian Carnival in Britain”**. Anyone interested in how we won the struggle to have Carnival on the streets of Ladbroke Grove should read this important document.

In the CDC we generated our own money through the Carnival Gala at Commonwealth Institute and regular Sunday events at the Tabernacle in Powis Square. Black businesses like St Clair hairdressers, Supreme hairdressers, Dyke & Dryden and many more sponsored the mas bands.



MY MEMORIES OF MAS AT NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL FROM 1973 TO THE MID 1990s

The first Caribbean mas at Notting Hill Carnival was provided by women from Dominica in traditional Dominican national dress the “Wob” and “Dwyette” from 1966 onwards.

From research, one of the first full mas bands at Notting Hill Carnival was Ashton Charles’ Fancy Sailor band in 1969. Carnival mas bands did not come out regularly at Notting Hill Carnival until 1973. Through the efforts of Leslie “Teacher” Palmer, the architect of the modern Notting Hill Carnival, mas bands were encouraged to bring out full mas bands on the road. He recruited, cajoled and challenged mas makers like Lawrence “Stretch” Noel and Peter Minshall to bring out full mas bands at Notting Hill Carnival. Palmer met and talked to a lot of the Carnival people at the Hibiscus Club mentioned earlier.

The development and growth of many mas bands in London have been as a result of breakaways from four, I call, foundation bands. They are Ebony, Metronomes, Sukuya and Cocoyea . This is the usual path to the development of many new mas bands where carnivalists who have gained experience in other mas bands receive the knowledge to start their own.

Larry Forde of Sukuya was the first person I knew to apply to the Arts Council for funding Carnival mas. But there was a struggle to get the Arts Council to fund Caribbean Carnival art and it remains a problem. The fight for funding was led by Selwyn Baptiste along with Bertie Delandro and the other mas band leaders. Some of them picketed the Arts Council in Piccadilly. In this period, the Arts Council was involved in a lot of divide and rule tactics, pitting one mas band against the other. But that is a story for another time!

In 1979 mas from Notting Hill Carnival was represented in Trinidad when Evelyn Noriega of the Cocoyea band, took part in the Carnival Queen mas competition in Trinidad and Tobago.

I founded the Association for a Peoples Carnival (APC) in 1989 along with individuals who supported carnival, stall holders and the mas bands Peoples War Carnival Band, Mangrove, Dallaway Mas Band, Cocoyea and Ebony.

MAS AS ART – MAS AND EDUCATION



Caribbean Carnival mas **is** art. We come from a strong fabulously artistic and creative mas tradition. George Bailey, Irvin McWilliams, Harold “Sally” Saldenah, Ken Morris ,Wilfred Strasser, Stephen Lee Heung, Cito Velasquez, Carlisle Chang, George “Diamond Jim” Hardey, Peter Minshall, Rosalind Gabriel, Jason Griffiths, Gwyneth Squires, Ivan Kalicharan, Wayne Berkley, Stephen Derek are all names we as mas people should know.

A strong mas tradition developed in Notting Hill Carnival that included Peter Minshall and Wayne Berkeley. There was traditional and individual mas from Johnno Roberts, “Shadow d mas man” (Arnold Davis) from Liverpool who made mas in the footsteps of Wilfred Strasser.

There was also the Sensay from Dominica and the Grenada Shortney . Notting Hill Carnival has produced fantastic creative and original mas designers and mas makers including Arthur Peters, Rocky Byron, Lawrence Noel, Clary Salandy, Speedy Ramdeen, Lincoln Rahamut, Carl Gabriel, Larry Forde, Vernon “Fellows” Williams, Errol Romilly, Nikki Lyons, Kamal El Alaoui, Ashton Charles, Keith Khan, and there are many, many more.

Mas from Notting Hill Carnival has been involved in exhibitions at the V&A, (Victoria and Albert Museum) and other self-organised mas exhibitions for a long time. The plan was to have a mas exhibition after every carnival. In 2007 there was the important “**Midnight Robbers; The artists of Notting Hill Carnival** ” exhibition of mas and the book published to accompany the exhibition co-ordinated by Ruth Thompsett .

