

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

BEANSTALK TO MACCA TREE:
The Development of the National
Pantomime by the Little Theatre Movement
of Jamaica, 1941-2003

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by

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Summary of Thesis submitted for PhD degree
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on
Beanstalk To Macca Tree: The Development of the National Pantomime
by the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica, 1941-2003

Greta Bourke and Henry Fowler, co-founders of the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica, initiated the LTM Pantomime tradition in 1941 to raise funds for an experimental theatre, which would both house contemporary trends from Europe and America and carve out a creative space for the indigenous culture of an emergent New Jamaica.

The LTM actively developed the Pantomime audience at the Ward Theatre to reflect a cross-section of society. Coachloads of adults and children from country districts joined the established middle-class theatregoers as well as representatives of the inner city 'people of the yard'. Gradually, the original English-pantomime style production metamorphosed into a different entity. Topical reference, proverbial wisdom, song, dance and vibrant colour were mixed and expressed in language, which zigzagged along the continuum between Jamaican Standard English and Patwa.

Over six decades, Jamaican Pantomime has created a prestigious performative space for the retelling of many episodes from the life story of an old island. Intrinsic to this context is a system of shared beliefs which operates on a number of levels: the value of received wisdom, the redemptive nature of Christian faith, Anancyism as a strategy of survival, and national aspirations for unity based on the principle of mutual respect.

The Little Theatre complex, which opened in 1961, housed the national schools of drama and dance before they became part of an integrated Visual and Performing Arts College for the island. Furthermore, a catalogue of the thousands of people who have been involved in LTM productions over six decades reads as a *Who's Who* of Jamaican cultural development in the twentieth century.

Instead of merely mimicking the English model, the LTM Pantomime evolved into a distinct form of indigenous theatre and rekindled the folk tradition as an expression of national identity within the context of contemporary popular culture.

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LIST OF LTM PANTOMIMES

Year	Pantomime	Scriptwriter(s)
1941	<i>Jack & the Beanstalk</i>	Jack Bruton
1942	<i>Babes in the Wood</i>	Pat Worlledge
1943	<i>Soliday & the Wicked Bird</i>	Vera Bell
1944	<i>Toad of Toad Hall</i>	A. A. Milne
1945	<i>Aladdin & his Magic Lamp</i>	(unattributed)
1946	<i>The Rose and the Ring</i>	(unattributed)
1947	<i>Cinderella</i>	Henry Marshall
1948	<i>Beauty & the Beast</i>	Micky Hendriks (adp)
1949	<i>Bluebeard & Brer Anancy</i>	Louise Bennett & Noel Vaz
1950	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Clemence Dane
1951	<i>Dick Whittington</i>	(unattributed)
1952	<i>Aladdin</i>	Michael Vickers (adp)
1953	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	Ranny Williams (adp)
1954	<i>Anancy & the Magic Mirror</i>	Greta Bourke
1955	<i>Anancy & Pandora</i>	Louise Bennett
1956	<i>Anancy & Beeny Bud</i>	Louise Bennett
1957	<i>Busha Bluebeard</i> (revival)	Louise Bennett & Noel Vaz
1958	<i>Quashie Lady</i>	Ranny Williams
1959	<i>Jamaica Way</i>	Ranny Williams
1960	<i>Carib Gold</i>	Cecile Nobrega
1961	<i>Banana Boy</i>	Sam Hillary
1962	<i>Finian's Rainbow</i>	E. Y. Harbury & Fred Saidy
1963	<i>Queenie's Daughter</i>	Greta Fowler, Louise Bennett, Henry Fowler, Ranny Williams, Lois Kelly-Barrow, Noel Vaz (compiled by Dennis Scott)

1964	<i>Bredda Buck</i>	Greta Fowler, Lois Kelly-Barrow, Louise Bennett, Derek Boughton & Doris Duperley
1965	<i>Morgan's Dream of Old Port Royal</i>	Henry and Greta Fowler
1966	<i>Queenie's Daughter</i> (revival)	1963 team with additional dialogue by Lloyd Reckord
1967	<i>Anancy & Pandora</i> (revival)	Louise Bennett
1968	<i>Anancy & Doumbey</i>	Sonia and Don Mills
1969	<i>Moonshine Anancy</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1970	<i>Rockstone Anancy</i>	Sylvia Wynter, Alex Gradussov
1971	<i>Music Boy</i>	Trevor Rhone
1972	<i>Hail Columbus</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1973	<i>Queenie's Daughter</i> (revival)	1963 team
1974	<i>Dickance for Fippance</i>	Gloria Lannaman
1975	<i>The Witch</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1976	<i>Brashana O!</i>	Gloria Lannaman
1977	<i>12 Million Dollar Man</i>	Verena Reckord
1978	<i>Johnny Reggae</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1979	<i>The Hon. Allpurpus & the Dancing Princesses</i>	Michael Reckord
1980	<i>Mansong</i>	Ted Dwyer
1981	<i>The Pirate Princess</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1982	<i>Tantaloo</i>	Gloria Lannaman
1983	<i>Gimneral B</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1984	<i>Sipplesilver</i>	Pat Cumper & Lloyd Reckord from a scenario by Dennis Scott
1985	<i>Trash</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1986	<i>River Mumma & the Golden Table</i>	Aston Cooke & Barbara Gloudon
1987	<i>King Root</i>	Balfour Anderson
1988	<i>Bruckins</i>	Carmen Tipling & Ted Dwyer

1989	<i>Schoolers</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1990	<i>Fifty Fifty</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1991	<i>Mandeya</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1992	<i>Reggae Son</i> (revival)	Barbara Gloudon
1993	<i>Anansi Come Back</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1994	<i>Moonsplash</i> (revival)	Barbara Gloudon
1995	<i>Schoolers 2</i> (revival)	Barbara Gloudon
1996	<i>Jangah Rock</i>	Alvin Campbell, (& Barbara Gloudon)
1997	<i>Baggarags</i>	The Group (& Barbara Gloudon)
1998	<i>Anansi Web</i>	Barbara Gloudon
1999	<i>Bugsie - Millennium Bug</i>	Conliffe Wilmot-Simpson (& Barbara Gloudon)
2000	<i>Jack and the Macca Tree</i>	Conliffe Wilmot-Simpson (& Barbara Gloudon)
2001	<i>Chicken Merry</i>	Barbara Gloudon
2002	<i>Miss Annie</i> (revival)	Barbara Gloudon
2003	<i>Combolo</i> (revival)	Barbara Gloudon
2004	<i>Iffa Nuh So</i>	Barbara Gloudon
2005	<i>Zu-Zu Macca</i>	Barbara Gloudon

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research on the development of the Jamaican National Pantomime tradition explores a genre – West Indian drama – that has been given too little serious academic attention during the 20th century even when other aspects of Caribbean creative expression have received worldwide recognition. Pantomime in Jamaica – a much transformed product of the British pantomime tradition – has tended to be dismissed by the cognoscenti as ‘merely’ popular theatre and therefore not worthy of serious academic study.

It needs to be noted here that as the Little Theatre Movement (LTM) tried to indigenise the English ‘pantomime’ form in the Caribbean context but never managed to find another name for its increasingly different Jamaican version, the thesis will make the orthographic distinction between the two meanings, which the word ‘pantomime’ has acquired due to LTM experimentation, by referring to the Jamaican theatrical package as Pantomime (with a capital P).

My thesis is that the work of the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica has significantly shaped the development of the Arts on a national level and continues to contribute towards a definition, from the people's point of view, of what being *Jamaican* might mean. The material of the Pantomime comes from the worlds of folk culture, social reality and popular entertainment, the language is Jamaica Talk, the theatrics embrace various aspects of the art of performance, the outcome is educational, sociological, anthropological, political, enjoyable and, at its best, cathartic.

For 65 years, the Little Theatre Movement's annual Pantomime has been a cultural constant in an ever-changing national context. Nevertheless, the peculiar phenomenon of a staged show, even if it happens repeatedly, also

presents specific problems for the scholar because the ephemeral nature of performance, and especially the dynamic tension between performer and audience, creates an intangible but valid entity in the present, which is impossible to re-live in retrospect.

This research has involved some analysis of scripts and performances, plus an insight into past productions from working notes, theatrical programmes, reviews and interviews. Access to holdings in the National Library of Jamaica, The West India Collection at the Library of the University of the West Indies and the Library of Oral History also at the University of the West Indies, Mona, has been invaluable.

Despite the contribution of many acclaimed West Indian writers to the scripts of Jamaican Pantomime; the synergy of the show lies in the embodiment and interpretation of the word on stage. From the beginning of this project, therefore, it has been my intention to engage with the phenomenon of the National Pantomime of Jamaica as performance rather than as literary history. Indubitably biography, literature, history and folklore, as well as sociology, politics, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, philosophy and dramatic theory play a part in unpacking this theatrical art form, but the fulcrum of the research has to be the mimetic function of the production, as this is the root of its popularity.

The theatrical intelligence and sophistication of Jamaican audiences (Hill, 1992:158) is not to be underestimated. The real aim of the Little Theatre Movement was to create a vehicle for formal, cultured theatre that would keep Jamaicans up-to-date with new trends in Europe and in the metropolitan United States. The institution of an annual Pantomime, which began each Boxing Day, was intended to be merely a means to an end: a money-spinner at the prestigious Ward Theatre which would eventually finance the building of a new theatrical home in Kingston, dedicated to experimental drama. Indeed by 1961 the Little Theatre Movement had established a home of its own, in every sense.

It had been Greta Fowler's vision for the LTM to reaffirm Jamaica's place on the world theatrical map by providing for the new, experimental theatre of the metropolitan West a home among the predominantly middle-class theatre-goers of Kingston. The intrinsic irony inherent in the outcome of the Little Theatre Movement's efforts was that the concept of 'transposition' was replaced by the phenomenon of 'transformation' and what should have merely been 'the means to an end' inadvertently became 'the end' in itself. The pantomime, a populist money-spinner, acquired – through experiment, artistry, vibrant dynamism, relevance and longevity – the mantle of authentic West Indian drama arising from and out of the experience of the people.

By the time the 1941 'beanstalk' of the British pantomime format had been indigenised into the 'macca tree' of the Jamaican National Pantomime cultural experience in 2000, the 60-year old tradition had produced an art form in a package so theatrically distinctive that the label 'pantomime' might have seemed a misnomer.

The aim and purpose of the research

From its beginning, the focus of the research has been a sense of the LTM Pantomime as a mirror to society, an anthropological and even ontological explanation of what it might mean to be Jamaican. However, this core concern could only take shape gradually, chapter by chapter, as each layer of data was unfolded, sorted and synthesized. The storage and organisation of multiple snippets of information produced a framework within which this intuitive premise could be investigated. Consequently, the development of a database of people involved in the Little Theatre Movement and the National Pantomime of Jamaica became a preliminary and ongoing outcome of the project.

While specifically aiming at expanding knowledge and theory within the genre of West Indian drama, the research simultaneously sought to find application in the 'real world' of Jamaican culture and the findings are

therefore written for the information of an interdisciplinary academic audience, and ultimately for the lay reader as the PhD thesis will eventually evolve into a long-needed book about the National Pantomime of Jamaica.

The result of this project is a description of the empowerment of the Jamaican public through its own indigenised version of the European pantomime form. This popular entertainment, which originated with the Greeks, found a renaissance in the development of the *commedia dell'arte* in Italy, before being harnessed for the English stage at Drury Lane Theatre in 1685. Over the next two hundred years the genre evolved into the twentieth century British pantomime model that, in turn, provided inspiration for Jamaica's fledgling LTM in 1941.

So often, those familiar aspects of a context, which are considered 'ordinary' by its inhabitants, are the very elements that, together, constitute the essence and defining qualities of that environment. An understanding of what is special about the everyday aspects of life in a locality is often grasped only through the distance of space or time, and if it is the latter, then such awareness can come too late. Within the Caribbean context, so much of what has constituted the 'natural' cultural expression of the people has been lost because it has seemed too mundane and 'simple' to be actively nurtured and preserved. It is hoped therefore that this work will generally serve the purpose of informing educational policy in so far as heightening an appreciation of the value of the contribution of the Jamaican National Pantomime tradition to the island's cultural development.

The purpose of my research is primarily to contribute to a greater understanding of the development of Jamaican Theatre in the twentieth century, but it has as a corollary an interest in salvaging disappearing primary source material from the oral accounts of hands-on participants in the early phase of the development of the National Pantomime. By the turn of the century, many of the original movers and shakers of Jamaican Pantomime were either quite elderly or infirm or had already died. Inevitably, the

enthusiastic 27-year-old of 1941 – the year in which the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica was founded – would be an elderly 86-year-old in 2000 – the year in which this research began to take the form of a PhD. This meant that the preliminary points of focus for the researcher centred on the early stages of the development of the Pantomime tradition so that material could be recorded in what was rapidly becoming a race against time. The project began to assume a sudden urgency as source material continued to disappear person by person – Hugh Morrison, Bridget Jones, Maurice Harty, Gloria Escoffery, Eric Coverley, Errol Hill, Ted Dwyer, Carl Abrahams ... and, most recently Louise Bennett.

“Every time an old man dies, another book is lost,” prompts Olive Lewin, citing Professor Chief Fela Sowande of Nigeria, as she focuses our attention on the endangered treasure of our oral heritage (Lewin 2002:17). The primary source for the research has been the memory of the elderly: distilled by experience, detailed in terms of remembering the quirky and ‘trivial’ – often found to be the uniquely special aspect of their insight – but at times uncertain about more generally known facts such as married names and dates. They have the advantage of remembering the distant past with increased clarity as they get significantly older and this has provided a fleeting window of opportunity for the research. Maybe it is an awareness of the transitory nature of life that explains why the oldest of the participants have often been the most enthusiastic and encouraging supporters of the project. They have played an invaluable role in helping me to get the story of the National Pantomime told with as much accuracy and in as much detail as possible.

A further aim is that this research might play a part in informing practice by stimulating current practitioners to re-evaluate their vision for the future in the light of a summary of the dreams and achievements of the past. This study is meant to be an opportunity for reflection on the experience of ‘a road less travelled’ and the demands and discipline that such a journey has required.

The wider scope and multidisciplinary nature of the project also has a bearing on the articulation of the notion of a Caribbean aesthetic which continues to be a responsibility for many West Indian scholars in the arts. George Lamming refers to the contribution of various Caribbean arts movements from the 1950s as “Chapter 1” of this collective tome on Poetics: “If there is any reason at all for working as a writer, it is in the full knowledge that we are only perhaps a Chapter One of the new meaning of Caribbean civilisation” (Lamming 1989). The aim of the generation of creative artists which he represents was to “make people who are the subject of the theme become the articulators of the theme.” Derek Walcott, a leading figure in the group, sums up the main thrust of their endeavours:

I think in my generation, people like Naipaul or Lamming or Hearne, that what we had to do was pretty well fight for some kind of establishing of the language as being respectable, or our positions as being equally respectable to that of . . . but I think that’s over, because I mean there is now a body of West Indian literature, which may be ‘the old men,’ but the younger people coming up don’t really have that struggle because the path has been opened for them. (Baugh 1988:52).

This research seeks to acknowledge the early involvement of the theatre in mapping out ‘the new meaning of Caribbean civilisation’, but beyond that, it wishes to incorporate an awareness of the contribution of the LTM’s National Pantomime of Jamaica, to the contents of ‘Chapter 2’ as it is being currently written at home and abroad, by a ‘second generation’ of post-Independence Caribbean writers and intellectuals.

The research is angled to capture the significance of the spirit of performance in twentieth century Jamaica, rooted as the culture is in the predominantly oral history of the island’s people. The dynamic of the voice – which sadly is too often archived solely in memory – becomes therefore an essential aspect of the work.

Research method

The methods for the collection of data had to evolve with time as circumstances and access varied. Initially, the hope had been to start with the scripts, but as they were not easily accessible, the first sets of printed materials available to the researcher were reviews photocopied from newspaper clippings filed in the National Library of Jamaica. Consequently, from an early stage, it was serendipity which focused attention on the importance of audience response vis a vis the contribution of the players, in the development of the research.

Since the scripts continued to be unavailable, data had to be collected through fieldwork and interviews - a method which is labour intensive and costly. The researcher began to collect data from the periphery of the field and early observations came from past members of the chorus rather than from the high-profiled figures at the centre of Pantomime productions or within the current management of the Little Theatre Movement.

This hindrance of access to the 'mainstream' of information became an asset to the research, however, as forays into the wider field heightened an awareness of the collective nature of the enterprise as well as an interest in identifying some of the nutrients in the creative soil from which an indigenous theatrical tradition eventually grew. It has been said, "the real heart of the theatre in Jamaica has been the musical, and its exponents have been the 'Panto' and Bim and Bam. Both...had their roots in the culture [sic] manure of the country" (Gradussov 1970: 49). The idea of using the metaphor of dung would probably not be received with much enthusiasm within the current context of Caribbean cultural studies, but the old Yorkshire adage of "where there's muck there's brass" certainly has some bearing on the subsequent development of the Jamaican Pantomime tradition because the success of the show was due to its ability to be 'fertilised' in equal measure by the island's rural folk heritage and urban popular culture.

Sadly, until relatively recently, the notion of distinguishing between 'top soil' and 'dung' has been vigorously applied within the Caribbean's academic élite which has tended to elevate the 'high culture' of the written word, especially in the form of the novel, over the 'low culture' of the oral tradition expressed in Creole and its associations with Anancy, Africa and the drum. It is due to this traditional bias against the acceptability of popular culture that the LTM Pantomime, described by Errol Hill as "the most notable instance of Caribbean integrated theatre ... playing to audiences in the tens of thousands over several months" (Hill 1992: 283-284) has received so little scholarly attention, even from academics at the University of the West Indies.

However, a new breeze began to blow in the final decade of the 20th century and on into the 21st when in addition to considerable attention paid to Creole and burgeoning research on Rastafarianism and dub poetry in the 1980s, came the publication of seminal work on Jamaican theatre (Hill 1992), orality (Cooper 1993), reggae (O'Brien Chang & Chen 1998), Jamaican art (Boxer & Poupeye 1998), folk music (Lewin 2000), culture and customs (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001), broadcasting (MockYen 2003), and an encyclopedia of Jamaican heritage (Senior 2003).

The fundamental building blocks for this research are therefore an exploration of the following folk-based concepts: orality, rhythm, metaphor, landscape, Anancy, paradox and spirituality. Conceptual frameworks like the centrality of the dominant female presence at the helm; the fundamental importance of the concept of paradox to an understanding of the Caribbean situation; and the contribution of the Pantomime tradition to the development of Caribbean Poetics have all been used as anchors for the research.

Due to the current entrenchment within Western academia of fashionable notions which celebrate difference over homogeneity, the value of the mininarrative over the Grand Narrative (Barry 1995: 86 - 87); the acceptability of qualitative research methods in which anecdote provides a framework for analysis, this research is unavoidably 'Post-modern' in its timing. A

philosophical climate which espouses hybridity and allows for a multi-disciplinary approach, the increasing validity of the 'grass roots' perspective and the questioning of barriers between high and low culture – including a discussion of the relative values of each – all provide the scope necessary for the pursuit of this kind of study as a valid enterprise.

On another more practical point, this project could not have been done as part of an academic programme in the pre-computer era. With so little source material properly archived, the constant sifting and sorting of scraps of information, found in the most unlikely of places, would have made of this introductory study of Pantomime a life's work in the pre-digital age. There are just too many pieces of too large a puzzle for an individual to keep hold of, at the same time.

Research instruments

The theatrical production is by its very nature transient and illusory. A performance happens in the present of a particular place and time and in consort with a particular audience. Once given, it can never be duplicated with the exactness of the original, even when recorded for archival reference. Furthermore, the performance lives afresh in each enactment within the imagination of each individual presence: each participant in the event – the performer (on stage or behind-the-scenes) and the audience alike.

How then does the researcher recapture the flavour of the event? As Bridget Jones – one of the few 20th century scholars to take West Indian theatre seriously – warned in 1986: “Only the foolhardy advance judgements on the basis of the text alone. Productions can be dated and located, we may be able to say how many tickets were sold; but the truth of each performance, the real event, is only available to the critic who was there on the night” (Jones 1986:35).

To the ingredients of the production (script, designs, score, lyrics, choreography, programme notes, topicalities, box office data, audiovisual recordings) needed to be added the spice of lived experience (memories of producers, performers and members of the audience - including critics - alike). In order to keep track of the very large number of people involved in the LTM Pantomime over the years, I created an evolving database of names of participants with which I could match associated bits and pieces of information. A further and fortuitous discovery was that some of my potential primary resource persons were actually living in Britain. A preliminary meeting with Henry Fowler, the co-founder of the Little Theatre Movement in Jamaica, now retired and living in Oxford, produced my first recorded interview in August 1996, which kick-started the beginnings of this doctoral phase of the research project.

The Elite Interview

I have had a range of conversations with people both on the periphery and at the epicentre of Pantomime in Jamaica, and a series of recorded interviews with performers, directors, writers and technical personnel. Fortunately too, many Jamaicans travel to Britain on business, on holiday or en route to another destination. For example, I had the opportunity to interview Brian Heap, the director of various LTM Pantomimes since 1985, during a brief visit made by him to Kingston upon Hull in 1997. Then there is the documentary evidence in the form of written records, sound recordings and video footage, which have been archived in various collections in the United Kingdom. These would include film clips of Una Marson, radio recordings of Louise Bennett, scripts and play memorabilia relating to the work of playwrights like Barry Reckord, and interviews of Yvonne Brewster by newsprint journalists and radio presenters.