I have been involved with Celia Macey in Carnival education projects, like “Carnival in the Curriculum”, and the producing of a “Teachers Carnival Pack”. I have also contributed to the Kensington and Chelsea Community History Project coordinated by Sue McAlpine, which is a rich heritage of audio interviews with Carnival people. Education is the key to mas in Britain. Education of bandleaders and designers, masqueraders and young people of all backgrounds. It is something we here must all take seriously.



INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED WITH MAS BANDS AT NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL FROM 1973 TO THE EARLY 1990s

These are the names of people who were involved with mas bands:

1. **Leslee Wills** LION YOUTH
2. **Ken Modeste** GRENADA SHORTNEE
3. **Lord Eric** SUGUMUGU SUNDAY from Ghana
4. WIDO CARNIVAL BAND
5. **Larry Forde** SUKUYA
6. **Ashton Charles & Vernon Fellows** 12th CENTURY
7. **Dexter Kahn and Arnim Buccoo** METRONOMES MAS
8. **Hugo Learmond** STARLITE
9. **Rosa “Sister Rosa” Noel Jones , Jo Beddoe and Tony Freeth** FACTORY CARNIVAL BAND The Factory later became the Yaa Asantewa Centre
10. **Bertie Delandro and Randolph “Bull Bull” Baptiste** EBONY
11. **Lawence and Joan Noel** TRINBAGO
12. **Michael La Rose , Keith La Rose and Janice Durham** PEOPLES WAR CARNIVAL BAND
13. **Anselm “Sam” Samuel** HARAMBEE
14. **Fitzroy Lewis** HACKNEY UNITED
15. **Ansell Wong, Gloria Cummings and PatC Jaggs** ELIMU PADDINGTON ARTS
16. **Rupert “Kush” Edinburgh** HIBISCUS

17. **Rachel Henderson** DOMINICAN WOMEN IN NATIONAL COSTUME FROM 510 CENTRE
18. **Cheryl Tudor** FLYOVER CARNIVAL CLUB
19. **Martha Fevrier** FLAMINGO
20. **Arthur Peters, "Rocky" Byron ,Clive "Mashup" Phillip and Bernice Francois** MANGROVE
21. **Louise Forte** TRINIDAD & TOBAGO CARNIVAL CLUB
22. **Dexter Kahn and Evelyn Noriega** BWIA COCOYEA
23. **Darcus Howe and Una Howe** RACE TODAY RENEGADES
24. **Alan Hayman** LONDON SCHOOL OF SAMBA
25. **Festi Francis** DEM GROVE
26. **Jean Bernard** PATO (Pioneers And Their Offspring)
27. BARBADOS CROPOVER CLUB
28. **Anton Holder** BAYIE BUSUOFO
29. **Steve Dallaway** DALLAWAY MAS
30. **Joan Samm** BUROKEETS
31. **Lee Woolford –Chivers** CHILDREN & PARENTS CARNIVAL BAND
32. **Mervyn Hargreaves ,Tex and Titus** DRAGONS SOCIAL CLUB
33. **Frank Alexander** DESIGN IN MIND
34. **Errol Romilly and Carole Gaspard** MAS-O-RAMA
35. **Ros Robinson and Rachel Henderson** DOMINICA UK ASSOCIATION (DUKA)
36. **Ruby Noblemunn** STAMFORD HILL YOUTH CLUB
37. **Ethenia Smith** SPEKTAKULAR
38. CAMDEN BLACK TEACHERS & PARENTS
39. **Maggie Woods & Sister Monica Taiwan** ST MARY OF THE ANGELS
40. **Christina Oree & David Grant** BEERAAHARR SWEET COMBINATION
41. **Larry Forde and Gloria Cummings** FLAMBOYAN
42. ST CLEMENTS & ST JAMES BAND
43. **Vernon "Fellows" Williams** GENESIS
44. **Clary Salandy and Michael "Speedy" Ramdeen** MAHOGANY
45. **Randolph "Bull Bull" Baptiste** STARDUST MAS & PAN
46. **Carl Gabriel** MISTY
47. **Nikki Lyons** OVALIONZ
48. **Monty Ward** PHOENIX
49. **Lincoln Rahamut** PERPETUAL BEAUTY and later MASQUERADE 2000
50. **Paul McLaren** SHADE MAKERS
51. **Debbie Eno** KUUMBA
52. **Ros Price and Avion Mookram** SOUTH CONNECTIONS
53. **Rubena Waldrop** JAMBOULAY
54. **Alfred Walcott** ARTE NEUVILLE
55. **Boo and Frank Rollock** LONDON ALL STARS
56. **Greta Mendez** BATTIMAMAZELLE
57. **Bertie Delandro** QUINTESENCE