The 'elite' interview has been an essential tool in the conduct of my research. This is 'elite' in the sense of accessing information through gatekeepers. The validity of their role has been described to the researcher in the following

terms: "Although they may be remote from some aspects of what you are researching, they are likely to have a particularly comprehensive grasp of the wider context, and to be privy to information that is withheld from others. Quite simply, their perspective is different. So you could be dealing with ... someone retired from professional practice but with a view that has both length and breadth" (Gillham 2000: 81-82).

Each interview starts off with structured questions asked to set, or keep, the ball rolling but the main thrust of the dialogue is the exploration of general themes related to those questions. I have used the interview as a tool when a) in depth information is required, b) the subject matter is potentially sensitive and c) the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification (Hinds 2000: 47). But I also used the format of a taped conversation as a means of getting the interviewee to guide the line of inquiry beyond the basic framework of my prompts. The aim of each interview has been to provide space for memories to be explored and recollected for the benefit of the interviewer but within parameters determined by mutual consent.

I have also conducted informal interviews (telephone calls and sometimes extended, face to face conversations) when observations made have been written down quickly during the course of the exchange or recollected in summary form as soon as possible afterwards.

Collecting information through interviews is very helpful indeed, but it is also emotionally exhausting and very time-consuming: "For every hour spent interviewing allow ten times as much time to process the data" (Gilham, 2000:49). Though absolutely essential and also a privilege of the research method employed in the pursuit of this project, the 'elite' interview is no soft option.

Focus group interviews

In the focus group interview the questioner plays the part of facilitator rather than director of the conversation, as it is the participants who determine “the precise content of the discussion within the boundaries of the topic as a whole” – the premise being that they will highlight “those aspects of the topic most important, meaningful or relevant to them” (Gilham 2000: 49-50).

The timesaving considerations are obvious and there is also the dynamic of ‘iron sharpening iron’ as people share ideas with each other. An example of the efficacy of this dynamic is the interview conducted simultaneously with Alma MockYen and Leonie Forbes in December 2000.

Textual analysis

I have supplemented my limited exposure to the scripts with a collection of photocopied reviews covering the period from 1949 to 1962, programme notes, audiovisual clips, cassette and CD recordings, transcripts of radio programmes made by the Radio Unit at UWI, access to back copies of the *Jamaica Journal*, articles from scholarly journals and leisure magazines, newspaper clippings, photographs and the Internet.

Literature review

According to Richardson Wright, before 1937 the only study of the theatre in Jamaica was “that contained in one chapter of George O. Seilhammer’s *History of the American Stage before the Revolution*, published in 1888” (Wright 1986: viii). In the context of twentieth century scholarship, the two substantial works which give an account of the history of the theatre in Jamaica, are Richardson Wright’s *Revels in Jamaica 1682-1838* (reprinted 1986) and Errol Hill’s *The Jamaican Stage 1655-1900* (1992).

Other texts which consider the broader field of Caribbean theatre would include: the Nigerian, Kole Omotoso’s *The Theatrical into Theatre: A Study*

of the Drama and Theatre of the English-speaking Caribbean (1982) which was acknowledged by the Guyanese Ken Corsbie as “the first book to attempt to deal with the growth and present status of drama and plays within the English-speaking Caribbean” (Corsbie 1984: 58). Corsbie’s own textbook, *Theatre in the Caribbean* (1984), written for use in schools, not only gives a helpful overview of the Caribbean theatrical scene from the 1930s to 1980s but also pays tribute to the contribution of folk and popular culture and the theatrical aspects of everyday Caribbean life.

Judy Stone’s literary history of drama in the English-speaking West Indies, *Theatre: Studies in West Indian Literature* (1994), is described by Kenneth Ramchand as, “the first attempt to put together in one place all the existing information, from the earliest documentable period” (Stone 1994: x). In reviewing Stone’s book, Lowell Fiet of Puerto Rico makes the point that the gap filled by this study was so great that, “it has immediately become the standard text chronicling the growth and development of West Indian theatre in the twentieth century. ... Thus, *Theatre* complements the other major accomplishment of recent Caribbean theatre scholarship, Errol Hill’s *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900* (1992), to provide the best available view of the creativity, energy, and cultural dynamism which have worked together to overcome colonial attitudes and restrictive theatres in the world today” (the caribbeanwriter.com).

Other published scholars in the field of Caribbean theatre are: Ivy Baxter, Wycliff Bennett, Alex Gradussov, Bridget Jones, Mervyn Morris, Rex Nettleford, Derek Walcott and Sylvia Wynter, but no major study of the theatre in Jamaica has yet been written by a Jamaican. Indeed, it was hoped that this deficiency would have been addressed by the aforementioned Wycliffe Bennett, himself a catalyst and active participant in 20th century developments, who has been distilling many years of research in the writing of a book with the working title: “The Historical Foundation of the Jamaican

Theatre.” Up to now, this life’s work has still not been published despite tantalising glimpses given in excerpts printed in the *Jamaica Journal*.

With so little scholarly work available on the theatre in Jamaica, and even less on the contribution of the Little Theatre Movement to the development of the theatrical arts on a national and regional level, it is essential that some impetus be given to young Jamaican scholars to study, research and appreciate the cultural wealth embodied in stage performance arising out of the local context. This attempt to map the contribution of the LTM’s annual national Pantomime over a period that has now exceed six decades is meant to bring primary source material into the public domain before it is permanently lost.

This research seeks to weave together some of the threads involved in the development of this tapestry so that the creative design behind the LTM effort can be better appreciated by those who take the endeavour for granted. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge – at least in part – the efforts of many who have worked doggedly to contribute to the productions and to keep the tradition going. Above all, this research project wishes to inspire other scholars – and in particular Jamaicans – to apply their educated eye and cultural insight to a more detailed analysis of the importance of the theatre as a literary genre within the West Indian context. As the proverb says, “the past is for wisdom, the present for action, but for joy the future” (Claremont 1994: 250).

CHAPTER 2

THEATRE IN JAMAICA: AN OVERVIEW

The Little Theatre Movement became a major player in the attempt by West Indian dramatists to shape the character of theatre in Jamaica. In the words of the Nigerian playwright and critic Kole Omotoso, “Greta and Henry Fowler began something upon which others could build, rather than having to begin all over again” (Omotoso 1982: 80). Although in many ways all-encompassing, the story of this theatre movement is not to be confused with the idea that theatre started in Jamaica with the nationalist struggle of the twentieth century. It did not. The island can boast of a long and distinguished theatrical history, which has both embraced influences from across the globe and has contributed in its own right to the story of the development of theatre in other places.

As is the case today, the eighteenth century relationship between dramatists in the Caribbean, Britain and America involved significant elements of mutual exchange. In 1733, an English company visiting from America very successfully performed *The Beggar’s Opera* by John Gay in Kingston, only five years after its London premiere. In 1771, Garrick’s Drury Lane mounted a successful production of *The West Indian* by an up-and-coming English playwright, Richard Cumberland. During the American War of Independence, the American Company of Comedians retreated to its Jamaican base where it was able to occupy Kingston’s first theatre on the Parade – the site where the present Ward Theatre now stands – in addition to developing Spanish Town and Montego Bay as other performance centres. In 1797, Matthew Gregory (‘Monk’) Lewis who would later be more famous in West Indian history as a benevolent member of the Jamaican plantocracy and social historian, offered

The Castle Spectre to Sheridan for production at Drury Lane, to the box office advantage of that theatre.

The influence of Shakespeare, restoration comedy and the sort of professional standard associated with the best of what London had to offer, percolated through the centuries of Jamaican playgoing, shaping the worldview and sense of humour of the educated elite, and can still be seen in respectable popular entertainment of the twentieth century, like the LTM's National Pantomime.

The period that led from settlement by the British to Emancipation involved complete separation between European theatre and folk theatre. As Baxter points out, "the Afro-Jamaican folk theatre existed in its own sphere" (Baxter 1970: 284); it expressed itself in entertainments like Christmas masquerade, Jonkonnu, Set Girl parades and the Festival of the New Yam (see Senior 2003: 440). However, in 1869 a closer amalgam between popular and literary elements within the theatre was heralded through the contribution of the Murray family.

Henry G Murray was a black Jamaican monolingualist who travelled the country with "recitals of humorous stories based on Jamaican manners and customs. His appeal was immediate, and people flocked to hear him" (Hill 2000: 555). This storytelling profession was continued by his sons Andrew and William, so for thirty years town and country audiences were delighted with "topics such as the annual troop muster, the Christmas-time masquerade of the Set Girls and John Canoe, and the Festival of the New Yam, as well as contemporary events, written in sparkling dialect and skillfully presented with appropriate songs, were enormously popular" (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 146-147).

Hill tells us, "The formal theatre adopted in the Caribbean came as ready-made package [*from Europe*], wrapped in the glory of its acknowledged achievement. It was peddled by touring professionals from abroad and ardently imitated by local amateurs, many claiming links to whatever little

European ancestry they could trace” (Hill 1992: 278). The extent of this desire to have cosmopolitan culture at the heart of island identity is reflected in the theatrical package associated with the three-month International Exhibition held by Jamaica in 1891 to stimulate trade. The London Dramatic Company performed on the stage at the exhibition grounds while the E. A. McDowell Company “with the enormously popular Fanny Reeves, occupied the hastily refurbished Theatre Royal” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 200). Between the two companies, “seventy plays – light-hearted comedies, melodramas and historical romances by such authors as W. S. Gilbert, Pinero and Boucicault – *[were presented]* in a total of 128 performances” (ibid.).

Rapid expansion in road, rail and sea links in the second half of the nineteenth century gave rise to the dominance of touring companies, like the F R Benson Company, dedicated exclusively to the classics, which toured the West Indies in 1905. Six Shakespearian dramas and Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* were produced at Kingston’s Theatre Royal during the course of a single week and established a benchmark of excellence for local audiences. Benson was a theatrical innovator, inspired by William Poel, and his company consisted of “several players of world-wide reputation” (Bennett 1989: 23). However, as Wycliffe Bennett points out, “not all touring companies were of this indisputably high quality” (ibid.) and the addiction of theatre-goers to productions from abroad did nothing to support the growth of local theatre as amateur efforts could not hope to compete on equal terms with the professional package from elsewhere.

An earthquake destroyed much of Kingston, including the Theatre Royal, in 1907 but as part of the city’s reconstruction, the Ward Theatre was built in 1912 on the same North Parade site. When George Bernard Shaw visited Jamaica in 1911, he tried in vain to warn those who would listen of the threat that hosting the professional touring companies posed to the development of native theatre. Nonetheless, the newly built Ward Theatre hosted various other professional groups during the 1920s onwards (like the Florence

Glossop-Harris Company from London and the W. S. Harkins Dramatic Company from New York) who “continued to provide a model for the schools and for those amateurs for whom theatre was simply an art form devoted to public entertainment of a high order” (Hill 2000: 555). This tradition, which began in the eighteenth century only came to a halt in Jamaica “with the outbreak of the Second World War” (Bennett 1989: 23) in 1939.

During the 1920s popular entertainment in Kingston was thriving as a variety of comic duos – refined comedy, black-face comedy and street minstrels – built, “a business catering to the largest audiences” (Hill 2000: 555), which flourished until the 1960s. Out of this context came figures like Ernest Cupidon, Tony Ableton, Ranny Williams, Lee Gordon and Ed ‘Bim’ Lewis (of the black-face comedy team Bim and Bam) who all contributed, either as influences or participants, to the development of the Jamaican Pantomime as a distinctive form. In particular, the early farces of Bim and Bam acted as a precursor to the ‘roots’ play, which emerged in the 1970s, and was also a significant model in the development of the Jambiz version of Jamaican Pantomime at the end of the century.

So despite, Shaw’s reservations, the home-grown product did begin to assert itself in tandem with the presence of the touring companies, but the gulf between the ‘art theatre’ and the ‘theatre of the street’ remained as the ‘respectable’ theatre-going public proved to be quite resistant to accepting local talent. This bifurcation within a culture rooted in equal measure in both the melody of Europe and the rhythm of Africa has been an ongoing creative tension in the development of indigenous theatre in Jamaica. The ever-swinging pendulum of politics has tipped the balance of power in favour of one side or the other decade after decade during the twentieth century as cultural legitimacy has been defined by the changing ideologies of the parties in government.

By the late 1920s, forces in the Caribbean were beginning to challenge colonial overlordship. Left-wing literary magazines began to appear, and

strong local political leaders and labour unions began to emerge. Artist and sculptress, educator and humanist, Edna Manley is credited with stimulating "transcultural art forms reflecting the social forces of change" (Anon. 09/09/84) by bringing the first African carving to Jamaica in 1925. In the theatre a new self-awareness asserted itself as participation became more widespread. At the populist level, Marcus Garvey, "leader of a global African uplift movement, opened a theatre for the masses in 1929 and presented a series of farces written by the Jamaican comedian Ranny Williams" (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 147).

Within the sphere of theatre as art, Norman and Edna Manley, who believed that creative endeavour had to be at the heart of developing national identity, became patrons of the Kingston Dramatic Society, which was formed in 1929. Conversely, in 1930 Marcus Garvey mounted on the open-air stage at Edelweiss Park, three large-scale dramatic pageants the very titles of which "aimed at uplifting his working-class audiences" (Hill 2000: 555) – *The Coronation of an African King* (a 3-Act Play with a cast of 100), *Roaming Jamaicans* (with a cast of 80), *Slavery – from Hut to Mansion* (with a cast of 120).

The real pioneer, however, in the use of the literary arts (and especially poetry) to establish a national culture was Thomas Henry MacDermot, a respected Jamaican journalist, poet and dramatist who wrote under the name 'Tom Redcam'. As early as 1919 he wrote a historical play, *San Gloria*, about Columbus's year as a castaway on the island, in which he tapped the glamour of Jamaica's past as an inspiration for its future. Tom Redcam was made the first Poet Laureate of Jamaica in 1933 and a posthumous *Gleaner* editorial of 1949 acknowledged his success "far more than any other ... in moulding the minds of his contemporaries" (Roberts 1951: 103). His memory has lived on in the symbiotic value of the Little Theatre being sited beside the Kingston Parish Library along Tom Redcam Avenue at the point when that section of

uptown Kingston was being developed under the premiership of Norman Manley.

Internationally, the language of jazz, rhythmic folk-song-like melodies, choreographic experimentation and the integration of singing, dancing and acting in the developing Broadway musical created new opportunities both for folk culture as content and the black artist as performer in mainstream theatre. London had already staged *In Dahomey*, its “first all-colour musical” comedy, at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1903, but the seminal American masterpiece *Show Boat* which appeared in 1928 at Drury Lane began to present new understandings of the validity of the culture and person of the black artist as serious performer. Paul Robeson singing ‘Ol’ Man River’ or the jazz beat behind ‘Can’t Help Lovin That Man of Mine’ heralded the central place of the influence of black music in the twentieth century.

Alan J Lerner (1986: 69) has described the words of Robeson’s signature song as “probably the profoundest lyric ever to emerge on the musical stage.” Indeed ‘Ol’ Man River’ became such a basic component of the musical vocabulary of twentieth century culture that when sung fleetingly by the pirate Captain Rackham as a mildly ironic allusion in *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981), the reference would have seemed as familiar to the National Pantomime audience as an epigrammatic quotation from the Bible.

There is a neurological condition in which “a person can see perfectly but be unable to recognize what he sees, even though he may be able to recognize it by feeling, hearing, or smelling it” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1994-2000). This problem of visual perception is called ‘agnosia’ and is the effect of injury and disease on the brain. Derek Walcott, the West Indian poet, most concerned with the need to name the elements of the Antillean story speaks of the creative artist as the ‘glue’ that restores ‘shattered histories’ like a broken vase that is lovingly reassembled: “Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. ... Antillean art is this restoration of our

shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent”(Walcott 1998: 69).

Looking back at the effects of the ‘dis-ease’ of history on the West Indian psyche, Philip Sherlock recognised the challenge for the arts of tackling the damaging phenomenon of cultural agnosia. He pointed out that West Indian literature, as a discrete body of writing, did not exist before the 1930s:

Rooted in his holding and village, the peasant spoke through his folksongs and stories. He handed these down from generation to generation by word of mouth. But the West Indian intellectual remained silent. Craftsmen made fine furniture in the style of Chippendale and Sheraton but there were no West Indian sculptors. Women plaited intricate patterns in straw and fibre but there were no West Indian painters. Revivalists danced when the Power took possession of them and children in their ring games translated music into gesture and movement, but there were no West Indian dance groups, no choreographers. The countryman’s comment on life in his proverbs had no counterpart in written literature. (Sherlock 1966c: 155)

As it turned out, poetry and drama led the way for the West Indian novel which emerged in the early 1940s, concurrent with the LTM’s fledgling efforts to find increasing relevance in popular drama through greater exposure to folk culture in Pantomime.

Along with the university of the West Indies and the government-sponsored Festival movement, the LTM proved to be a major player in the efforts of twentieth century West Indian dramatists to shape the character of theatre in Jamaica. As Errol Hill acknowledges, “the art theatre of Europe had helped to inculcate a love of stage plays in Caribbean audiences” (Hill 1992: 280). What would prove to be more difficult was the act of shaking off European dominance of a West Indian mindset shaped in the traditional grammar school system which considered this theatre to be a “product of a people of greater sophistication belonging to a superior culture” (ibid. 278).

According to Banham, Hill and Woodyard, in the decade of the 1930s “the first serious attempts were made to write and present plays relevant to Caribbean life that would appeal to a broad cross-section of the population” (Banham, Hill and Woodyard 1994: 142). Local dramatists, trying “to create a Jamaican theatre in content and style” (Baxter 1970: 285) began to combine elements of the folk tradition with the mainstream framework of classical European practice. Una Marson is considered to be the most significant Jamaican playwright of the 1930s. She inherited the mantles of Tom Redcam and Claude McKay and expressed her nationalistic sentiments in *Jamaica Talk* and hers was a theatre of social realism that was specific to the Jamaican context. Her work inspired Louise Bennett and she was the forerunner of the women poets of the 1980s. In terms of format, it should also be noted that her most important play *Pocomania* (1938) was “one of the early experiments in incorporating both folk songs and folk dances into a West Indian drama” (Stone 1994: 21).

In the field of light entertainment, Ernest Cupidon delighted his audiences by rewriting stories from H. G. de Lisser’s novels for the stage and though he did not engage issues of cultural politics directly, of great importance was the fact that his very popular productions were “among the earliest instances of plays that featured a black heroine” (Stone 1994: 21).

The informal musical gatherings held each Christmas morning at the ethnomusicologist Astley Clerk’s music shop in downtown Kingston, evolved by the 1930s into a variety concert that got so big it had to be relocated eventually to the Ward Theatre. These Christmas Morning Concerts, which were organised by the well known impresarios W. Hylton, Vere Johns and Eric Coverley, included dance, dramatic sketches, music and above all an opportunity for talented Jamaican entertainers to display their skills “before a mostly working class audience” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 206). Indeed, it was in this context, that Louise Bennett the dialect poet made her

professional debut in a 1936 concert organised at Coke Memorial Hall, by her future husband Eric Coverley.

Ranny Williams and his brother were world discourses (very interested in world politics) and were both great readers. They would learn what was going on in the world from shortwave radio and they would read the *Gleaner* from cover to cover. Ranny's niece, Ouida Rowe, attended the Christmas Morning Concerts regularly as a child, and remained fascinated with the transformation of her ordinary and often serious uncle into the bemused stage comic who, working in tandem with the irrepressible Lee Gordon, was so popular with the Jamaican audience:

I was introduced to the world of theatre through the Christmas Morning Concerts at the Ward (I think one time it was held at Coke Methodist Church hall). That's where I first saw Uncle Ran perform with Lee. Singers (the big singers of the day like Granville Campbell who was a Jamaican classical singer), rumba dancers, comic slots, Miss Lou's verses. Mostly Jamaican English. Things that happened in America were copied here, e.g. Radio City type acts, not just the rockets but different acts. It could be that Eric Coverley had seen that format in New York and had tried to pull all of this together in the Christmas Morning Concert. It was never a straight show: different items coming on but they were all exciting. It would start at 10am and go on till about midday. A one-and-a-half to two hour show. It was a calendar thing: the biggest theatrical event happening at Christmas time. Just as you would look forward to Pantomime, you would look forward to the Concert on Christmas morning. I was never bored even though I was a little girl of 6 or 7; it was action all the way. (Rowe 2003)

This series of acts – “from singers to gymnasts, from comedians to chalk-talk artists” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 206) – remained a variety concert until Roma Presano - singer, actress and producer – working with Ranny Williams, rearranged the format into a more cohesive whole. Presano, who would later be known as Mrs Roma d'Oyen Fitchett, created thematic links between scenes and introduced more elaborate décor and scene changes. As she became the first director of the LTM Pantomime in association with co-director Elinor Lithgow (who later took over sole responsibility for the

production) elements from the Christmas Morning Concerts were specifically introduced into *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1941 so that “the possibility of an adapted English pantomime, and later a totally Jamaican pantomime” (Baxter 1970: 259) was built into the form from the start.

The highlight of national theatre in the 1930s was, however, a very large-scale musical pageant called *Jamaica Triumphant*, mounted by the Roman Catholic church in 1937 and which used a cast “of English, Irish, Scotch, Spanish, Portuguese, Central and South Americans, Africans, Chinese and East Indians” to present the island’s story “from its Arawak origins, [then] the ‘discovery’ by Christopher Columbus in 1494, and the development of its multi-racial society” (Omotoso 1982: 48). This ambitious project was followed up in 1953 with a second pageant called *Joy for Jamaica*.

Inspired by Gordon Craig’s *Toward a New Theatre* (1913) and embracing William Poel’s new perspectives on Shakespearian performance, the Little Theatre movement, a form of community theatre, developed rapidly in the United States between 1909 and 1939. The movement expressed dissatisfaction with the overtly hedonistic entertainment of commercial theatre and was sustained by the belief that committed amateurs could do better (see Banham 2000:238-239). This was the model that seemed most suitable, to the Jamaicans Henry Fowler (a radical political scientist) and Greta Bourke (who dreamt of a national theatre for Jamaica) as a framework for developing the performing arts as a means of national cultural self-definition. The centrality of their achievement through the LTM is acknowledged by the Nigerian theatre scholar Kole Omotoso in these words: “It is not an overstatement to say that the history of theatre performance in Jamaica for the last 60 years of the 20th century (1941-2000) is and is going to be the history of action taken by the Little Theatre Movement or the reaction to it either by way of co-operation or by way of antagonism” (Omotoso 1982: 80).

The other major performing arts group in Jamaica in the 1940s was The Caribbean Thespians, an amateur company, founded in 1946 “for the

encouragement and development of drama in Jamaica” (Lindo 1969). The group’s first president and leading actor was Roy Reid, a black Jamaican, Kingston College old-boy and an accomplished musician who wrote the theme song for Bourke’s 1954 LTM Pantomime, *Anancy and the Magic Mirror*. Under the directorship of an Englishman Orford St John - “an indefatigable man who was instrumental in setting Jamaican theatre on its feet” (MockYen 2003: 181) – the Thespians used local cinema houses as performance venues for one-act plays before movies and in 1949, took their performances out of the capital city for the first time to the parishes of Manchester and St Thomas. Errol Hill, who had also been a member of the group, records that the Caribbean Thespians produced “a number of outstanding people including the actors Mona Chin Hammond and Charles Hyatt, the actor-playwrights Easton Lee and Mitzi Townsend, and the actor-director Ronald Harrison” (Banham 2000: 556).

Archie Lindo, the most successful indigenous playwright of the early 1940s, used his plays to deal with topical issues like colour and social prejudice as he “tried to bridge the gap between the classes by giving dignity to working-class characters” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 211). As a journalist, Lindo would later become an important voice as a local theatre critic capable of speaking in an informed manner about the stage but also of relating the performers’ efforts to the cultural dynamics of an evolving post-colonial context. Cicely Waite-Smith and W. G. Ogilvie were other dramatists committed to social realism who made a significant contribution to Jamaican theatre in that period.

There were other theatre groups, which emerged too. Some did not last, being in some cases destroyed by factionalism or transformed into other clusters with new identities. There was in any event considerable overlap in terms of the people involved in the various groups because the pool of dramatists in Kingston was limited. At one end of the scale stood the largely expatriate Theatre Arts Club, started in 1947, which tended to perform foreign scripts, as

very few local plays were available. At the other, was Elsa Benjamin's project for a People's Theatre.

In 1945, the director Elsie Benjamin used *One Soja Man* by W. G. Ogilvie to launch her vision of a theatre for an audience of 'ordinary' Jamaicans, outside the traditional theatre-going elite. The harsh reality was that such an audience did not exist; it would have to be built. The director mounted her production "under the kind patronage of the ordinary people of Jamaica" (Hill 1970: 22). As Martin and Pamela Mordecai report, "They did not come, nor did anyone else. The production folded after one night, and the People's Theater sank into oblivion" (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 168). When the LTM was formed it made sure that the most senior political figures in the country were represented on its management committee.

The University (College) of the West Indies established in 1947 also played a very important part in helping to "bring the live theatre home to Caribbean people" (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 142). The first batch of UCWI medical students started the Dramatic Society in 1948. The initiative was taken by Owen Minott who posted the list for interested students to sign but the early play-reading activities of the group were organised by Denise Mitchell. Both belonged to group of 33 medical students who made up the first class to start with the university college in 1947. In 1949, an Extra Mural drama course under the direction of Gloria Cumper provided additional dancers for Ivy Baxter's fledgling amateur dance company.

The great Paul Robeson performed in Jamaica in 1948. The black American baritone, a law graduate whose father had been born into slavery, would also have been as powerful a symbol of success for the pre-Independence generation of adults as Bob Marley would be for their children and Marcus Garvey still promises to be in the 21st century. It is also a strange quirk of history that when twenty-one year old Willard White (product of Excelsior School and the Jamaica School of Music) sang his way into the collective memory in the LTM Pantomime *Anancy and Pandora*, little did he or his 1967

audience know how much a voice for Jamaica and the world of 'high culture' his would become in the future. The following year he went on scholarship to study at the Julliard School in New York, from where he performed his way to stardom on both sides of the Atlantic and a knighthood in 2004 (see Reckord 25/07/04). Furthermore, there is an element of gently poetic irony in the metropolitan elite's celebrated 'Othello' recording a tribute album *The Paul Robeson Legacy* (2002) of folksongs, jazz and spirituals from a position of consolidated acceptability at the heart of the operatic establishment.

1948 was also the year that the British Council came to Jamaica. Tom Murray, a Scot, was its Music Officer and began an extensive collection of Jamaican folksongs giving legitimacy as well as impetus to a greater appreciation of folk music as part of the country's heritage. Barbara Ferland, who composed extensively for the seminal *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* Pantomime in 1949, worked as Murray's secretary/assistant for thirteen years, and experienced some of the richest years of her life in this intellectually charged and highly creative environment (see Courtman 1998: 366).

Not only did the British Council bring artists like Hector Whistler out to Jamaica to paint, but it also played a very important part in sponsoring theatrical endeavour in the 1950s through financial contributions and numerous prizes. The Council also provided the opportunity for the 73-year-old director of the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, Nugent Monck (himself a disciple of William Poel and mentor of Tyrone Guthrie) to work with drama students at secondary school level. This visit triggered the first Secondary Schools' Drama Festival, held at the Garrison Theatre in 1950, under the aegis of the LTM but also supported by the Ministry of Education, the Theatre Arts Club and the British Council.

From the late 1940s, "the technically perfect American musicals, symbolised by Rodgers and Hammerstein's smash hit, *Oklahoma!*, provoked English producers to consider more innovative ideas about stagecraft" (Shellard 2000: 17). The astounding success of *South Pacific* in 1949, winning the Pulitzer

Prize for its challenge to racial prejudice, as well as Tony Awards in every category, was proof that the Broadway musical had become a well-established theatrical form. This genre would, in turn, have a direct impact on the course of the National Pantomime tradition as it developed in Jamaica during the 1950s, as the Broadway successes *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *West Side Story* (1957) not only conquered the London stage but also provided inspiration in terms of popular relevance and the integration of dance, respectively, for LTM Pantomime scripts like *Quashie Lady* in 1958 and *Jamaica Way* in 1959.

It should also be noted that during the 40s and 50s the LTM was engaged in opening up the world of theatre to Jamaican audiences as much through serious theatre as through Pantomime. There had been eleven non-Christmas Pantomime productions between 1940 and 1949, five of which were directed by Noel Vaz. Between 1950 and 1954, there were ten non-Pantomime productions with Vaz handing over to Maurice Harty in 1951 as the main director, and the other half produced by a series of individuals: C. W. Fyfield, Zachy Matalon, Eric Coverley and Orford St John.

Leonie Forbes, Jamaica's leading actress after Louise Bennett retired, speaks of the lesson she learnt from a 'country' audience about the meaning of Shakespeare in their lives as enthusiasts gathered from across the county of Cornwall for *The Taming of the Shrew* in which she played Katherine to Ranny Williams' Petruchio, a Little Theatre production which opened, unusually, in Montego Bay:

We got this theatre built at Round Hill. ... and I'm saying, "I wonder if they know what them doing? This is country and Round Hill not full so where them going to get the people to come to fill up the theatre?" Well, I got the shock of my life. The four-thirty performance was completely sold out – they came from Hanover, Westmoreland, Montpelier, all these places – and they had a roaring time and, quote it back at you please. You couldn't miss no words for they know it. It was a wonderful experience. So by the time it got into town, it took on new life it was a totally different Shakespearian production from what we normally do. You know, we realized it is relevant; it's not just

kids who do it in school. The people they enjoyed it, and they reasoned it out. (Forbes & MockYen 2000)

So, the Bard has long played an overarching social role as a canonical point of reference for the people. This Jamaican love of Shakespeare has also shaped a certain type of audience for local theatre, not dissimilar to the effect of the late 1940s Broadway diet on American theatregoers. Fifty years on from *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller reflected on the challenge he faced as a playwright at the start of his journey:

That theatre had one single audience ... catering to a very different level of age, culture, education, and intellectual sophistication. ... One result of this mix was the ideal, if not frequent fulfilment, of a kind of play that would be complete rather than fragmentary, an emotional rather than an intellectual experience, a play basically of heart with its ulterior moral gesture integrated with action rather than rhetoric. In fact, it was a Shakespearean ideal, a theatre for anyone with an understanding of English and perhaps some common sense. (cited in Lahr 1999: 4).

John Lahr, a leading American theatre critic, then describes Miller's account of the audience's reaction to this extraordinary dramatic experience:

But there was nothing Shakespearean in the response to "that damned disturbing play", as Kazan called it, on the night of its debut, 10 February 1949, in Philadelphia. "The curtain came down and nothing happened," Miller says. "People sat there a good two or three minutes, then somebody stood up with his coat. Several men – I didn't see women doing this – were helpless. They were sitting there with handkerchiefs over their faces. It was like a funeral." He continues, "I didn't know whether the show was dead or alive. The cast was back there wondering what had happened. Nobody'd pulled the curtain up. Finally, someone thought to applaud, and then the house came apart. (Lahr 1999: 4).

This too was the type of challenge that the 'experimental' theatre in Jamaica would have to meet as local dramatists tried to carve out psychological latitude with audiences so that playwrights could more vigorously critique their experience of island realities.

In the late 1950s amateur theatre was in its heyday in Jamaica but casting was still dogged by the politics of shadeism so that, according to Yvonne Brewster, a Jamaica Amateur Operatic Society production of *South Pacific* in 1959 allocated its leading roles to “the many expatriate wives who had little to recommend them but their skin colour” while as a graduate of Drama School (and a member of Jamaica’s mulatto elite), she was offered “a non-speaking part in the chorus ... Luckily, however, not all the local thespians were so caught up in the colonial past. Orford St John, an escapee from Oxford University, who was a brilliant director, decided to produce a double bill using Carol Morrison and Yvonne as his leading ladies” (Brewster 2004: 63). He chose Strindberg’s *The Stronger* – “thought to be very cutting-edge, dealing as it does with infidelity. Tasty for Jamaica” (ibid.) – and Tennessee William’s *Suddenly Last Summer*. The package “filled the Ward Theatre’s 900 seats on many a night” (ibid.).

Alma MockYen (2003: 181-182) also pays tribute to the impact that Orford had on her development as an actress and broadcaster, in addition to many other Jamaican actors who went on to have distinguished careers in the theatre, either at home or abroad. The list is long: Radcliffe Butler, Leonie Forbes, Keith Amiel, Carl Bingers, Mitzi Townsend, Gladstone ‘Bobby’ Lee, Ronald Harrison, Dwight Whyllie, Jean Brown and Mona Chin-Hammond. Ivy Baxter puts him alongside Noel Vaz as a producer/director in Jamaica who “did much to develop actors and to produce the best in theatre tradition” (Baxter 1970: 269).

Orford St John formed The Repertory Players in 1957. With a repertoire springing from the drama of many countries, the Players stood out in the “desperate effort [*on the part of many*] to establish Jamaican theatre on a professional basis” (Dawes 1977: 25). The company had as its aim to present “a raceless theatre” in which casting was in no way influenced by complexion. This alone was a bold step at the time, for Jamaican society was still very rigidly stratified on the basis of shade of skin.

However, as Morris Cargill (the sharp-tongued newspaper columnist for the *Gleaner* whose Jamaican plantocratic background made him a local adjunct to the Noël Coward set) observed, the colony “was undoubtedly one of the more boring places in the world. ... The English civil servants lacked style and, with the exception of the Governor, rode around in small Austins on inadequate incomes” (Cargill 04/08/85). It became very important for the expatriate community and the local educated elite to keep up with the European scene by entering vicariously into the imagined excitement of West End productions through avid reading of the English broadsheets. “The power of theatre critics for the British Sunday papers was at its zenith between 1947 and 1962, with movements being bolstered as well as documented by their observations” (Shellard 2000: 19), so it was not difficult for theatregoers in Jamaica to keep abreast of the latest trends in the London. Inevitably, there was a wish to see some of these developments expressed in local theatre.

As a student at Oxford, Orford St John had been a friend of Terence Rattigan and then went on to work as an actor and a lyricist in London’s West End before leaving with his parents for Jamaica. There, he proved to be a clever, daring and prolific theatre director whose work traversed the barriers of culture, language, historical period and social condition. He chose scripts for their craftsmanship and dramatic effect but he was prepared to flout with convention in terms of venue and set. St John was capable of delivering an outstanding production of *Chippy*, a popular one-acter on a day in the life of a Jamaican police constable on the one hand, while on the other, presenting tragedy in its most disturbing forms: innocence compromised by a decadent society in Anouilh, death and decay in Webster and the pointlessness of human endeavour in Betti; all expressed in a context of civilised amusement but making a strong moral point.

In a country much given to the joy of comedy, Orford St John was willing to embrace the grotesque and to release the dark forces of human experience at a time when a growing middle-class audience much preferred to smile wryly at

the mild satire of the LTM's *Banana Boy* (for which he wrote the lyrics) than to take on violent though compassionate stories of bloodthirsty family vengeance like the *Duchess of Malfi* (Repertory Players).

In the context of 1950s Jamaica, the world of the university-trained intellectual and the street vendor were poles apart but in the context of the theatre, the idealistic nationalists within the LTM were trying very hard to bridge the gap. In many ways, St John's approach embraced exposure to the type of 'experimental' theatre that Greta Bourke so wanted to see as part of the Jamaican dramatic context, but though he contributed witty lyrics to more than one Pantomime, his commitment to serious theatre was too unsettling for a Movement trying to finance the construction of its own playhouse and which, consequently, measured success by box office returns.

The tension between intellectualism and sentimentalism in which the LTM was caught up meant that dramatists who needed to take risks in order to rise above the ordinary could not find the opportunity for extended expression of their talents within that framework. As a result, by the end of the 50s, more attention was being given to providing a vehicle for the "many favourites [*who*] emerged for the audiences, with Miss Lou and Mas Ran leading. Names like Lee Gordon, Lois Kelly Barrow (now Miller), Charles Hyatt, Inez Hibbert, became the stars for the Pantomime crowd. As time passed, [*new*] names emerged like Oliver Samuels, Leonie Forbes, Pauline Stone, Ted Dwyer and others" (Little Theatre Movement 1982: 32).

The pragmatism inherent in the LTM's desire to build and then maintain a tradition therefore demanded less of the avant-garde approach to serious drama and more of the 'distraction' of Pantomime. Although it is clear from conversations with contemporaries like Paul Methuen that Greta Fowler admired Orford St John's innovative and daring approach, the only time that he directed for the LTM was in 1952 when he produced *Salomé* and *A Phoenix Too Frequent* at the Ward. Nevertheless, he kept his place on the LTM's management committee for a number of years (officially, as editor of

the programme notes!) and so provided continued input that way. It must have been that as director, his plays were not 'safe enough' even though, ironically, he was doing the type of experimental work that the Movement had been striving to host in the Jamaican context when it was being set up at the beginning of the 1940s.

The world of university drama seemed to provide more scope for trial and error than was possible in the unsubsidised context of community or commercial theatre. Philip Sherlock as poet, historian, classroom teacher, social worker, philosopher, administrator, man of public affairs and first Vice Principal (and later Vice Chancellor) of the university college, believed in the creative arts "as a catalyst for intellectual pursuits" and consequently inspired faith in self and society among such talented individuals as Errol Hill, Noel Vaz, M. G. Smith, George Lamming, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott because he was "among the first to recognise, to acknowledge and to facilitate *[them]* on their way to full flowering" (Nettleford 1993b: 2). Under his guidance, the Extra-Mural Department would become the real focus of the university's efforts "to encourage the writing and publication of local plays throughout the English-speaking Caribbean and to spread the notion of a popular theatre using the vernacular where appropriate rather than a grammatically correct but artificial language" (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 142).

Noel Vaz first harnessed the spirit of this approach at a UCWI Summer Workshop in 1948, where he developed (in association with Louise Bennett) his idea for merging the Brer Anancy tradition with the English pantomime story. During the 1950s, and in keeping with Philip Sherlock's commitment to West Indian integration through greater regional understanding, Errol Hill (from Trinidad) served from 1953-57 as Drama Officer for the University College at Mona while the Jamaican Noel Vaz was sent to the St Augustine campus to be Drama Officer in Trinidad from 1956-59.

Errol Hill, an indigenist *par excellence*, expressed his controversial, “groundbreaking emphasis on the West Indian” (Stone 1994: 26) in his job at the university through collectively creating and producing Caribbean plays. He recognised that the regional theatre’s most immediate need was training so as drama tutor he worked with the Dramatic Society on campus, assisted in the establishment of several community and other theatres (one of which was Jamaica’s Federal Theatre Company) and started a collection of Caribbean plays, which he had begun to publish by 1955 (Hill in Banham 2000:556).

By 1960, after studying at the Yale School of Drama and learning “from the Jamaican experience” (Stone 1994: 27), Hill the playwright expressed his vision of total theatre, i.e. “incorporating music, song and dance, with a strong story line” (ibid.), by revising his musical comedy *Man Better Man* to produce Trinidad’s first full-length calypso musical. Hill’s theory was that a national theatre for the Caribbean territories should be born out of folk rituals and festival (ibid. 30) and in 1972 he published his milestone thesis, *Trinidad Carnival, mandate for a national theatre*.

Noel Vaz returned to work with the Extra-Mural department at Mona in 1959 and consolidated the new university’s commitment to developing high standards in the performing arts at both a local and regional level. During the 1960s the fully-fledged University of the West Indies (UWI) acted as a catalyst for education in drama throughout the West Indies; Vaz “worked in Hut 36 with Extra-Mural colleagues until drama got its own ‘place in the sun’” (MockYen 2003: 181). This was the Creative Arts Centre or CAC, with administrative offices, music and art studios, the foyer/exhibition area and a three-hundred-seat theatre.

Through the teaching programme and production schedule at the Creative Arts Centre (completed in 1967), summer workshops in rural Jamaica and the broadcasts of the Radio Education Unit based at Mona, the Extra Mural department of the University steadily worked at providing a hub for the development of the performing arts on campus and beyond. In 1993, the CAC

was renamed the Philip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts (PSCCA) “in honour of the man who conceptualised it and worked assiduously to have it built” (MockYen 2003: 181).

Vaz worked from his campus base until 1986 and played an important part as a proponent of serious theatre in the post-Independence period. He introduced the study of twentieth century theatre into the academic programme of the Faculty of Arts alongside administrative responsibilities in co-ordinating joint venture efforts for on-campus clubs and societies and with off-campus theatre groups. However, during the post-Black Power era his refusal to put political ideology above artistic integrity and professional commitment meant that his role as nationalist pacesetter was under-rated for the rest of the twentieth century.

The sixties brought to Jamaica new tensions, new beginnings, new playwrights, new venues, and new training opportunities. As Independence (August 1962) heralded the institutionalisation of a new beginning, political and social changes were reinforced by opportunities for cultural re-evaluation. Indeed, *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre* emphasises the role of “political independence starting with Jamaica and Trinidad in 1962” in driving “a search for forms of presentation in speech, drama, movement, dance, music and rhythm, in verbal and visual imagery that would free theatre creators from inherited customs and inhibitions of the past” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994:142).

In *To Hell with Paradise*, Henry Fonda described the effect of post-war air travel on this sleepy tropical haven: “Jamaica’s North Coast was literally its gold coast, pulsating with tourism development” (cited in Anon. 25/11/97). By 1960, Jamaica dominated the island tourist trade in the Caribbean with visitor numbers passing the quarter million mark. The increasing dependence of the island’s economy on tourism meant that artists found more scope to make a living out of their talent. The observation in 2004 by award winning actor/comedian Tony ‘Paleface’ Hendriks that “hotels are UWI for

entertainers,” was equally true for the 1960s. Hendriks further noted that with plenty foreigners in Jamaica to practise on, “if you can entertain them as well as cross over into mainstream, you've gone clear” (quoted in Roache 31/10/04).

The impressive profile that the Montego Bay Little Theatre has acquired in the national Actor Boy Awards for Excellence at the start of the 21st century could well be a consequence of the variety and high standards of performance required by a further increase in the number of North coast hotels. Another 21st century element, which has indeed contributed significantly to Hendriks's own success as a Jamaican performer abroad, is the size of the Jamaican Diaspora (which is equal to the population of the island) and the growing international audience that it has engendered. As Hendriks knows from personal experience, “There are plenty of Jamaicans across the world who love entertainment from home” (Roache 31/10/04).

The inclusion of folk culture within the prestigious walls of ‘proper theatre’ during the second half of the twentieth century was also consolidated by the work of activists from the Caribbean Artists Movement who, having studied in Britain during the 1960s, returned home to the region to participate in the task of nation building. Certainly a key representative of this group was Edward Kamau Brathwaite but even his contribution followed on from ideas about the economic history and development of the West Indies promulgated by Elsa Goveia and Lucille Walrond (Lucille Mathurin Mair) who, guided by Dr W. Arthur Lewis of St Lucia, had begun to explore this new field as undergraduate history students in London from 1945 (Walmsley 1992: 4).