If I left out your mas band, or the information is not accurate, my apologies. I will need to get your band details and history to include your work in Carnival. Talk to me afterwards or email me.



OUR FUTURE REQUIRES WORK ON THE HISTORY AND ART OF CARIBBEAN MAS.

Every band should write the history of their own band. This should include:

- Who founded your band?
- What year was it founded?
- Who were your designers?
- What are your themes and sections over the years?
- Who provided your music on the road?
- Who was on your organising committees?
- Where were your mas camps?
- Who provided you with music on the road?

There is a lot more information to record.

I hope that CAMF can launch a “Mas Band History Project” which I am willing to help with. This should include:

1. The story of the origins of the Caribbean Carnival for mas band leaders and their masqueraders
2. The history of each mas band at Notting Hill Carnival
3. The production of a multi-media pack about the history of the Caribbean Carnival and the history of your band that each band can use to do presentations and outreach work with your own masqueraders, young people, schools, colleges etc.

Many people here can be part of this important project. The truth is if we do not take seriously the art and history of our mas, who will?

I gave a talk entitled “**We stand on the shoulders of giants: over 50 years of Notting Hill Carnival**” last year. If you have not seen it I will send you a copy.

I have been working with some talented people on a Carnival Dance project called **DINGOLAY** for a number of years now, I hope I can return to CAMF and ask the mas bands for your participation in a new competition and creative project that will bring creativity, training, skills and education to your mas band and masqueraders.

To progress and for the future of mas at Notting Hill Carnival each individual mas band and collectively as CAMF must focus on:

1. Young people
2. Educating ourselves and then the UK about the Caribbean Carnival and masquerade
3. Promote mas as an art
4. Make our own mas band histories

Thank you.

© Michael La Rose July 2015

Michael La Rose is an author and researcher, Chair of the George Padmore Institute, director of Savannah View, designer and band leader Peoples War Carnival Band (1982-1998), vice chair of the Carnival Development Committee (1978-1980) and founder of APC Association for a Peoples Carnival (1989).



CAMF Tribute to those who have passed. Read by "Sister Rosa" Rosa Noel Jones:

Claudia Jones	Kelso Cochrane
Rhaune Laslett	Andre Shervington
Edric and Pearl Connor	Junior Telfer
Chris Le Maitre	Granville Pryce
Selwyn Baptiste	Ethnia Smith
Johnno Roberts	Vivian Comma the "Golden Cockerel"
Frank Critchlow	Carlton "Zigilee" Constantine
Merle Major	Philmore "Boots" Davidson
Biggs Yearwood	Randolph "Bull Bull" Baptiste
"Rocky" Byron	Allan "Capitan" Thornhill
John La Rose	Trevor Carter
David Roussel –Milner	Wayne Berkley
Tony Cumberbatch	Shadow the mas man
Hugo Learmond	Vernon "Fellows" Williams
The calypsonian Peace & Love	Blue
Larry Forde	Lawrence Noel
Geraldine Connor-Crawford	Monty Ward
Ruby Nobleunn	Rachel Henderson,

And ALL those unnamed and unknown who have made a contribution to Notting Hill Carnival.

Compiled by Michael La Rose for CAMF "Pioneers of Notting Hill Carnival Awards", 5th July, 2015 from the listing in the talk "We stand on the Shoulders of Giants: over 50 years of Notting Hill Carnival" 2014.