Lloyd Reckord formed the National Theatre Trust in 1967. Anne Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement* (1992: 207-208) explains that the idea was “to attract sponsorship for theatrical productions, to make it possible ‘for something worthwhile to happen in the theatre in Jamaica and the Caribbean’” as a first stab at rescuing serious theatre from the vagaries of the box office. The Trust enjoyed a good working relationship with the university and its

production of “Jean Genet's play, *The Blacks*, early in 1970, was regarded as another landmark in the process of black consciousness-making.” Other offerings on campus which “nourished the new mood of black consciousness and pride in Jamaica’s African heritage” included, in the aftermath of the Rodney affair, an ‘Africa Night’ hosted by Lucille Mathurin Mair at Mary Seacole Hall in November 1968, which Brathwaite later referred to as ‘the first time that our students had been exposed in any serious way to African art, music, dress, poetry’” (Walmsley 1992: 208).

An important step forward for the 1960s and 1970s in terms of drama in education was that along with introducing twentieth century playwrights like Arthur Miller, T S Eliot and Robert Bolt into the literature curriculum, the schools “developed a taste for plays by Jamaican writers” (Lindo 1969). At the same time, serious playwrights like Samuel Hillary, Dennis Scott, Sylvia Wynter, Trevor Rhone and Easton Lee all exercised their craft as writers or directors as part of the LTM Pantomime tradition.

Numerous theatre groups sprang up in the 1960’s (Omotoso 1982, Dawes 1977) so “the next phase was the creating of more theatre spaces in Kingston to accommodate the increasing number of drama groups” (Hill 2000: 256). The Barn Theatre – originally called “Theatre 77” – was founded by Yvonne Brewster, Trevor Rhone and George Carter. Myrtle Lindo refers to a “group of eight persons professionally trained in England and America” who had returned to Jamaica and who envisioned the possibility of realizing a “professional, topical, vital theatre” (Lindo 1969) by 1977. They staged their first play *Miss Julie* in 1965 in the Old Dramatic Theatre on campus under the auspices of the Extra-Mural department. She added, “Bad lighting posed a serious handicap but worse, the public did not like the play” (ibid.). In 1966 the group established its home at The Barn, a converted garage at 5 Oxford Road.

There were performances of plays by Jamaican playwrights like Sam Hillary, Sylvia Wynter, Roger Mais, Ken Maxwell, Dennis Scott, Carmen Tipling,

among others but the Barn Theatre group has become intimately associated in the public's imagination with the development of Trevor Rhone (*Smile Orange, School's Out, Old Story Time, Bellas Gate Boy*) as a leading Jamaican playwright.

"Several small theatres followed suit. Instead of playing for two or three times in the 1200-seat Ward Theatre, companies could now offer several dozen performances in their much smaller houses, improve their scripts and acting skills and attract bigger audiences over the longer run – all of which helped to professionalize the local theatre. ... The establishment of the Jamaica School of Drama (part of the Cultural Training Centre) in 1973 provided two additional performance areas, one an open-air arena" (Hill 2000: 256).

Both Afrocentric and Eurocentric paradigms have been locked over centuries in an ongoing conflict within the Jamaican social framework. Although the zeal of the Black Power reformer needed toning down, the real danger even at the end of the sixties was that the dissemination of culture still rested with people described by the Australian critic Alex Gradussov as wanting "to cut out their black heritage as if it were a cancer, as if it were an ugly scar that could be eliminated from their psyche" (Gradussov 1970: 47). For the Jamaican middle class, the rejection of a classical European standard as the yardstick for excellence had to wait until the 1970s to gain currency within the mainstream of political and social life. Consequently, the bifurcation identified by Wycliffe Bennett – with "imported scripts, classical and modern" on one hand and "the plays of Jamaican writers" (Bennett 1989: 23) on the other – has remained, even to the present, a persistent element in Jamaican theatre.

In essence, from Gradussov's point-of-view, the most meaningful vehicles for espousing a new value system capable of finding relevance through tapping the reservoir of folk culture but packaging it with appropriate technical know-how, proved to be the National Pantomime and the long-running though less well-resourced Bim and Bam comedy team. It is very interesting that Jambiz,

the end-of-century competitor with the LTM in the category of the pantomime-musical as a Jamaican form, is itself a development of the dramatic legacy of Bim Lewis, which found a new outlet in the comedic talent of Oliver Samuels.

By the end of the 60s, a national theatrical network had been built which produced “most if not all the names that would join to create the extraordinary burst of activity on the Jamaican theatre scene in the 1970’s. Playwrights, directors, producers, actors and actresses as well as back stage workers began their careers within the ambiance of the annual Jamaican pantomime” (Omotoso 1982: 83). Even the Little Theatre building itself had become a hub of theatrical activity. Writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Omotoso could see that “three hundred groups including companies and drama groups in Kingston and from communities and schools coming from all parts of Jamaica use the facilities of the Little Theatre” (ibid.).

The 25th anniversary souvenir magazine of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) suggests that the Festival Movement probably had its beginnings in 1897 when the Institute of Jamaica held an eisteddfod-like competition as part of Jamaica’s commemoration of Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee. Nonetheless, Wycliffe Bennett, recipient of a national honour in 1977 for “his outstanding contribution in the field of theatre, his pioneer work in the Festival Movement of Jamaica, and his tremendous skill in the field of the grand spectacle” (JCDC 1987: 7) organized the first annual Festival of independent Jamaica in 1963. Ivy Baxter notes that awards for excellence provided by the commercial sector encouraged the arts, and the Festival Movement did increase participation and interest in drama by providing specific training and much more opportunity for involvement.

Baxter also acknowledged the “policy of strong support and cooperation [*in*] the arts by the government of Jamaica” (Baxter 1970: 284) which staffed the JCDC to organize and run the Festival activities. She warned, however, that the government needed to extend its remit to incorporate ongoing training in

the arts, if the negative impact of broadening performance opportunities on the creative genius of over-stretched individuals was to be avoided. As it turned out, the institutionalisation of such training as part of national policy began to come into its own in the 1970s with the amalgamation of the national schools of drama, art, dance and music within the walls of the Cultural Training Centre (a tertiary institution which is now known as The Edna Manley College for the Performing Arts).

By the early 1980s, according to Kole Omotoso, “The burden of creating a continuous tradition of serious theatre in the Caribbean” rested on the shoulders of Dennis Scott through “his own dramatic writing, his production of the works of other Caribbean playwrights and his headship of the Jamaica School of Drama” (Omotoso 1982: 95). Scott had got his breakthrough as a playwright in the sixties through his prize-winning entries in the Literary Festival competitions. He was in charge of the Jamaica School of Drama between 1977 and 1983, and directed Ted Dwyer’s script for the LTM *Mansong* in 1980. Scott had previously compiled and edited the script for the first *Queenie’s Daughter* (LTM 1963) and later he provided the scenario for *Sipplesilver* (LTM 1984), which was co-scripted by Pat Cumper and Lloyd Reckord and then directed by Lloyd Reckord. Cumper, an award-winning playwright for stage and radio, had previously written the fairy tale that was adapted by Michael Reckord for *The Hon. All Purpus and the Dancing Princesses* (LTM 1979).

“New groups come and go,” wrote Alex Gradussov, “Only the Little Theatre Movement has lasted a long time” (Gradussov 1970: 48). In acting out its motto, drama “the art where all arts meet” the LTM became a major player in harnessing new talent and recognising the validity of Jamaican culture in its continuously changing and diverse strands. In this regard it has had a role of singular importance in the development of drama in Jamaica during the 20th century.

CHAPTER 3

UNDER BANYAN TREE: BUILDING A LITTLE THEATRE

The LTM became a centrifugal force in the unfolding of the island's performing arts traditions firstly, within the formal theatre where it provided scope for experienced hands to extend their skills, built a broader-based audience, nurtured young talent, and spawned other performing arts companies, like the National Dance Theatre Company.

Henry Fowler had been involved in amateur dramatics as a Jamaican Rhodes scholar with an interest in history and politics at Oxford. When he returned home in 1938, he translated vision into reality by becoming a founder member of the People's National Party (PNP) under the leadership of Norman Manley but he also expressed his radical stance as an actor in *Upheaval* (1939) a play at the Ward Theatre about the labour riots of 1938. As he recounted, "Frank Hill did a very left-wing play dealing with Bustamante and I was in that" (Fowler 1996).

The old tradition of the touring repertory groups capable of producing thirteen different plays at the Ward Theatre in a fortnight, and encapsulated most vividly in local memory by the Florence Glossop-Harris Company which travelled to Jamaica annually in the 1920s, created a void for the theatre-going public when they stopped visiting with the outbreak of war. Henry Fowler remembered, from the perspective of 1996, that as a consequence "a little bit of thought was being given to what to do to develop theatre in Jamaica and I remember when Greta and I went to many meetings which got stuck on the question of constitution and so forth, and finally she said, 'Look, let's forget about consitutions. Let's start doing something.' And then we did" (Fowler 1996).

Within the context of rural Jamaica, the banyan – an Indian tree with aerial roots that grow down into the soil forming additional trunks – often provided a performance space for the village community in an event called ‘Moonshine Darling’. As the ethnomusicologist Olive Lewin explains, "On nights of the full moon country people like to gather to sing, dance, tell stories, play games, and exchange riddles. Often their meeting place is under some large tree in the neighbourhood such as a banyan tree" (Lewin 1975: 2). The image of the banyan therefore serves as a fitting metaphor for the LTM's multifaceted accomplishment as it developed a new understanding of the pantomime genre in Jamaica. The figurative link is reinforced in the folksong ‘Under Banyan Tree,’ which was consolidated as part of the LTM Pantomime tradition with one generation singing to another in *Queenie's Daughter* (1963, 1966 and 1973): “me deh rock so, yu deh rock so, under banyan tree.”

The Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica was co-founded by Greta Bourke and her future husband Henry Fowler. They worked closely together but Henry claims that Greta, who had also done some acting, took the lead in their joint commitment to the theatre, which allowed him to keep the development of Priory School at the heart of his activities. The status of the new theatre movement was to be amateur, but Greta Bourke realised early on that in order to free itself from the whimsy of outside interests, the LTM would need to have its own theatrical base, a modern performing space that it could call home. Greta's dream of raising "funds to provide a Little Theatre for Jamaica, and generally to foster the development of drama in the island" (Little Theatre Movement 1955: 7) was in place from the Movement's inaugural meeting.

Out of the adversity of World War II sprang scope for new creative opportunities as the influx of American and British servicemen created both an extra pool of theatrical talent from abroad and an appreciative audience for “native entertainers catering to this new clientele with exhibitions of folk culture” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 148). Elinor Lithgow, a professional actress from England who had taken refuge in Jamaica in 1940

was enlisted as director of the new group's first production, *The Shining Hour* by Keith Winter (the vehicle for Gladys Cooper's 1934 Broadway debut) in the Little Theatre manner.

Encouraged by the added success of *The Quiet Wedding* also directed by Elinor Lithgow, an even bolder project took shape in the General Organiser's imagination. She wanted to produce a locally written Christmas Pantomime at the Ward Theatre, the largest and most prestigious performance venue in the West Indies. The estimated budget for such a venture was £500. In those days, this was "an unheard of amount for theatrical performances" (Fowler 1996). The transformation of animated, mealtalk of Pantomime into action, depended, therefore, on being able to overcome the apprehensions of such influential figures as "Lindsay Downer who was the doyenne of theatrical activities in times past, and Edna Manley, Ansel Hart and so forth" (ibid.), who made up the LTM Management Committee. Henry Fowler remembers that just as Lindsay Downer was saying, "This is too expensive," Greta "got up, went inside and came back out, [*saying*] 'My sister has agreed to underwrite £250'" (ibid.).

The Pantomime's newfound angel was Peggy Dougall, a Jamaican actress who had recently returned home "from RADA and the Playhouse Theatre in Hollywood" (Fowler 14/12/75). By boldly agreeing to underwrite fifty per cent of "the unprecedented cost of such a lavish production for Jamaica" (Anon. 12/12/61) Peggy Dougall triggered what proved to be the first step in the creation of an indigenous pantomime tradition, which resulted in "the most notable instance of Caribbean integrated theatre" (Hill 1992: 283) of the twentieth century.

In keeping with the British tradition of beginning the pantomime season on Boxing Day, the show *Jack and the Beanstalk* opened at the Ward Theatre on December 26, 1941 and ran for five performances. By its seventh year, the then well-established institution of the LTM Christmas Pantomime was playing to full houses at the Ward Theatre, creating much excitement as

Cinderella (1947) enjoyed "an unprecedented run on the box office" (Nettleford 1993a: 2). Indeed, the *Spotlight* magazine of March 1948 "reported glowingly that 'capacity' audiences 'saw the *Cinderella* pantomime twelve times between December and January last and still want more" (ibid.). The initial investment had paid encouraging dividends even though, during the 14-year period up to 1954, pantomime production costs had risen almost five-fold. Published accounts show that *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (LTM 1954) made a 50% profit of £1,233 (Little Theatre Movement 1955:25).

In 1955, audience figures were described as being "an average of some fifteen thousand...every year" (Little Theatre Movement 1955: 10) and the popularity of the Pantomime was repeatedly mirrored in newspaper headlines, which captured the excitement of one box office hit taking over from another. By the time of Independence in August 1962, confidence in the popularity of the National Pantomime had increased to such a point that for the night of the "61st performance of the longest playing theatrical show in the history of Jamaica" (Anon. 31/08/62), the *Daily Gleaner* could afford the luxury of simplicity with the headline, "*Banana Boy* - a record" (ibid.).

In the post-Independence period, the commercial viability of the LTM's Christmas show was indisputable. In 1970, Ivy Baxter, who had herself contributed significantly to the role of dance in Pantomime, acknowledged the enthusiasm, organizing ability and "sheer hard work" (Baxter 1970: 260) of Greta and Henry Fowler and the response of the public to the LTM project as "one of the most successful theatrical ventures in Jamaica, both from the financial aspect, and from the point of view of audience response" (ibid. 264).

In talking about the magic of Pantomime, Maisie van Courtland recollects the anticipated joy for an audience coming to see *Anancy and Pandora* (LTM 1955): "At 6 o'clock tomorrow evening, in the Ward Theatre, the auditorium will darken to a dim-hued cavern and Time will stand tip-toe in the thrill of hushed expectancy that only the theatre knows. Then slowly, slowly, with a

soft whispering sigh the curtain will rise on the wonderful, magical world of Pantomime...” (van Courtland 25/12/55).

An essential aspect of the device of Pantomime, developed by the LTM for the Jamaican public, was its presentation of the local context, as accessible popular performance in a *prestigious* venue. The home of the LTM Pantomime was established at the heart of Kingston, from the outset, in the Ward Theatre, reputedly the largest, and only theatre of its kind, in the English-speaking Caribbean.



Figure 1: The Ward Theatre in Downtown Kingston. *Jamaica Gleaner*, April 23, 2003.

“Standing majestically in North Parade, painted a cool powder blue that beckons the eye no matter the angle of approach” (Tortello, “Ward Theatre, 1912”), the Ward Theatre was designed and built by a Jamaican firm of architects and has a seating capacity of about 900. “So magnificent in appearance, so spacious in its proportions, (and) so artistically finished” at its completion in 1912, it was described at the start of the 21st century by the historian Rebecca Tortello as “a sturdy triumph of tropical architecture able to maintain an air of formality while answering the need for practicality in ventilation and acoustics” (ibid.).

This splendid Victorian style structure with three tiers, occupying one side of the main square in downtown Kingston became the symbolic home of the LTM Pantomime from 1941 until 2001, with the exception of 1950 the only time when the theatre was not available because film bookings were given priority by the theatre management. The theatre also acquired significant prestige for its role in the presentation of national events. The Ward Theatre has “functioned as the National Stage for the Festival Movement” (Tortello, “Ward Theatre, 1912”) as well as being “the official birth place of the island's two major political parties, the People’s National Party and the Jamaica Labour Party ” (Anon. 23/04/03). On January 7, 2000, the Ward Theatre was declared a National Monument in honour of its long history, which has encompassed so much of the nation's social, cultural and political life.

Cheryl Kean (2003), now a librarian at the University Library at Mona, still remembers vividly what it felt like, from the age of 9 or 10, to go on the annual school trip from St Thomas to the Pantomime at the Ward Theatre. In an interview, she summed up the experience in the word “grand” and when asked to explain she attributed the feeling to the building itself.

You felt like you were in a special place: the curtains, the architecture inside, the columns everything. It was different it was really a special experience for young children. There was something regal about the place. I would definitely think that the smell, the chill to the nose, the atmosphere, was a very important part of the experience. I have never experienced a place as special as that as an adult. I have travelled and been to museums etc, which are nice but not like that. The impact was significant on me as a child coming from the country. As an adult, I am not receptive in that way any longer.

And then the music it was great. The acting, performance itself was just great. Not so much magical but you did feel transported into the whole atmosphere, place environment of what was going on, on stage. There was no detachment: I felt caught up into the whole thing.

‘Grand’ is a good word to describe the Ward as to tread these boards, would put the performer in venerable company for not only “a wealth of local talent

has passed this test” but so too have such international stars of yesteryear of the stature of Marion Anderson, Paul Robeson and Charles Laughton. Wycliffe Bennett is quoted as saying, “until you can say you have acted in the Ward and filled the space with your presence, you won't have gotten very far” (Anon. 23/04/03). This ‘grand’ theatre became almost a second home for up-and-coming actors like Leonie Forbes, Buddy Pouyatt, Alma (Hylton) MockYen and many others, in those halcyon days when both the productions and personnel of the Pantomime enterprise were very much at the heart of the national project for cultural self-definition; this particular theatre became full of “wonderful memories” (MockYen 2000).

By 2001, however, its story had seemed “intertwined with the syndrome of urban decay affecting much of downtown Kingston” where the environs outside the theatre had “undergone a tremendous change for the worse: “Audience numbers have routinely fallen as people who live outside of downtown no longer want to travel downtown in the evening and the people in the community do not embrace it as their own” (Tortello, “Ward Theatre, 1912”). When the gun culture of the street spilled over into the foyer of the Ward Theatre during a Pantomime performance, the LTM withdrew completely from its long-term city-centre home to the more orderly venue of the suburban Little Theatre, near New Kingston. Boxing Day 2002 was the first time in a history of 62 years that the producers of the Pantomime chose not to open downtown: “the LTM Pantomime stayed away because of the condition of the theatre and the deterioration of its surrounding environment” (Anon. 23/04/03).

For the LTM the motive behind the choice of format was entirely pragmatic as “the whole concept of the Pantomime was to make funds for the development of a Little Theatre where plays could be tried out” (Fowler 1996). Indeed, the pantomime format in the hands of the LTM proved to be particularly successful, but the appeal of this type of play for theatregoers in Jamaica had already been proven. Baxter notes that during the war years, “Members of the

British Army had been staging pantomimes in the English style at the garrison theatre and later had opened these performances to the Jamaican theatrical public in Kingston. These co-existed, for a short time, with the Little Theatre pantomime” (Baxter 1970: 259). The difference in the LTM’s approach was that from the outset the group tried to integrate the English form into a specifically Jamaican context and this inevitably involved incorporating elements of island geography but also tapping the folk tradition in terms of philosophy, language, music and movement.

So the format worked, but the early experience of the LTM in pantomime, proved the commercial importance of recognizing the entertainment factor as a vital ingredient in building audiences large enough to ensure the continued success of a production. In the 1930s and 40s, the development of ‘folk’ and ‘straight’ theatre as two concurrent but parallel streams began to converge as some Jamaican dramatists tried to make theatre more relevant to the actual life experience of West Indian people. However, the trajectory of the indigenising process was not a straightforward process. The new theatrical enthusiasms of the pre-Independence intelligentsia were not necessarily shared by the commercial interests that controlled the Ward Theatre. For example, from 1939 the Kingston and St Andrew Corporation (KSAC) leased the theatre to a cinema company “at a very small fraction of the rental charged to dramatic users” which “severely stunted the growth of local drama in its most formative period” (Lindo 1969).

Nonetheless, it could be said that the LTM led the way with Noel Vaz’s commitment (shown as early as 1943) to incorporate the Jamaican physical context directly into the dramatic experience when he mounted *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* beneath a guango tree in the tropical gardens of Vale Royal. By 1950, Vaz’s pioneering work for the LTM, in so far as it was trying to make the Pantomime a truly Jamaican experience, had already culminated in the first, successful, all-Jamaican Christmas Pantomime production *Bluebeard*

and *Brer Anancy* (1949), which “made the LTM thousands of pounds profit” (Small 1993: 18).

Despite the extraordinary achievement of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy*, the director Noel Vaz was given *Alice in Wonderland* by Clemence Dane (a close friend of Noël Coward since the mid-1920s) as the follow-up ‘Pantomime’ script for the 1950 season. The LTM seemed constrained to counterbalance the indigenising momentum achieved by the integration of Anancy (successful as it was) with a return to the safety of an unequivocally English, middle-class offering. So, the most professional of Jamaican directors who had trained at the Old Vic Theatre School and who had idealistically given up the opportunity of working as an assistant to Michel Saint-Denis in 1948 in order to return home to build a National theatre, had to resort to stage-craft to make this production innovative and so he introduced Jamaica to the concept of the revolving stage.

This same seesawing effect between the indigenous and the Eurocentric had already taken place in 1944 when *Toad of Toad Hall* by A. A. Milne was chosen to follow Vera Bell’s too radical and less commercially successful Maroon-based script, *Soliday and the Wicked Bird*. Nonetheless, it would not be fair to blame the Pantomime’s organisers for the cultural ambivalence; they faced significant opposition from a social elite that was scornful of folk culture. Henry Fowler speaks of the “terrific” struggle on the part of the LTM to get access to the Ward “in those early days when the Corporation leased out the Theatre for a cinema” (Fowler 1996). For the 1950-51 Pantomime season, the LTM had to stage *Alice in Wonderland* in the Hall at St. George’s school and according to Henry Fowler, it was that which “really gave impetus” (ibid.) to following up the challenge of building a theatrical home of their own.

It should also be noted that during the 40s and 50s the Little Theatre Movement was also engaged in opening up the world of serious theatre to Jamaican audiences. There had been eleven other productions between 1940 and 1949, five of which were directed by Vaz who was then employed by the

LTM as director of all their productions at a salary of £2 10s a week. Between 1950 and 1954, there were ten non-Pantomime productions with Noel Vaz handing over to Maurice Harty in 1951 as the main director, and the other half produced by a series of individuals: C. W. Fyfield, Zachy Matalon, Eric Coverley and Orford St John.

It proved to be the last straw for Noel Vaz when “his employers suggested a cut in his measly weekly income in spite of several successful productions” (Small 1993: 18). He produced Shaw’s *St Joan* for the LTM in 1951 and then resigned, returning to theatrical life in Britain until Sir Philip Sherlock encouraged him to go back to the West Indies to work for the university college in Trinidad. Vaz’s commitment as director to the highest standards of professional integrity within the constraints of the LTM, lived on in the 1950s, however, through his protégé, Maurice Harty – “that quiet fellow who is responsible for putting it all together” (van Courtland 11/12/56) as he was perceived in LTM circles.

The desire to be experimental manifested itself in a variety of ways. During the 1950s, Jamaican dramatists received exposure to new Shakespearian techniques in the school of William Poel, on the one hand, through the involvement of Nugent Monck, founder of the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, as director of *The Merchant of Venice* at the beginning of the decade. While, on the other hand, Jamaican audiences were being kept abreast of the innovation of theatre-in-the-round associated with off-Broadway developments in the USA, through the involvement of Reuben Silver of Cleveland’s Karamu Theatre in the UCWI summer school of 1958.

Errol Hill’s emphasis from 1953 on the folk in Jamaican theatre, emanating from his work as Drama Tutor on the university campus, was strongly supported by Greta Fowler but, by that time, Noel Vaz had given up on the LTM and gone to Britain to work in repertory theatre and for the BBC. Easton Lee describes the cultural tug-of-war of the period as “a touch and go, a touch and go, and a come back” and notes that by 1958, when he was in

Ranny Williams's version of *Robinson Crusoe*, "the very serious detractors, who were also fighting Greta and Henry, had gone back to Britain" (Lee 2003).

At first, Greta might have longed too for experimental theatre along the lines of the European model but she realised very quickly that her Little Theatre movement would only thrive if it succeeded in generating its own income and that necessitated a level of popularity only possible by finding connections with a cultural framework that was familiar to the Jamaican masses. With the departure of both Vaz, and then Harty in 1957, the Pantomime seemed to tumble from one director to another until Norman Rae steadied the ship with Barbara Gloudon's *Hail Columbus* in 1972. He then switched his directorial allegiance to her rival – as principal scriptwriter for Pantomime – Gloria Lannaman.

In 1951 a temporary base for the Little Theatre was opened at the Rainbow Club, which was part restaurant in Half-Way Tree near the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation. Having created a means of generating an income, the LTM's second goal was to build its own theatre. So, as Henry Fowler explains:

We ... found this place in what was, Tom Redcam. Which wasn't yet built. It was bush. And we went to look at it and there was a little bit of surplus land there that we thought was too little for the Library and then we said to the Government, "Well, could you let us have some more of this surplus land? And we got enough for Kingston & St Andrew Parish Library and the Headquarters of the Library. And then I, same time I said, "As we are doing this, could we get a bit for the, for the, theatre? And we got this acre of land and we transferred the roof that we had at the Rainbow, there. And for a number of years, it stood there with just this roof. And everyone passing by when Tom Redcam [*library*] was being built, said, "Woi, the Little Theatre! They have this thing there and they don't know what to do with it! (Fowler 1996)

A press release circa 1960 entitled, "Little Theatre building begins" explained some of the financial challenges involved in proceeding with the project: "the

proceeds of all productions (except those in aid of War Funds and Hurricane Assistance) have been accumulated for the purchase of the land and the construction of this theatre.... The total cost of the land and the Little Theatre will be £31,000. The accumulated profits of the Movement over the 20 years will cover £16,000 of this cost, and a mortgage has been arranged for the balance of £15,000.”

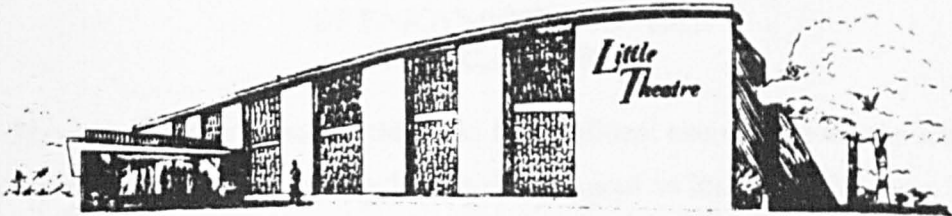


Figure 2: Illustration by the architect Gil Pratley for the new Little Theatre building on Tom Redcam Avenue.

A government grant of £5000 aided the construction the LTM rehearsal room in 1959 (Lindo 1969) and then finally, “forty-five productions” on from its start in 1941, with proceeds from the annual Jamaica Pantomime as “a major source of funding for the new theatre” (Banham, Hill & Woodyard 1994: 211), the LTM’s theatrical home on Tom Redcam Avenue was ready with the start of the Movement’s third decade. The long awaited Little Theatre building was opened in May 1961. The plan was for this new smaller theatre to translate contemporary trends from British and American stages and Emlyn Williams, George Devine of The English Stage Company, Tyrone Guthrie of the Music Box Theatre in New York City, Sam Wanamaker and Peter Brook, all sent congratulatory messages to the LTM in 1961 to mark the opening of the Little Theatre on Tom Redcam Avenue. Their words of encouragement were printed in the Little Theatre Souvenir Programme for that occasion.

At last, Greta Fowler’s dream of a theatre of their own had been realized. Yet, there was still so much to be done as the building itself, though in use, still needed roofing and additional funds would be necessary to bring theatre equipment up to the desirable standard. Nonetheless, after twenty years of

"consistent and purposeful theatrical effort" (Greta & Henry Fowler 1961) the vision of creating this 'Little Theatre' for Jamaica had become a reality at least in terms of the physical structure:

THE LITTLE THEATRE
MAY ITS DOORS BE EVER OPEN TO ALL TALENT,
ITS PRESENCE A CENTRE OF INSPIRATION
FOR ALL ARTISTS,
AND ITS PRODUCTIONS A CONSTANT SOURCE
OF ENJOYMENT AND HOPE
FOR ALL PEOPLE.

This was the point at which the LTM felt confident enough to posit the notion that the Jamaican Pantomime had finally acquired an identity of its own. The promotional newspaper article "With *Banana Boy* Jamaican Pantomime comes of age," which introduced this concept, referred not only to the longevity of the LTM tradition but also to their Christmas show's popularity as a national institution:

Not only have Pantomime Musicals played to over 100,000 people in the last three years, but the actual form of these musicals has developed each year a more and more distinctively Jamaican atmosphere, providing an annual show which breathes a Jamaican spirit, and provides a showcase for Jamaican talent of dramatists, composers, lyric writers, artists, singers, and dancers. By popular acclaim the Pantomime (as it is still called by everyone) is the Jamaican show of which all Jamaica is proud. (Anon.12/12/61).

In terms of the dream of developing "experimental theatre which would service the Ward" (Fowler 1996), another step this direction was the challenge of making this new theatrical facility accessible to a wide range of performing arts groups. Again this would be dependent on the continued financial success of the annual LTM Pantomime at the Ward Theatre.

The special relationship between the National Pantomime and the Ward Theatre in downtown Kingston therefore continued to be maintained despite the LTM's new uptown base. In the 1981 Programme for *The Pirate Princess*, Henry Fowler wrote:

Rich and poor, young and old, from country and from town, of every colour, class and creed – audiences totalling over 1¼ million come to the Ward Theatre year after year, to enjoy a production which, each year, brings its message of inspiration and cheer to the whole nation. (Fowler 1981: 7).

Somewhat ironically, in light of the terrible struggle experienced by the LTM in getting access to the Ward Theatre for its productions, especially in the early years, the popularity of the Pantomimes and the fact that they had become synonymous with the Ward itself, meant that the Little Theatre Movement was able to continue to attract large audiences to that bigger theatre in downtown Kingston even during the unstable socio-political times of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Standing on the platform of this achievement, Henry Fowler could therefore encourage the audiences who had braved the ‘dangers’ of Kingston at night in 1981-82 in order to attend the show, to extend this measure of courage in support of the rejuvenation of their capital city:

We have the opportunity now to rebuild the national image of Kingston, to heal the wounds of internal strife and to attract international recognition for Kingston as a great Caribbean city able to attract visitors, a worthy site of the Seabed Authority.

The National Pantomime therefore has the challenge and opportunity this year to become the focus of an integrated attempt to repopularise the City of Kingston - an effort which might hopefully, stimulate similar efforts by other organizations in other spheres of civic action. (Fowler 1981:7)

The National Pantomime was no longer just a fund-raising entertainment it had become part of a developing affirmation of national identity.

Greta Fowler, the President of the LTM presented a declaration of intent in 1973 when she wrote, “Our aim is to keep the Little Theatre available at a price within the reach of all developing groups, it has therefore to be subsidised, along with the Drama School, by proceeds of the Annual Pantomime” (Fowler 1973: 3). She added, “...all profits from Pantomime go towards the Little Theatre Rehearsal Room and the recently added Studio for

the Jamaica National Theatre School. This centre that we have created on Tom Redcam Avenue has become a bristling cradle of creative effort and is a splendid tribute to the vision and co-operation of the Community which makes it possible" (ibid.). It was not until the 1990s, however, that the Little Little Theatre – studio facilities devoted specifically to experimental drama – was integrated into the fabric of the Little Theatre complex at Tom Redcam Road.

Although the enterprise began as an expression of Greta Bourke's vision of stimulating consistent and purposeful theatrical effort, the success of the venture lay primarily in the fact that it was a collaborative project led by a very capable and committed team. As Kole Omotoso notes, by the time of the LTM's first efforts at pantomime in 1941, "there were artists of local reputation to join in and make it a success" (Omotoso 1982: 82), and the LTM proved to be very good at harnessing new talent especially if it had already made its mark abroad. In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, the extensive catalogue of participants in the LTM project had become a *Who's Who* of Jamaican creative talent in every aspect of the Arts.

The idea behind the Little Theatre Movement under Bourke and Fowler was not only to present new European and American plays along with classical revivals to a burgeoning Jamaican audience but also to provide creative and performative space for nationalistic cultural expression in the emerging New Jamaica. The time-honoured patronage of the island's Governor and his wife was matched by the association of the Movement with the enterprise of nation-building, symbolised by the visible support and interest of Norman and Edna Manley – pacesetters both in politics and culture. This type of establishment support provided a podium for highly trained dramatists, like Noel Vaz, Louise Bennett, Ranny Williams, Lois Kelly (Barrow) and Charles Hyatt – all committed to the political realisation of a West Indian identity – to create the hub of a growing network of thespians devoted to entertaining large audiences to the highest standards possible despite the fact that the theatre had no hope of providing its performers with a living wage. It is to the credit of

the LTM that its vision inspired stars of such a high calibre to give the productions their fullest support year upon year.

Like the moguls of the twentieth century film industry, Bourke and Fowler “had the intelligence to recognize that theatre audiences care as much, if not more, for their favourite actors and actresses as they do for the vehicles in which they display their talents” (Wickham 1992: 236). Unlike the Little Theatre movement in America, the LTM in Jamaica could not retain “the loyalty of trained, classical actors of the highest calibre with large salaries” (ibid.) but it was possible to provide status: ‘star’ billing, and the prospect of a degree of glamour and public adoration and in this way the emerging tradition of a Christmas show at the Ward, as well as atmospheric outdoor productions of Shakespeare and other classical works, was consolidated during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The stars in turn could be relied upon to encourage juveniles (who could be groomed to replace them in due course) to join their ranks; and, not surprisingly, commercial managements quickly began to regard the expanding Little Theatre movement as an ideal training school from which to recruit these newcomers.

Indeed, the extent to which the National Pantomime became an integral part of the Jamaican performer’s annual schedule, and even life, is expressed in the example of Ranny Williams who, along with Louise Bennett, was the LTM’s greatest star. Ranny’s niece Ouida Rowe, in an interview in 2003, tells the story of her diabetic uncle who was disinclined to pay too much attention to his condition, and developed ulcers from making do with uncomfortable shoes during a long Pantomime run towards the end of the 1970s. By the time the season was over, Ranny had to be hospitalised and, eventually, his foot had to be amputated. He spent six months in rehabilitation, learning to walk well with his prosthesis, and was back on stage as usual in his leading role for the opening of the next LTM Pantomime season. Mischievously, he would tease the audience saying, “You don’t have to call me Ranny any more...Call me One-y” (MockYen 2003: 256).

The critic Alex Gradussov referred to the LTM cofounders as “traditionalists” yet acknowledged “the consistent work of the Fowlers” as “a great asset to the theatre” and even praised them for their sometimes-inspirational contribution “in training actors, directors and technical personnel through their Little Theatre Movement” (Gradussov 1970: 50). He also recognised that the ability to pack the Ward Theatre “for months on end ... is a solid achievement” (ibid.). Rex Nettleford said of Greta Fowler that she “had that entrepreneurial eye which beamed into Jamaican realities” (Nettleford 1993a: 6). This insight and the courage to trust her instincts provided her with the scope to manage the Little Theatre Movement in such a way that it was able to repeatedly present a product, which caught the imagination and appealed to the sensibilities of the Jamaican public.

Although she saw herself as very much part of the island’s social elite, it would not be fair to dismiss Greta as a ‘traditionalist’. She recognised and encouraged the new talent, and was instrumental in developing the show business careers of seasoned Jamaican actors like Louise Bennett, Ranny Williams and Lee Gordon. She embraced and developed the concept of Anancy on stage and was instrumental in bringing him back into the Pantomime picture as a leading figure in 1954 with her first script, *Anancy and the Magic Mirror*. This move was then consolidated by harnessing the writing talent of Louise Bennett to develop the first Anancy series.

Greta was willing to see sets transformed by the designs of emergent artists working with Edna Manley to build a local school of painting; to adjust the theatrical framework to accommodate developing trends in popular music – mento, revival, ska, rocksteady and reggae – and she encouraged the integration of Jamaican body language and movement patterns into the show from the earliest days when Hazel Johnson was invited to choreograph for *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Furthermore, it was she who carved a niche in the LTM for the choreographic talent of the young academic Rex Nettleford when he returned to the island after his studies at Oxford.

The theatre proved to be so much more than the building: it also very purposefully provided a nursery for talent. Ivy Baxter had acknowledged the organic nature of the theatre dynamic and the consequent responsibility for training: "Theater grows with the people of any country. There are some things which need to be said over and over again, in different ways, perhaps, for a different generation of people. However, new people have to be trained to this task" (Baxter 1970: 281). This had always been the aim of the LTM. Henry Fowler reminded the audience of thousands who received *The Pirate Princess* at Ward Theatre in the 1981 season that the function of the National Pantomime was to be "the showcase of Jamaican talent and excellence, and the nursery of Jamaican actors, artists, writers and musicians" (Fowler 1981:7).

Greta Fowler, in taking "stock of some of the aspects of 35 years of consistent pioneer effort and experiment," reiterated the challenge that lay behind the formation of the Little Theatre Movement: "The LTM must provide a medium for the talents of our dramatists, artists, actors, directors, musicians and dancers. It is therefore implicit that change and new ideas will provide exciting challenges..." (Fowler 14/12/75). Some of these new ideas were finding expression through changes arising out of the next generation: the versatility and verity of Leonie Forbes as an actress, the comedic talent of Oliver Samuels, the emergence of powerful new playwrights in the form of Barbara Gloudon and Gloria Lannaman, the 'roots'-based choreography and performance style of Jackie Guy lead dancer with the NDTC, and the paradoxical musical talent of Peter Ashbourne, a classically-trained violin virtuoso who made his living by composing popular music for the world of advertising.

Barbara Gloudon's maturing talent as leading scriptwriter for the Pantomime was endorsed by the LTM's doughty General Organiser who officially drew the attention of the wider theatre-going public to a talented individual worthy of notice: "And now welcome, welcome to Barbara Gloudon and her

Moonshine Anancy, Hail Columbus and now *The Witch*. It's really not her fault that her name never cropped up in programmes of 35 years ago! It's because she's young enough and sensitive that she's 'with it' now. Her integrity and ability are to be cherished" (Fowler 14/12/75).

As it turned out, this young playwright would indeed prove to be pivotal in the life of the LTM during the last quarter of the 20th century and beyond. Could it be that three years before her death, the founder and president of the LTM had recognised in her future successor an indomitable spirit and devotion tough enough to be entrusted with such an important legacy? In due course the Gloudon name would become as synonymous with the Little Theatre Movement and the National Pantomime as that of the Fowlers.

All along the way, opportunities were created for children to engage with the Pantomime. The LTM also encouraged the value of performance as part of the school curriculum by sponsoring and organising the Elementary Schools Drama Scheme in 1945 and 1948, and in collaboration with the British Council it established the Secondary Schools Drama Festival in 1951. Furthermore, the LTM actively created a love of theatrical spectacle in children across the country by encouraging Sunday Schools, primary schools and other community groups – especially in rural Jamaica - to incorporate visits to the annual LTM Pantomime as a highlight of their year's programme. It was also the driving force behind the development of the Jamaica School of Drama from 1967, and the Little Theatre building became the hub of speech and drama competitions organised annually by the Jamaica Cultural and Development Commission for Festival. Space was also provided for the National Dance Theatre Company's School of Dance to operate out of the complex on Tom Redcam Avenue.

During the 1969 Pantomime season, the LTM announced its proposed plans to form "the nucleus of a permanent Repertory Company based upon a School of Drama" (Little Theatre Movement 1969: 25). Looking forward to the return in March 1970 of Vivian Matalon, a young Jamaican director "who has made

an enormous theatrical reputation in London and in New York” (ibid.), the LTM planned to match his part-time input as the school’s Honorary Director of Drama with the ongoing support of Sam Walters (LAMDA) who would bring “a wide experience of repertory work, acting, directing, and producing from his work in Britain” (ibid.) to the project. The aim was to build a small “professional repertory group, capable of developing year-round performances in Jamaica of a high standard, and to take Jamaican plans and players of which the island can be proud, to the theatres abroad” (ibid.).

Ivy Baxter observed in *The Arts of an Island*, “The old time patterns are breaking down, the seasons of theatrical activities are changing and the new ones are not yet set” (Baxter 1970: 281). As the momentum for change increased, she realised that the fluvial mixture of creative energy and innovation would keep the drama in an ongoing improvisational flux unless creative artists could also be given access to technical training so that they could develop their gifts and adopt a more tactical approach to the execution of their craft (see Baxter 1970: 365).

The 1970s represented a unique period in Jamaican political development. The National Theatre Trust in an attempt to strengthen its aim of reaching a wider public of bus drivers and conductors, factory workers and people in depressed areas with non-elitist theatre, created a Youth Company in 1970. Thom Cross, a Rose Bruford graduate who would take over the Drama School from Sam Walters, wrote and directed *Long Ago Sometime*, a musical on a Jamaican theme. This show was taken free-of-charge by the NTT Youth Company to children in rural Jamaica and to inner-city schools in areas like Tivoli Gardens. In November 1970, Marina Maxwell’s Yard Theatre enjoyed “a short but influential run at the commercial Barn Theatre” (Walmsely 1992: 208).

Ivy Baxter recognized the importance for local audiences to connect with an imaginary world that could “inform, embellish, or satirize the real world of which [they] were a part” (Baxter 1970: 281). This required of twentieth

century dramatists “a real understanding of the historical nature of the country and the tradition of theatrical response of the audiences in Jamaica” (ibid. 281-282). This framework informed the selection of staff at the Drama School and tutors included such figures as Eddy Thomas, George Carter, Trevor Rhone, Yvonne Brewster, Rex Nettleford, Louise Bennett, Leonie Forbes, Dennis Scott and Bari Johnson, all with specialised ability in theatrical work and training, who had brought their unique stamp to Pantomime productions over the years.

Music Boy the 1971 LTM Pantomime written by Trevor Rhone with music by Boris Gardner and directed by Thom Cross had been immensely popular. In 1972, Henry Fowler replaced Wycliffe Bennett as Chairman of the Board of Governors for the Jamaica School of Drama. In 1973, with the development of The Cultural Training Centre, he embarked on his last job in Jamaica before going off as the country’s representative to UNESCO. The dream, shared by so many, to house on **one** site the separately operating national schools of art, dance, music and drama would eventually result in the building of the Cultural Training Centre (now the Edna Manley College for the Visual and Performing Arts) in 1973. This was a project that had initially been the idea of Edward Seaga, but which did not actually become a reality until Michael Manley took it up after the PNP won the 1972 elections. Henry Fowler, who was a consultant to the Ministry of Education and consequently, Chairman of the committee that set it up, reminisced, when interviewed in 1996, on how the motto of the Little Theatre, “Drama, the Art where all Arts meet” found new encouragement through this government initiative.

The Ministry of Education acquired the land on Arthur Wint Drive and a committee was set up to oversee the conversion of a fresh and exciting architectural concept into the reality of a functioning combined training centre for the arts. The Drama and Dance schools from the Little Theatre complex joined the Edna Manley School of Art and the School of Music founded by Vera Moody. The necessity of a national performing arts training institution

was finally realised and its role in helping theatre to “grow with the people” (Baxter 1970: 281) was further enhanced through the multidisciplinary nature of this ambitious project.

So the LTM's branches inevitably spread even further as it contributed indirectly to this exciting and radical development. As Henry Fowler was both Chairman of the School of Drama and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Cultural Training Centre in 1973, the direct involvement of the LTM network in the development of Performing Arts education during the tumultuous 1970s was a foregone conclusion. Some felt that the LTM committee members were in danger of becoming cultural czars, and eventually growing opposition to the Movement consolidated itself in the twenty members of the National Festival Theatre of Jamaica, led by an Executive Committee consisting of Carroll Dawes (Artistic Director); Rendolph Yearde (Company Manager); Enid Dorah (Secretary); Seymour Blackwood (Treasurer); Rolande DeGazon (Public Relations) and Michael Everett (Business Manager).

Carroll Dawes (a graduate in English from UWI and with multiple qualifications in drama from England plus a Doctor of Fine Arts in Theatre from Yale University) returned to Jamaica and was appointed as an ideal candidate for the post of director of the Drama School at the newly established Cultural Training Centre in 1973. She also took on the project of very successfully staging the LTM classic *Queenie's Daughter* at the Ward Theatre for the third time (1963, 1966, 1973). Under Dawes, however, the Jamaica School of Drama consolidated itself as a voice of opposition to the goals and methods of the LTM – ‘serious theatre’ was polarised against ‘entertainment’. The National Festival Theatre of Jamaica (NFTJ), instituted by Carroll Dawes as “a performing extension of the Drama School” (Dawes 1977: 18) and initially co-sponsored by the LTM and the Jamaica Festival Commission, became a bastion of theatrical radicalism. The NFTJ's objective was to

awaken its audiences to the realities of life through an examination of serious sociological features.

In 1974 the national economy, under the leadership of Prime Minister Michael Manley and the PNP, was in trouble but Jamaican theatre was flourishing. Carroll Dawes directed Dennis Scott's *Echo in the Bone* for the University Drama Society at the Creative Arts Centre in May 1974. She had given up her post at the Drama School a month before and did not return as Director until September of that year. *Echo in the Bone*, which questioned and recreated the complex organism of violence, was recognised at once as "a major work" (Morris 04/05/74) by the theatre critic Mervyn Morris. Carroll Dawes said of Scott's playwrighting technique: "His disciplines are towards economy and austerity – a stripping away of whatever will obscure the sinews of the imaginative exercise. That alone is complex, as our lives are, where experience is prismatic and ironic, and where time, space, action and character are not sequential but relative" (Dawes 1974).

Later on in the year, the Jamaica Playhouse (a theatrical team led by Reggie Carter and Sheila Hill) mounted the Pantomime *One Time Long Time* (book and Lyrics by Easton Lee & Reggie Carter, music by Sonny Bradshaw) at the Little Theatre (1974/75) and in October 1975, Beverley Manley (the Prime Minister's wife) commissioned the NFTJ to perform Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as a conclusion to the International Women's Year with the proceeds going to the crisis centre for women. With this kind of political endorsement, the voice of the NFTJ was getting stronger and the LTM found itself facing the criticism that it was "more of a business organisation than an artistic company" (Dawes 1977:11). In fact, in the view of the NFTJ's student director Rendolph Yearde, the National Pantomime was "the worst thing that has happened to Jamaica" (ibid. 21).

The LTM fought back against Carroll Dawes's implication that its success was based on providing light and slick entertainment "as easily digested as a soft drink or a slice of cake" (ibid.). The Management Committee "consolidated

itself in the school by appointing members to the Board of Governors, and remained thus until June 1976” (Dawes 1977: 14) when Carroll Dawes terminated her stint as director of the drama school before moving on to pursue a teaching career at university level in Nigeria. By 1977 the NFJT, which had cut its ties with the School of Drama and was ideologically against the use of box office proceeds as income, found itself financially alone. Gwyneth Dawes’s study points out that despite excellent reviews for its work, “the Company could well be called the poorest one in Kingston. This has affected the loyalties of some of its members, who prefer to work with more lucrative groups” (Dawes 1977:21). In the same research paper Gwyneth Dawes highlighted LTM’s unassailable position as “the richest company at the present time, [which] will continue to increase its resources if the Pantomime continues on a steady basis” (ibid. 25).

So the mantle of leadership for the School of Drama was passed on to the poet, playwright, dancer, actor and theatre critic Dennis Scott – a man of “exceptionally incisive intelligence” and “skill in lucid exposition” (Stone 1994:143). Scott also made a significant contribution to the Pantomime tradition. As a co-writer of *Queenie’s Daughter*, he worked closely with Noel Vaz in shaping the 1963 (first) production by compiler and editor of the script. He directed *Mansong* (LTM 1981) and provided the scenario for *Sipplesilver* (LTM 1984). At the Drama School between 1977 and 1983, he was “guide and mentor to a number of playwrights, such as Pat Cumper, Stanley French, Rawle Gibbons and Trevor Rhone” (Stone 1994: 144) and in 1983 he was awarded the Jamaican Prime Minister’s Medal for Service to the Arts. Despite Scott’s reputation as “the most important and most conscientious writer/director for the theatre in the Caribbean” (Omotoso 1982: 94), his “insight and strength of purpose” (Stone 1994: 150) as director of the School was frustrated by bureaucracy and fettered by under funding. Realising he could carry it no further, he resigned from the School of Drama in 1983 and went to Yale University as Visiting Professor of Directing before taking up tenure in 1984.

A further output of the formalisation of theatrical training in the Drama School was the fact that by the early 80s, “Jamaica was the only island-nation in the English-speaking Caribbean to have” alongside community theatre workshop projects, “specialised theatres such as the Sistren Theatre Collective, the Gun Court Cultural Movement and the Children’s Theatre Workshop, all these aspects of the work of the Jamaica School of Drama” (Omotoso 1982: 85 & 81).

In 1978 (August 4-27), the LTM presented Eric Bentley’s English version of *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the Little Theatre and pulled out all the stops. Written in 1939, Brecht’s play was first performed in Zurich in 1941. The LTM production was directed by Norman Rae (who also composed original music for songs), designed by Richard Montgomery, with lighting by Franklyn St Juste. A strong cast was headed by Leonie Forbes, Pauline Stone, Charles Hyatt and Harold Brady with support from Cyrene Tomlinson, Roy Hall, Paul Byles, Ted Dwyer, Maurice Powell, Clyde Walcott, Inez Hibbert, Quindell Ferguson, Whitty Bingham, Gary Harvey.

Greta Fowler MBE, CD was still President of the LTM but Barbara Gloudon had taken over temporarily as Acting Chairman. As the programme notes for the production pointed out, Brecht’s play was about “a woman of considerable toughness and reliance” whose indomitability was inspiring. Consequently, one cannot but help wonder if the epithet “mother courage” was being ascribed to Greta Fowler herself as she approached the end of her life (she died on 30 November 1978; Henry Fowler CD became President of the LTM and Barbara Gloudon OD became Chairman).^{*} However, the symbolism of the play could also be applied to the Pantomime itself as an organic entity. The LTM’s logo portrayed a figure, which could easily be read as a composite of the tradition’s two female stalwarts – Greta Fowler and Louise Bennett –

^{*}The terms CD (Commander of the Order of Distinction) and OD (Officer of the Order of Distinction) refer to national honours instituted by the Government of Jamaica when it disassociated itself from the British honours list. Before this, Greta had been made a MBE (Member of the British Empire) for her services to theatre in Jamaica.

and their joint interest in the merger of Jamaica's cultural traditions through every aspect of performance.

In the article "Brecht's view on *Mother Courage*," included in the programme notes for the LTM production, another applicable statement is made: "So long as the masses are the object of politics they cannot regard what happens to them as an experiment but only as fate. It is not incumbent on the playwright to give *Mother Courage* insight at the end – she sees something, around the middle of the play, at the close of the sixth scene, then loses again what she has seen – his concern is that the spectator should see" (Little Theatre Movement 1978: 12). The responsibility for



Figure 3: The LTM's logo illustrates the motto "Drama: the Art where all Arts meet." This picture was used on several occasions as a programme cover for early Pantomimes.

the way in which theatre in Jamaica would develop would ultimately have to rely on the developing theatrical expectations of the audience. Nonetheless, by the last two decades of the twentieth century, when the public accepted performance unquestioningly as a Jamaican art form, the LTM continued to provide a bastion of respectability and a standard of achievement, against which new talent would repeatedly pit its strength either directly or indirectly.

The zenith of the Pantomime's popularity coincided with the period following the handover of responsibility for the LTM from one generation to another and found its expression between 1974 and 1986 in the scripts of Gloria Lannaman, Barbara Gloudon, Pat Cumper and Aston Cook. The Lannaman-Rae production of *Dickance For Fippance* (LTM 1974) was the first Pantomime to play to total audience figures of 70,000, a feat which was

equalled in 1981-82 by Barbara Gloudon's *The Pirate Princess* directed by Bobby Ghisays.

In the end, Gloudon emerged as the main scriptwriter for the National Pantomime and made her position as a box office draw unassailable with *Gimmeral B* (LTM 1983), again directed by Ghisays. *Trash* (LTM 1985) heralded the beginning of a very successful partnership with the director Brian Heap that was consolidated the following year with *River Mumma and the Golden Table* (LTM 1986) in which she supported the emerging playwright Aston Cook as his award winning play *River Mumma* was developed for Pantomime.

A significant challenge to the LTM's traditional approach would arise with the phenomenon of the roots play, a form of Jamaican-bred farce pioneered by Ralph 'Give-the-people-what-they-want' Holness, based on the comedy format developed by Ed "Bim" Lewis in plays like *Obeah Wedding*. Delroy Roache, one of its many producers and writers, had acted in LTM Pantomime in the 70s and the prolific roots theatre playwright Balfour Anderson who staged his first major play in 1986, was invited to write the script for the LTM Pantomime *King Root* in 1987. The *Gleaner* critic Michael Reckord noted that roots theatre "virtually ruled the theatrical roost for the 12 to 15 years before the mid-90s," but added in the same article, "for various reasons, roots plays got scarce. Production costs became prohibitive, audiences became increasingly sophisticated, fashions changed, energy and talent dried up and nowadays only one or two roots producers still make the entertainment news" (Reckord 25/01/03).

Under this kind of commercial threat which seemed to undermine the ennobling view of theatre that had always been a part of the LTM's brief, the Management Committee had to find a way of protecting its access to acting and production talent and consolidating its commercial position on the theatrical scene. So it was decided that the time had come for the establishment of an in-house company that would save on "much valuable

rehearsal time ... spent breaking in a new set of players each season only to start again with the next" (Little Theatre Movement website). The Jamaican Pantomime Company, which developed out of a summer workshop coordinated by Maurice Harty, was formed in 1985 under the leadership of Brian Heap and Barbara Gloudon.

Born in England, Brian Heap went to Jamaica in 1973 to teach economics at grammar school level. It was not long before he got heavily involved in the theatre. From 1976-79, he played leading roles in *Mother Goose*, *Goody*, and *Cindy* for the Jamaica Children's Trust (of which he was a founding member) "as well as undertaking several aspects of artistic direction including set and costume design" (Little Theatre Movement 1985: 8). Having transferred into teaching Child Drama at St Joseph's Teacher Training College and with many stage credits as an actor under his belt, he became the Director of Studies at the Jamaica School of Drama in 1979. By 1981 when he was poised to take on a lead role in the LTM's *The Pirate Princess*, Heap was reported in the tabloid evening newspaper as being capable of sounding "as Jamaican as anyone who falls into the category of 'born ya'" (Anon. 02/12/81). High praise indeed following the intensely 'Afrocentric' days of the late 1970s but deserved because Heap's genuine interest in and deep commitment to a sense of Jamaican identity increasingly won the respect of friends, co-workers and students.

As director of the LTM Pantomime, he proved to be creative and innovative in the vein of Noel Vaz, Norman Rae, Maurice Harty, Bobby Ghisays, and Lloyd Reckord (see Nettleford 1993a: 5). The first Pantomime which featured the Pantomime Company was *Trash* (LTM 1985) defined by the LTM's website as "a watershed production which ensured the survival of Pantomime" as theatre in Jamaica struggled to compete against the appeal of satellite television. The Pantomime Company shifted gear in 1988 with the disruption of Hurricane Gilbert and the Tipling & Dwyer celebration of Emancipation in *Bruckins* directed by Carol Lawes but after that the LTM's course was largely

set by the Barbara Gloudon-Brian Heap combination, which continued largely undisturbed up to the 60th anniversary production in 2000.

The fund-raising Pantomimes were not initially intended to be the experimental theatre so as the banyan tree grew, the Little Theatre Movement somewhat accidentally created a unique and indigenous national theatrical tradition, which grew out of and depended upon an essential combination of acting, singing, dancing and design as expressions of Jamaican culture.

“A commendable exercise of co-operation and mutual respect” (Little Theatre Movement 1990: 3) was the phrase used to describe the work done by the musicians Conroy Cooper and Noel Dexter as they compiled the score for the 1990 anniversary production and attempted to reflect the breadth of original music composed for the Pantomime over its five decades of life. This concept of co-operation based on mutual respect, emphasised in *Fifty Fifty* (LTM 1990), is an approach that applies to every aspect of the National Pantomime endeavour including the merger of ‘folk’ and ‘straight’ theatre elements, which lies at the heart of the production’s strength.

Furthermore, the Jamaican Pantomime style has had, as a fundamental subtext, an ongoing belief in the basic intelligence of the economically deprived Jamaican majority and the abundance of talent to be found in its midst. This would mean that what the audience saw on stage would be but a reflection of its own capabilities. The proverb, “A wink is as gud as a nod to a bline man,” interpreted as “an intelligent person needs only the slightest hint to tell when his behaviour is out of line” (Cleary n.d.: 20), serves to sum up the viewers’ natural ability to read between the lines and to extract the full range of multiple meanings from even the most seemingly innocuous comment.

Such an attitude provides much scope within the context of the play, for scripted or impromptu double entendre, dramatic irony, biblical allusions, proverbs and many opportunities to participate through utterances or song in the action as it unfolds on the stage. Though at times dramatically naive, the

audience would be expected to be culturally sharp, and the folk-based subject matter of Pantomime would always be comfortably familiar. In such a context, the audience quite naturally becomes a quick-thinking collaborator in the telling of the story.

Though based originally on a traditionally British format, the National Pantomime of Jamaica, embraced its tropical landscape and tapped the multicultural history and legacy of the Jamaican people to produce a theatrical experience, vibrant and accessible in its energy but requiring some measure of interpretation for visitors. It is indeed a credit to the founders of the LTM that sixty-five years on, and still going strong, the ladies and gentlemen of the audience represent a cross-section of Jamaican society expecting something quite distinctly and identifiably Jamaican as they respond to the annual invitation: *Come mek we dance an' sing* in the annual National Pantomime production at Christmas.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETING THE ISLAND'S STORY FROM 1494 TO 1938

Writing at the beginning of the 1950s, Esther Chapman rather scenically referred to Jamaica as “a romantic island in the earliest-known portion of the New World, the hunting ground of the warriors of the past, the scene of adventures in which the Caribbean and the Spanish Main were overrun by figures from the history books” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952:20). A less romantic perspective of the island's story has to recognise that for at least five centuries, different players in the roles of oppressor and oppressed have fought each other in a variety of guises in an ongoing struggle for pre-eminence and control of its natural resources. Spanish control lasted 150 years, followed by the dominance of England for 300 years and then 43 years of independent self-government from 1962 to the present. A history of aggression, oppression and bloodshed has characterised all three periods. By 1540, after only 46 years of exposure to Spanish domination, the first Arawak ‘West Indians’ were to all intents and purposes extinct. The defeat of the Spanish introduced the 168-year ordeal of African slavery under British rule, which in turn was abolished in the 19th century but still echoed in the excesses following the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865.

Jamaican history – past, present or future – has become an intrinsic characteristic of the Little Theatre Movement's National Pantomime. The story of the island's experience over the last 600 years is mapped out in the midst of musical comedy as the collaborators juggle fact and fiction for narrative interest. There have been dedicated historians involved in this enterprise, like the scriptwriters Ted Dwyer and Gloria Lannaman, and in such years the LTM Pantomime has been an educational tool, drawing important episodes from the past to the attention of a relatively uninformed general

public. *Dickance for Fippance* (Lannaman 1974), *Mansong* (Dwyer 1980) and *Bruckins* (Tipling & Dwyer 1988) are examples of LTM Pantomimes, which not only explore aspects of the theme of freedom but also stay true to the documented historical narrative through the medium of performance.

For the most part, however, in Jamaican Pantomime historical event works merely as the framework for a problem solving – and at its best action-packed – story and often there is little pretence at historical accuracy. As in the cinema, there are times when stories from the past merely give flavour to rewritten accounts in the present – *Morgan's Dream* (Henry & Greta Fowler 1965), *Hail Columbus* (Gloudon 1972), *The Witch* (Gloudon 1975), *The Pirate Princess* (Gloudon 1981), *Mandeya* (1991), *Miss Annie* (Gloudon 2002) and *Combolo* (Gloudon 2003).

The scriptwriter Barbara Gloudon, in particular, takes an active delight in turning history on its head in a version rewritten to suit the needs of the present. In this sense, the 'historical' account provides a kind of collective gravitas, an aura of potential truth, which counteracts the essential elements of fun and laughter and which lends weight to the moral message of the production. Gloudon's provocative interest in episodes of the past is more to do with their use as metaphors for delivering a message about positive perceptions of self to a receptive public, which has paid to go away feeling encouraged at best and entertained at least.

The idea of Pantomime as history is, therefore, merely an extension of the art of storytelling in which deviations from the truth are permissible as long as the overall effect works. Fearing that *Combolo*, the 2003 update of Barbara Gloudon's *Hail Columbus* (1972), would never be able to live up to the original, the critic Michael Edwards warned the LTM, "If you're going to rewrite history, then you ought to make sure it's sufficiently exciting so as to preclude the issue of accuracy" (Edwards 02/01/04). When the new Boxing Day offering reverts to a reworked version of a previously successful LTM

Pantomime, levels of expectation rise even higher to combat the danger of being disappointed by 'sameness'.

In many ways, Jamaica represents the paradox of a 'tropical idyll' whose scenic backdrop of alluring loveliness stands in contrast to the citizens' experience of man's inexorable inhumanity to man. It would not be unreasonable to expect a blood-soaked land to find expression in the voice of tragedy possibly like that of the great Shakespeare himself or even the playwright Gabriel García Lorca, executed without trial in 1936 at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

However during the course of centuries, the yarn of the Jamaican story has been woven in such a way that fibres of ruthless expedience have been counteracted by religious fervour and rugged resistance, shaping in the process the character of a multiracial and multiethnic island people known for their music, laughter, food and hospitality. Accordingly, a dependable respite from the violence continues to be the joy and mercurial release of a quick smile, ready wit, verbal irony and good humour. Jean Lowrie-Chin, columnist for the *Jamaica Observer*, reflected on the enduring quality of humour in Jamaican society as she referred to the classic LTM Pantomime of 1963, 1966 and 1973: "'Laughter," wrote Karl Barthe[s], "is the closest thing to the grace of God." How can one ever forget that wonderful Pantomime, *Queenie's Daughter*, when Miss Lou as Queenie emerged from the dressing room in an elaborate girdle and platform shoes? And then her moment of glory, when she took the stage for her daughter's wedding looking every inch a queen. We got the record, learned all the songs and acted out the hilarious parts with Miss Lou and Mass Ran" (Lowrie-Chin 04/08/03).

For the historians from amongst the people, nation building must begin with the correction of a distorted history for as the old storyteller in *Mansong* (LTM 1980) says, "Backra write story fe please demself. Oonu tink say Backra a go write dung de part dat any a we play eena de love story between Miss Rosa and de Captain? Oonu tink say dem woulda write dung de part dat Jack

Mansong play eena dat love story?” (Dwyer 1980: Act I, Scene 1). The other version of ‘history’ is understood to be that which “resides in the memories of the people” (Bailey 2003:1) and has to be accessed as “told and hence reshaped by the descendants of those who have been misrepresented or under-represented in official historical records” (ibid.).

The discontinuities in the Caribbean narrative come from a tendency over too many years to disregard the oral account and the fact that so much of the record has been stored in the stories, songs, rhymes, herbal medicine, riddles and proverbs of people often educated only to a limited extent in the western literate tradition. Storytellers who see that the memories are passed on from generation to generation have guarded the historical record. The people’s version of the Morant Bay rising of 1865, eventually written down and published in 1949 by V S Reid in the powerfully evocative ‘novel’ *New Day*, is an example of this historical process. History is a record of achievement but to what extent does this record need to be housed in archives made of paper, brick, metal, glass, plastic or stone. The power of the Jamaican Pantomime narrative – as it was established by the early work of the ever expanding and contracting LTM team – arose from a judicious appreciation of collective memory as a rich and valid historical and cultural archive.

A challenge embraced by the National Pantomime is that it should assist the public in the exercise of discovering and experiencing ownership of its collective history. Prompted initially by Barbara Gloudon’s LTM script for *Hail Columbus* in 1972, subsequent versions of the encounter story within the Jamaican Pantomime format have been the LTM-rejected but very successful independent production of *Arawak Gold* (Tipling & Dwyer 1991), *Combolo* (Gloudon 2003) an LTM reworking of the 1972 concept, and also in 2003 a rival Columbus Pantomime *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us* (Jambiz 2003) written by Patrick Brown but with the same ideological spin on notions of ‘discovery’ as its LTM counterpart.

Traditionally, the term ‘discovery’ is associated with the encounter between Europeans and the peoples of the New World as if to suggest a genesis of valid existence with the arrival of the Spaniards. Linked with this concept is a broader, and very long lasting, notion of privilege associated with exposure to the civilising influence of European philosophy. Since the Quincentenary of Columbus’s historic first voyage to the Indies, this historical perspective has been challenged by “indigenous and disenfranchised peoples around the world” who reflect on a Spanish legacy which “exterminated the Indians... decimated the forest covers of the region,” and as Amina Blackwood Meeks finishes off her list of offences in the present, “collided with Africa till de coco inna my forehead nuh get better yet” (Blackwood Meeks 01/08/04).

Embedded in this is a latent understanding that Columbus did not encounter a blank social slate and people at some needy stage of pre-cultural development when he chanced upon the island people. Paradoxically, though in decreasing measure, the Caribbean has continued to pay tribute to the “greater civilising influence of Europe” (Hall 1972: 3) ever since. It has taken a long time to shed the colonial tendency to imitate metropolitan practice rather than risk the rebuke of initiating our own – this was what the LTM was ultimately trying to do as it reached out to embrace the theatre of everyday life in Jamaican terms.

The notion of the centrality of the West Indies on both continental and world stage has persisted through the centuries, at least in the minds of those who live there. This is especially true of the island of Jamaica, which sits at the centre of the Caribbean Basin, as a map in *The Economist* of February 12, 1983 rather pithily portrays. Gloria Escoffery, a rural-based academic who was a creative artist in her own right, presented in the *Jamaica Journal* an interestingly phrased observation which illustrated the mixture of micro and macro levels at which this sentiment operates: “Jamaica is its own little world, but it is also part of a gyrating globe, an entity more complex in its movements than the school books tell us” (Escoffery 1986: 51). Another, less well-known, voice from rural Jamaica, Stanley Redwood of Middle Quarters in St

Elizabeth, referred to himself during a visit to the United States in 2002 as being from “the subcontinent of Jamaica” (Redwood 02/01/03). Recounting

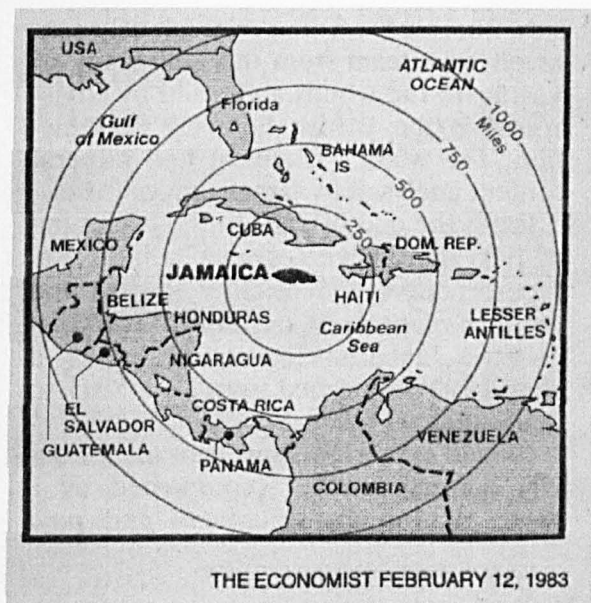


Figure 4: Jamaica at the centre of the Caribbean Basin.

his explanation for this in a letter to the Editor he summed up the main thrust of his argument in these terms: “When you look at the world map you may see Jamaica as a tiny Caribbean island, I concluded, but when I look at world affairs, I see Jamaica as a subcontinent and if we had the resources of a subcontinent, we would be a superpower” (ibid.).

Not surprisingly, then, the LTM Pantomime also reflects the centrality of Jamaica’s self-perceived presence in the arena of global activity as seen, for example, in the exchange between Captain John Rackham and his First Mate Mary Read in *The Pirate Princess* (1980) Act I, Scene 2:

Mary Read: Where are we off to this time?

Rackham: Jamaica.

Mary Read: Jamaica? Where’s that?

Rackham: Off the coast of Miami (*laughter from the audience*)

Mary Read: What’s Miami?

Rackham: It’s a suburb of Jamaica! (*laughter*)

D J R Walker remarks on the very good fortune of Christopher Columbus in making landfall where he did “for he had sailed into the near centre of the New World with its northern and southern continents lying unknown to him either side of his bows” (Walker 1992: 52). According to the historical record, when Columbus’ ships crossed the horizon on his second voyage to the Indies, “there, silhouetted against the evening sky on May 4, 1494 arose ‘sheer and

darkly green' Xamayca 'the fairest island that eyes have beheld'" (Manning-Carley 1963: 18).

The Arawaks were a soft-spoken people with a language that was, according to Peter Martyr, "rich in vowels and pleasant to the ear" (Walker 1992: 19). David Watts (1990) suggests that the unsurpassable beauty of the land was reflected in the nature of its indigenous inhabitants who were intelligent and without guile. In fact, D J R Walker also proposes that for a first encounter, the Island Arawaks were the best possible ambassadors of the Peoples of the new continent, as they "were in so many ways more refined in thought and habit than any other American Indians then living in that region of the New World despite their primitive lifestyle" (Walker 1992: 111). In fact the ultimate accolade came from Columbus himself who wrote in his *Journal of the First Voyage* that these Island Arawaks were a people without greed, always smiling, who loved their neighbours as themselves, concluding, "I believe there is no better race or better land in the world" (ibid. 34).

The encounter between the Spaniards and the Arawaks was a mutual



Figure 5: "The Discovery" by Albert Huie, no. 120 in the *Huie in Jamaican Collections: A Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue*, 1979.

discovery of each other's existence. Albert Huie, Jamaican artist and set painter for the 1943 LTM Pantomime, sums up the brink of encounter in a wood engraving entitled "The Discovery," circa 1950, which seems to suggest that it was the Arawaks who discovered Columbus rather than the other way round. The scope that this episode provides for imaginative reinterpretation probably explains why this 'discovery' event has been repeatedly the subject of Jamaican Pantomimes both within the

In an interview, Charles Hyatt, folklorist and erstwhile LTM star, straddles the dividing line between ‘discovering’ and ‘inventing’ as he tries to unpack the notion of invention as a rediscovery of the familiar, in the following way: “when you try a ting and try a ting, and get a series of evolution ... and it come right back to the original thing, you tek credit for it becaas is you fine it. Everybody whch claim dem did invent, didda really discover, becaas di sinting diddeh fi dem fin’ out long time” (Maynier Burke 1981: 15). A standard English version of his observation would read something like this: When you have experimented repeatedly, and as a result of that process you arrive at the point at which you began, then you are entitled to take credit for your invention because you have indeed found it for yourself. All those who claim to be ‘inventors’ are therefore really ‘discoverers’ because all they have done is to encounter for themselves something that has always been there.

That the person of Columbus reflects an island interpretation of the idea of ‘discovery’ as an expression of ‘versioning’ takes on a new spin in *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us* in 2003 when Jambiz, a competing theatre company, put on their Pantomime adaptation of the Columbus event to coincide with *Combolo* the LTM’s reworked version of its 1972 success, *Hail Columbus*. What the Jambiz ‘hero’ realises through engagement with the islanders is that Europe no longer enjoys a monopoly on the concept of ‘civilization’:

Columbus’ real discovery is that the natives are not so “backward” after all. The natives “shock him out” with their “cellie” phones as his attempts to barter and woo them over with “state-of-the-art technology” such as the first telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell goes to naught ... [Furthermore] hungry belly natives tired of the “fenky fenky” leadership of Chief Running Belly finally succumb to the tastes of Italy and through a rigged election select the foreign Columbus as leader only to find that “the grass is not necessarily greener on the other side”. (Anon. 12/12/03).

Meanwhile, the official National Pantomime *Combolo* (LTM 2003), which opened to a full house on the same day as *Christopher-Cum-Buck-Us* (Jambiz

LTM and without.

The thirst for wealth, which dominated the thinking of the European arrivants, was an immediate threat to both the vulnerable social structure of the indigenous inhabitants as it was to the carefully balanced eco-system of the island environment. Far from the presence of the indigenous Americans achieving legitimacy through recognition within the European norm, everything that they stood for was destroyed by these welcomed guests who found their hosts to be easy prey to their rapacious attitudes. It would be attested within the consciousness of Jamaican folk culture that Columbus was the initiator of European piracy in the Caribbean. Yet as *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) illustrated in its revisionist version of history, the relationship between the Spanish and the island people could have been very different had there been a greater measure of mutual respect.

In *Hail Columbus* the Gloudon version of the story, Columbus is unsuccessful in finding gold for Queen Isabella, but in the pursuit of it he shares knowledge with the Arawaks and consequently saves the corn crop from the drought and the village from attack by the Carib cannibals. In true Pantomime fashion, love conquers all and Mama Cacique, the Arawak Chieftainess, who has the last word declares at the end of the play, “Is celebration time. Music. Who have foot fe drop, drop it. Who have voice fe raise, raise it. And don’t none of you forget who save the day. Oonu hail the man. Hail Columbus...” (*Hail Columbus*, Act II, Scene 3).

The acceptability of taking personal credit for chancing upon a successful new version of an original thing is very much part of the island’s popular culture. In Act I, Scene 4 of *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) Columbus explains to his fellow dons, “Gentlemen, what you must understand is that an explorer hasn’t got to know where he’s going. When he gets there, he decides where he is. Right?” (Gloudon 1972:13).

2003), tells the story of the 3,033rd descendant of the original Spanish explorer, who comes back, as the scriptwriter explains, “with a very noble motive. His motive is to find the Arawaks and tell them that he is sorry” (Henry 28/11/03).

The “rickety old sailing ship” (Henry 28/11/03) of this latter day Columbus (whose name has been inverted unintentionally to ‘Combolo’ by the Jamaicans he meets) is wrecked in a storm off the coast of Jamaica, so he too arrives ‘by accident’. Once again, beyond the bare bones of the historical account, the Pantomime makes no apologies for producing its own version of the Columbus event but each time this is done in order to present a special message to the audience.

Again within a tradition of talking about serious things in jest, the LTM Pantomime engages its audience almost surreptitiously in an unresolved, international, political debate triggered by a United Nations’ conference against racism in Durban September 2001, which was stymied by the question of apologising for slavery in the Atlantic system and the associated topic of reparations. According to Gloudon, *Combolo* was “also my discussion on reparation, you know, in terms of the African experience, who pays for what



Figure 6: *Combolo* (LTM 2003). Photograph from the *Jamaica Observer*, 24 February 2004.

they did to us? Nobody even said, we sorry. So, what I have done is that I have made Columbus come back and the people that he was supposed to oppress, to find them to say he is sorry and make

amends and hope they can be friends” (ibid.). Gloudon’s concept merged three Jamaican civilisations – the Arawaks, the Europeans and 21st century

Jamaicans in a “three-tiered approach,” which “called for the use of three different settings, music and costuming” (Anon. 21/11/03). In the play, the Spanish visitors arrive in pseudo fifteenth century period costume and meet the locals who are African descendants belonging to a dancehall culture, but the island setting simultaneously reflects a pristine tropical idyll and uses Fern Gully (still a site of outstanding natural beauty in the parish of St Ann just south of the coastal town of Ocho Rios) as the home for the residual Arawaks whose pre-Columbian culture is further reflected in their music. As reported by Michael Williams, it was explained at the press launch for *Combolo* (LTM 2003) “that the LTM National Pantomime had always turned history upside down and to that end presents the Arawaks as being here, alive and well” (Williams 20/12/03), albeit suffering from a shortage of men.

In this way the playwright was able to present the message – as relevant to contemporary realities as it is to recollections of the past – that history can be redeemed through the act of saying sorry with an accompanying change of behaviour. Within the world of Pantomime, “When the descendant of Christopher Columbus offers an apology to the Queen of the Arawaks for the sad legacy of his ancestor, she reminds him:

Once ago yuh coulda fool wi up
What yuh dish out wi had to sup
But is a new day now
Arawak nah bow
And yuh don’t haffe worry
If yuh really sorry.

The politics of sorry takes much more than mere words. According to an old-stager: ‘Yuh nuh fi sorry. Yuh nuh fi do it.’” (Gloudon 14/05/04). The idea that an apology without restorative action is meaningless, while central to *Combolo* (LTM 2003), actually proves to be part of the social commentary of *Christopher Cum-Buck-Us* (Jambiz 2003) too with its “natives who reflect an interesting bunch of the different faces of Jamaica then and now all things good the productive, industrious, responsible, ambitious, discerning and some

things not so good greedy, proliferous, chickeenry, ‘bag a mout’ with no action" (Anon. 21/12/03).

In her newspaper column written shortly after the close of the 2003-2004 Pantomime season, Gloudon the journalist pointed out the similarity between “acts of gross cruelty and disrespect” in the treatment of prisoners-of-war in Iraq and the callous and degrading behaviour of gunmen in Kingston. She then tied these reflections into lyrics written for *Combolo* which talk about the strategy of making a fresh start against a background of conflict: “Sorry ah nuh word a mout/ Sorry haffe come from de heart/ If a new day yuh waan fe start/ You haffe play yuh part” (Gloudon 14/05/04). The Pantomime’s theme is universal in its application.

The extraordinary event which accompanied the Pantomimes of 2003-2004 was that a latter day Combolo did in fact pay an official visit to Jamaica along lines so evocative of Pantomime that the columnist Amina Blackwood Meeks thought it was a joke: “Headline: Something bout Columbus 20th generation coming to visit Jamaica. I found it hilarious. ‘Him mussi hear bout Miss Gloudon play...hahahaha’ and with that I turned the page” (Blackwood Meeks 01/08/04). By her account, Amina who was skimming through the daily newspapers at the Division of Culture was prompted by “a perceptive Secretary” to look at the article more carefully. When she did she nearly had a “conniption” – not only was the present day the Duke of Veragua Cristóbal Colón de Carvajal arriving on July 19, 2004 for a week-long visit to Jamaica, and inauspiciously, at a time of national mourning following the death of Hugh Shearer, a well-loved retired Prime Minister, but it looked like the island inhabitants of today were going to welcome this Aristocrat-In-Perpetuity of the Indies with as much enthusiasm as the Arawaks had done twenty generations previously.

As in the LTM Pantomime, His Grace the Duke – a direct descendant of Columbus – had come to say sorry and “apologised for the harsh treatment meted out to the Tainos (Arawaks) under the Spanish” (Buddan 01/08/04).

The twenty-first century Cristóbal Colón was coming to honour his ancestor and be fêted in turn by Jamaican officialdom with “a citation from the Mayor of Kingston, the keys to Spanish Town, boat tour of Buccaneer City Port Royal, wreath laying ceremony at his predecessor's monument in St. Ann, Public Lecture at UTECH and such delights” (Blackwood Meeks 01/08/04). The Duke also tried to ameliorate his country's legacy with the suggestion “that British colonialism did more harm to Jamaica than the Spanish did” (Buddan 01/08/04).

Apart from the politics of saying sorry, it would seem that the Duke of Veragua was expressing an attitude about colonialism, which is somewhat characteristic of a wider Spanish perspective. The Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos had visited Jamaica in 1917 and wrote, “It was a misfortune for Jamaica to fall into British hands, for if it had remained Spanish it would today have been a nation. Under the British it was merely a trading post, a factory, with no style of life of its own” (Coulthard 1967). There is no gainsaying the exploitative nature of the colonial experience, regardless of the superpower, but the perception of Jamaica as a place “with no style of its own” (ibid.) is the element of colonialism, which potentially could have been the most nullifying of all. This denial of intrinsic identity – referred to, in the Dexter/Glendon song ‘Fi Wi Ancestors’ from *Mandeya* (LTM 1991), as “lose dere pedigree” – has been consistently contested by the enduring presence and legacy of the folk tradition (see lyrics on pages 247-248).

In the absence of any Tainos (Arawaks) to hear his apology, the gracious reception afforded to the Duke by his hosts, as they talked together about the merits of heritage tourism, could be seen as a tribute to the inherent, forgiving nature of the Jamaican people, *or* evidence of their ignorance of the *actual* historical account, *or else* studied indifference to the genocide of the past in the light of the promise of financial gain in the present. Amazed at the positive nature of the Duke's reception in Jamaica, Amina Blackwood Meeks, herself a teller of stories, could only reflect on the irony of presenting him with the keys

to the old capital established by the Spanish: “yu mean to say, we carry the man to Spanish Town and never leave him in the district prison in Marcus Garvey Cell as poetic justice?” (Blackwood Meeks 01/08/04).

Amina was not the only person to raise an objection. “Why honour Columbus?” wrote Garfield N. Morgan of Kingston 10 to the *Gleaner* as soon as he got wind of the latter-day Combolo’s impending visit. Conceding that the explorer’s navigational feat had been a tremendous asset to Europe, Morgan pointed out that within the Caribbean context, “to honour this man, is to dishonour the memory of the great people who were here before us” as “Columbus was basically a forerunner to the other pirates, who would follow his path into the region” (Morgan 20/07/04).

As the LTM tried to develop through the Pantomime an emerging performance vocabulary for the New Jamaica’s “traditions-in-the-making” (as the writer Vera Bell phrased it in January 1950), notions of ‘respectability’ based on a Eurocentric frame of reference – undergirded without question by the island’s educational system and the entrenched value system of the traditional middle class – would tussle repeatedly with a more folk-centred assessment of standing based on ‘reputation’ arising out of intrinsic self-worth and an acknowledgement of the contribution of the individual to the well-being of the community. It is a dialectic that the anthropologist Peter J. Wilson (1995) refers to as ‘crab antics’ in his study of the social dynamics of the Anglophone inhabitants of the island of Providencia who consider themselves to be descendants of the notorious pirate Sir Henry Morgan.

After capturing Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655, Britain’s initial intention to establish a white settler colony with small landowners and “a white labour force of indentured servants (criminals and political offenders) sentenced to transportation” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 26), was undermined by the exploits of the buccaneers whose base at Port Royal provided a refuge for bondsmen seeking a better life. Henry Morgan, the most legendary adventurer of all, was a case in point.

He arrived in the Caribbean as a twenty-year-old member of Cromwell's expeditionary force but then moved on to enjoy such success as a privateer in the Spanish Main that he was appointed Admiral of the Brethren of the Coast by his fellow buccaneers. In the late 1650s, these privateers were invited by the Governor of Jamaica to use the rich merchant town of Port Royal as their base as they protected British interests against the French and the Spanish and contributed a tenth of their booty to the island's economy (Senior 2003: 79). Consequently, Port Royal came to be known as the 'richest and wickedest city in the world.' Nonetheless, despite their excesses, the privateers were tolerated by more sober civic authorities because their presence guaranteed the island protection against would-be invaders.

The matter came to a head, however, when Henry Morgan sacked the treasure port of Panama City to avenge a Spanish attack on Montego Bay. Consequently, he was taken to London to answer charges because Britain was no longer officially at war with Spain. Having signed the Treaty of Madrid (1670), the British government had to curb the activities of the pirates of the Caribbean, so pragmatically it turned to Morgan, now both knighted and appointed to the post of Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica. Accordingly he provided, on the one hand, the opportunity for many former buccaneers to buy land cheaply and become sugar estate owners, while on the other, he ruthlessly hunted down those of his previous associates, now unlicensed outlaws, who would not change with the times.

Attitudes changed as the concept of nationalism tried to find expression in the practical details of everyday life. In Jamaica, the commercial expansion of radio in the 1950s provided yet another opportunity for the appeal of Morgan for the common man to be exploited with great success. Seagram Whisky, Canadian producers of Captain Morgan rum, wanted to tap the more than 100,000 listeners who constituted the burgeoning Rediffusion audience to promote the brand in Jamaica. To do this, the firm sponsored a weekly situational comedy written in *Jamaica Talk* by the professional print journalist

and popular folk comedian, Ranny Williams who had previously hosted a monthly programme *Jamaica Night* for the short-wave radio station ZQI.

By name, the Captain Morgan brand was closely associated with the spirit of the legendary buccaneer but the marketing needs of the company required the large, low socio-economic group of rum-drinkers which subscribed to the wired broadcasting service to identify with the product (MockYen 2000). So Ranny, who was as much a businessman as he was an artist, created Morgan Henry (a typically Jamaican inversion of the name) and amalgamated the stereotype of the ordinary Jamaican man with the defiant cunning of the pirate and the trickster spirit of Anancy: “Morgie was the little man who did not care much for work. Like Anancy, he had a tricky mind and was nimble of tongue. His wife worked, and loved him very much. Whenever he had his problems, she would help him, for example, when he rode his bicycle without a licence and court proceedings threatened, she would pass around a white saucer and collect money from the neighbours” (Fairweather-Wilson 1976: 25).

Ranny had recognised that Alma Hylton (later Alma MockYen), a young actress and dancer who had joined the cast of the LTM Pantomime *Aladdin* in 1952, had a talent for comedy. So, he invited her to co-star as Putus, the voluble, put-upon *tegayreg or sketell* – an easily recognisable Jamaican type – who was Morgie’s wife. Alma MockYen, now a retired veteran of the radio waves, commented in interview on the novelty appeal of *Life with the Morgan Henrys* even for the middle classes in the 1950s. Fifty years on, the memory of Putus, described by her creator as “very raw-chaw [*i.e. unrefined*] in sound” – reigns indomitably in the imaginations of those Jamaicans who are old enough to have been mesmerised by the programme (MockYen 2000). She recalled how riveting “hearing Jamaican dialect” and participating imaginatively in this earthy portrayal of things Jamaican within the mid-twentieth century colonial situation would have been: “We were coming out of a context of BBC transcription programming ... of Doris Hastings,

expatriate, who was running the RJR Players and she was putting on very good plays – wonderfully done – but this was not Jamaican, it was not even West Indian, so we were not close to anything. And into all of that you suddenly hear the voice saying: “Putus, weh mi food? Weh mi bammy? Weh mi ...,” you know. Shock!” (MockYen 2000).

But not everybody approved. No matter how groundbreaking the makers might have been, the programme was purely a commercial enterprise as far as the sponsors were concerned: “they wanted to sell their goods to the kinds of people who were not really rich but would spend money on liquor and on such basic ‘necessities’. ... They weren’t too interested in the values and attitudes, they were selling” (MockYen 2000). Such was the pioneering radio programme’s popularity that during its four-year run it is said that it affected the attendance at church evening services.

The then Alma Hylton’s “deeply religious maiden aunt” was disgusted by her well-educated niece’s involvement “in the degradation of Jamaican speech and worst on the Lord’s Day” (MockYen 2003: 47). Consequently, despite the programme’s continuing success, Ranny’s young co-star felt pressured to give up the role as her Patwa-speaking radio persona met with both the disapproval of her family and seemed incompatible with her profession as teacher of English language and literature in a traditional grammar school.

Nonetheless, it was easy for the Pantomime, *Morgan’s Dream of Old Port Royal* (LTM 1965) to tap the link already established in the public imagination between the figures of Anancy, Captain Morgan, Ranny Williams and Jamaica Talk as it tried to consolidate the Christmas Pantomime within the context of independent Jamaica and new island-based ways of thinking.

This involved new urban behaviours, very different to the humility necessary for community life in rural Jamaica. In an interview with the editor of the *Jamaica Journal*, Charles Hyatt (Maynier Burke 1981) tells the story of ordering a beer at the bar of a hotel in 1964 and immediately being given a

bottle of local brew; the word 'beer' in independent Jamaica could only possibly have one meaning: Red Stripe. He saw in the bartender's assumptions a new attitude, "a certain arrogance which to me was a very healthy thing" because it had to do with the evolution of a new idiom of identity. A sudden departure from old social patterns and values, even if it meant returning ultimately to the original position, involved experimentation so that the 'norm' could be tested – the difference being that the behaviour becomes yours by choice.

The idea of self-assertion as a rebuttal of a lack of confidence has everything to do with a popular culture based on posing, performance and style. Yet the values of the heartland of rural Jamaica are not easily broken and gracious civility reasserts itself in everyday phrases like *no problem* and *irie*, which are frequently used in response to many situations. Such terms are the equivalent of saying, "I am centred in the situation. I am content. *No problem* – it will not be an issue because I can handle it" (Minott, 2003). *Irie* means that everything is in perspective; you're feeling good about yourself and what's happening. Furthermore, within the context of the traditional social code, a situation that might not be *irie*, can still be *no problem* because despite the inherent difficulties, a solution compatible to all parties will be found. At the heart of sovereignty is a quest for the self-sufficiency, which comes from a sense of self worth – pride equals dignity and respect for self and others.

By the admission of Henry Fowler (co-writer of *Morgan's Dream* with Greta Fowler) the script of that Pantomime was not particularly strong. In reality it did not need to be because everybody already knew the story and the interest lay in the portrayal of this larger-than-life figure by Ranny Williams and the evocative use of song as narrative device. It is appropriate that this Pantomime's strength lies in its songs because it is the music that transports an average Jamaican bandleader Alexander Morgan from a 1960s present to a past where he envisaged himself as Sir Henry Morgan, chief of pirates, reliving those days of glory in old Port Royal. As in real life, Morgan in the

show eludes a fate in the Tower of London and returns to Jamaica knighted for his services to the King.



Figure 7: Ranny as Sir Henry Morgan does one of the comic songs in *Morgan's Dream* (LTM 1965). Photograph from *Sunday Gleaner Magazine*, December 14, 1975.

Mas Ran had already significantly shaped the development of Jamaican Pantomime by defining and consolidating the persona of Anancy in Pantomime between 1949 and 1957, a contribution discussed at greater length in the chapter on Anancyism. By 1963, in Noel Vaz's production of *Queenie's Daughter*, Anancy had become part of the establishment as a 'Colón Man' turned Director of Tourism. Olive Senior explains, "While present-day Jamaicans are among the most travelled people anywhere, large scale emigration actually began in 1850, to Latin America, and the icon of the

foreign experience from that time until well into the 20th century was ‘Colón Man’” (Senior 2003: 121).

A little bit of dramatic irony, in the light of the seventeenth century Morgan’s catastrophic attack on Panama, was that Ranny Williams, though of Jamaican parentage and upbringing, was in fact born in Panama, so he turned out to be a ‘Colón Man’ in a truer than expected sense of the word. This character-type becomes a version of Anancy in the Jamaican Pantomime story so there is value in noting Olive Senior’s comment, “it was the people who had travelled to Panama and elsewhere and returned to their colonial island homes throughout the British West Indies who were to become catalysts for change” (Senior 2003: 123).

Once again in 1965, Ranny Williams would have presented an intriguing challenge to the audience for, to successfully cast a *trickified* Patwa-speaking black man as Morgan, was to cross the colour bar and fully indigenise – with a “ho, ho, ho and a bottle of whites [*rum*]” – this Anancy-like Welsh pirate of legendary ‘reputation’. Once more, local theatre was unassumingly placing centrestage an issue that was being challenged in the wider society: the skin tone of a capable ‘performer’ should not be allowed to thwart the expression of talent.

Thinking back from the perspective of 1966, the first Jamaican Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Philip Sherlock, asserted in his Foreword to Kenneth Ramchand’s *West Indian Narrative*: “it is the artist who fashions the symbols of unity in the English-speaking Caribbean, not the politician” (Sherlock 1966b: ix). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Martin and Pamela Mordecai as cultural historians were still thinking in terms of “the journey of ex-slaves through the thickets of prejudice and inequality to the present reality of a complex, anxious independence” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001:17). They also point out that in the mid-1960s there was an immediacy, which characterised the controversial political agenda of colour. Although Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante as national leaders both

“aspired to lead the black masses, neither man was black” and Bustamante, the “populist trade union leader” who won the election and became Jamaica’s first Prime Minister, was the lighter-skinned of the two” (ibid: 24) cousins.

The political undertones to the embodiment of the heroic, deep sea rover Morgan in the person of Ranny were complex as “being black was something that even some black people did not want to be” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 19). In fact, in 1964, the controversial decision of the government to bring the remains of Marcus Garvey “back to his native land, declaring him the young nation’s first national hero,” met with “opposition from many of the same quarters as Garvey had encountered in life” (ibid: 21). Despite all this, the hero of *Morgan’s Dream of Old Port Royal* (LTM 1965) – fresh from that lucrative adventure in Panama but about to face a day of reckoning before the Crown in England – was able to reassure the *boogooyaga* masses in Port Royal, “I shall return victorious”; as Garvey had done.

Ranny in the role of Sir Henry Morgan presented the idea that the hero of adventure, and storybook example of the reformed *ginal*, could be lifted off the pages of the written historical account and made part of the collective experience of the public at large. The buccaneer is an important character in the Jamaican story because this romantic opportunist as enjoyed a paradoxical relationship with legitimised authority over the centuries. That “mixture of men of every nation, the outcasts of society” (Senior 2003: 79) who became buccaneers and who brought such glory to Port Royal, became an enduring symbol within the collective imagination of what it means to be free. So among the Jamaican theatre-going public, there is significant sympathy with the free-spirited, roguish anti-hero who became a power broker in the battle between European empires for dominance of the region.

Indeed, each century of Atlantic history since 1492 has had its high-profiled representative of the sea-faring adventurer inspired by the love of gold: Columbus the ‘discoverer’, then Drake the ‘protector’, Morgan the ‘deliverer’ who became Admiral and Commander in Chief of all the ships of war

belonging to Kingston Harbour, then finally the impenitent 'Calico Jack' Rackham who was captured at a rum punch party in Negril in 1720 and executed at Gallows Point off Palisadoes.

In 1981, the 1960s treatment of piracy in Pantomime would be outshone completely by another example of Barbara Gloudon's penchant for "having a little fun with history" (Henry 28/11/03) in *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981) which dealt with the capture and trial of Calico Jack's astonishing crew in 1720 at the peak period of pirate activity in the West Indies. By this time Port Royal had become "notorious not as a pirate haven but as a place where they were hanged" (Cordingly 1999: 172).

Jack Rackham, alias, 'Calico Jack' has two women in disguise on board – Mary Read and Anne Bonny – whose female identity is almost discovered when William (the Principal Boy) overhears them sharing with each other about how difficult it is to look like a man. As soon as the idea of visiting Jamaica is raised, the First Mate Mary Read warns the captain, "Haven't you heard about Jamaicans? No one can predict what they will do." Even so, Captain Rackham plans to go to the island as an investor, to sell his soap. In true pirate fashion, and to the dismay of the locals, he is prepared to accept 'callie weed' (i.e. marijuana) instead of 'US' dollars when he realises that foreign currency is scarce.

It seems that like the islanders, the pirates are in the 'higglering' business, and in fact they think they own that corner of the market. The wily Jamaican leader, Seaside Harry agrees to do business but he is fully aware (like Bob Marley before him) that "Ol pirates come to rob I." Seaside Harry, who insists that he is not afraid of anything – though "mi still fraid a truvell" – brings his fellow Jamaicans aboard the pirate ship as guests to a party but he proceeds with caution. Indeed Seaside Harry also gives Calico Jack, his foreign equivalent, a quick account of the severity of island justice as he graphically explains the meaning and seriousness of being hanged at Port Royal by illustrating the word "heng" in body language.

Creatively spanning many periods in the island's story, the Pantomime's history-derived plot stretches back in time yet always paints a picture that relates directly to the present. It is a reminder of the Jamaican people's extraordinary capacity to forgive and the power for good that such an approach entails in terms of community development. This concept is always encapsulated in the "happy-ever-after" denouement of the story: Anancy tries to reform his antisocial behaviour because he loves and wants to marry the benevolent matriarch and the exploitative foreigner becomes creolised and finds a vested interest in being a contributing part of the community.

Pantomime needs to be energising and redemptive like reggae and religion, reminding the public that hope always triumphs over despair. The social function of the Jamaican Pantomime can be summarized in two words 'release' and 'recovery'. It is about the release of frustration through laughter and the recovery of hope. When enslaved by the Spaniards, the Arawaks died not only from disease and overwork, but also from despair. The journey through the middle passage created in those who managed to stay alive an indomitable will to survive and to remember the homeland that had been left behind. There were, however, those who did not make it on that long journey from Africa to the Caribbean. Some went insane while others gave in to terror and despair and, like the Arawaks, lost the will to live. The history of the resolute, doughty ones, who outlasted the crossing and rose above the degradation of slavery, and indentureship, was recorded in the oral culture of the folk. It became a legacy that served as an active force of empowerment in the present of each new day because it was founded on the victory of laughter over anguish, expectancy over despondency, hope over despair.

Labour shortage heralded the demise of the small proprietor system and the introduction of a plantation economy was based on an ever-increasing number of enslaved workers imported from Africa. The Spanish might have introduced both sugar and slavery but the English developed the plantation model into a fine art. Between 1673 and 1693, the ratio of blacks to whites

(freedmen and Maroons excluded) mushroomed from 1:1 to almost 6:1. It is intriguing to note that this “is exactly the time when some scholars think Jamaican Creole formed” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 81). Alongside the development of folk culture, the impact of ‘King Sugar’ on the socio-economic life of the island would be a feature of 18th, 19th and 20th century politics.

Colonial society was motivated by the need for economic profit not moral ideals. As “a colony of exploitation” Jamaica became accustomed to developing “those resources which satisfy the demands of people abroad” and neglecting “those which might satisfy our own” (Hall 1972: 2). This view affected the way the empowered assessed the island’s priorities. The irony is, as the historian Douglas Hall makes clear, that attitudes dating from this seventeenth century period still influenced the development of the nation a full decade after independence. The European connection was deemed important, the European norm was deemed desirable, the rest, as Hall puts it, “was seen to be ‘interesting’, perhaps deserving of display as a non-European ‘curiosity’; but never counted worthy of respect and recognition as a part of a developing Jamaican style” (Hall 1972: 2).

The eighteenth century saw the continued expansion of the plantation and its insatiable need for labour. By 1776, slaves had out-numbered whites ten to one and the status quo was defended by a regime, which met any sign of revolt with the harshest of measures. For two hundred years, sugar was king and the Creole interest, i.e. the West India planters, consolidated their social, political and economic position both in Jamaica and in England. William Beckford, second son of the richest planter in the island, owned more than 22,000 acres in 1754 and added the Drax Hall estate to his holdings in a manner, as report, “that excited the indignation of every honest man who became acquainted with the transaction” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 155).

This was the same William Beckford who twice became Mayor of London; Jamaica’s own Dick Whittington, Anancy-style. There would be many other

politicians of this ilk who would appear in the National Pantomime in the post-Independence period, but this popular example of 20th century British pantomime was chosen by the Little Theatre Movement in 1951 to follow *Alice in Wonderland* (LTM 1950) at a time when the society was indecisive about whether it was culturally rooted in Europe or in Africa. In *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (LTM 1951) the Pantomime cast sings, “London Pride has been handed down to us” at one point (Act I) and revels in the vitality of The Murphy’s John Connu Band at another (the beginning of Act II).

Rose Hall Great House, built in 1755, “was said to be the finest house in Jamaica, and perhaps in the West Indies” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 58) and became an enduring symbol in Jamaica of the presence and power of the plantocracy. Eventually it became a ruin, but the legend of its most famous inhabitant, Annie Palmer, lived on: “’Tis said that on a moonless night in the witching hours after midnight the white figure of a woman stands beckoning on the road near Montego Bay. She is the White Witch of Rose Hall, whose infamous life and death became a legendary tale of horror and bloodshed whispered in the nights under cover of the rustle of waving sugar cane, or the murmur of swaying coconut fronds” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 58).

This is a story, which was picked up in the 1975 LTM Pantomime *The Witch* directed by Yvonne Brewster and reworked again in 2002 in the form of *Miss Annie* directed by Robert Clarke. The first version of the Rose Hall legend was written by Barbara Gloudon for Lois Kelly Barrow and Leonie Forbes (both stars of the 1975-76 season) to alternate in the leading role and anchor their respective casts. Twenty-seven years later, Gloudon was conscious that the ‘dark side’ of Annie Palmer highlighted in the original would be too overwhelming in a country already beleaguered with murder and mayhem, so the second time round, in a production mounted by The Pantomime Company, she decided to play it more for laughs. This meant that mean and evil Miss Annie became vulnerable when she fell in love and was therefore unable to

squash the ‘industrial dispute’ by her workers who were tired of working for free.

Historically, Jamaica has been an explosive society with the possibility of rebellion always in the air. Women stood shoulder to shoulder with men in the fight for freedom and the successes and disappointments associated with resistance, like the Maroon Wars in the 1730s and 1790s, highlighted the reality that rebellion, rather than conformity, ultimately resulted in freedom but at the dear cost of lives. Furthermore, the Robin Hood-type figure represented in the figure of the buccaneer leader on the one hand and the Kromanti ‘highwayman’ Jack Mansong on the other, expresses a type of self-assertion which, in captivity, found everyday expression in a pattern of behaviour designed to subvert the efficiency of the plantation system at every level. In a situation like this, apparently innate sluggishness and frustratingly consistent incomprehension of new expectations (the evasion and dissembling that are characteristic of Anancyism) became tools for freeing oneself from mental bondage even while the body remained shackled and under the whip.

“Jamaica is the 150-mile backbone, 50 miles wide, of a submarine mountain chain reaching to the 7,400-ft peak of the Blue Mountains” (Butler 1994: 1). This was the land of the romanticised free African – and in particular, the Maroons who constituted a nation within the nation. It is important to note too, that through the centuries “Maroon societies have not only conserved elements of African culture but also provide a direct link with the indigenous people of Jamaica, the Tainos. The oral culture has always held that such linkages exist, but they are now being supported by solid evidence from archaeological research in old Maroon settlements” (Senior 2003: 307).

Rachel Manley, whose father and grandfather frequently sought rest from the responsibilities of public life in the foothills above Papine, attests that “no one knows Jamaica who does not know her mountains. They are the temporal frame worn down to expression by each of the island’s passages: its seasons, pauses and hibernations, desertions and reunions, betrayals and redemptions.

From history's quixotic lap our imperfections rise as character; scars form our features. Trapped in its evolution, Jamaica has become its own predictable uncertainties. The unfamiliar call this magic" (Manley 2000: 64). The mountains have always been associated with freedom, and "as symbols of resistance, they have played a significant role in shaping the psyche of Jamaicans" (Senior 2003: 307).

The Pantomime *Soliday and the Wicked Bird* was the LTM's bold bid in 1943 to acknowledge the cultural potential of Jamaica's Maroon presence. Vera Bell, the scriptwriter was herself a Jamaican of African descent. She is most famous for her poem "Ancestor on the Auction Block" in which she acknowledges the historical obligation to the forefathers of those seeking fresh understandings of self in the emergence of a new country: "Yours was the task to clear the ground / Mine be the task to build." The magnitude of the builder's task was evident in the challenge to the society's values that her Pantomime story represented. However, although the census statistics for 1943 showed a Jamaican population of mixed racial origin, predominantly Black but with a wide range of other groups (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 243), local audiences of the time did not consider the Maroon story a fit subject for theatre and the LTM box office suffered. The majority of Jamaicans might have been Black but most theatregoers were not.

It was also in these mountains, 5,000 feet above sea level, that the daring rebel Jack Mansong, the notorious Jamaican Robin Hood, had his hideaway. In fact, the mountains constituted the essence of his song of freedom:

A love de mountain. Dere is no place like de mountain. Let de mountain be me resting place. Mek de cave be mi grave an de tall mountain top me tombstone. De mountain is strong. In all you trial and tribulation, stan up like de mountain. De mighty flood come an it jus wash de mountain clean an mek it greener dan ever. De great storm blow and de mountain stan up an laugh. When you come to de mountain it show you de worl below, and it look good. When you down below an life hard look to de mountain. When you look you haffe hole you head high and when you hole you head up high you is a man looking

up wid hope. (*He puts his arm around Quashie and Teena*)
Quashie and Teena you freedom come but de struggle begin wid
freedom. Look to de mountain. (*Mansong, Act II, Scene 7*)

The Blue Mountains were his domain and magic was his trademark. The figure of Jack Mansong began to loom large in the aftermath of the Kromanti rebellion of 1760, and is shrouded in myth but as Alan Eyre asserts, “one thing is certain: by early 1780 Jack had decided that the life of a guerrilla was better than that of a slave, and he began his private war” (Eyre 1973: 10).

Such was the impact of this Coromantyn ‘highway robber’ on the public imagination both at home and abroad that in England he was the subject of plays, musicals and pamphlets (Senior 2003: 485). Dada, the storyteller in *Mansong* (LTM 1980) recounts, “Him name reach clear a England. One day mi a lissen an mi hear Backra a read newspaper dat come from Englan bout him.” (Act I, Scene 4) He even entered pantomime in London’s West End as *Obi – or Three Fingered Jack*. Two hundred years later, in Jamaican Pantomime, the story is told as an example of history narrated from the point of view of the enslaved, rather than from that of the property owners.

Ted Dwyer, a historian and educator with a good musical ear, wrote the script for *Mansong* (LTM 1980). He was also an experienced actor and had performed in several LTM Pantomime productions starting with *Moonshine Anancy* in 1969. The plot revolves around the exploits of the proud, Coromantyn/Kromanti warrior prince who refused to accept slavery. Workers on the plantations in those days had to hide the finer details of their African ancestry because the owners operated a divide and rule principle and kept people from the same tribe apart. When a newly bought slave is brought to the Chapman Estate, Teena (Jack Mansong’s sister who was abducted by raiders from their village home in Africa) has to pretend not to know him or they will be separated. She is warned by Dada: “Is Backra policy not fe have slave pon de estate who know dem one another an who come from de same tribe before dem lef Africa. Dem always get divide up. If Backra know bout you an Jack him good fe get rid a one a you.” (Act I, Scene 2).

Everything associated with African culture – the drum, the dance and the magical incantation – was to be denied. Dada was an African medicine man but he frequently played the part of a doddering old fool in order to hide his special knowledge and minimise his potential threat to the plantation status quo. He had the authority however to command the duelling opponents to fight in hand-to-hand combat as Ashanti versus Coromantyn in keeping with their identity as African warriors (Act II, Scene 7). He was also astute enough to back up his latent authority as father-figure and spiritual protector by taking the precaution of removing the bullets from Quashee's gun while he was asleep, an action which saved the lives of them all when the malevolent Sam Power tried to steal Jack Mansong's treasure. As Eyre points out, the story of Jack Mansong underlines the point that in human relations there is only one choice – bloodshed or brotherhood (Eyre 1973: 14).

The historians point out that “the greatest agony the imported African slave endured was not physical, terrible though that was, but psychological” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 3) and one of the greatest challenges facing the twentieth century builders of the new nation was defined by Richard Hart as “a widespread lack of racial self-respect” (quoted by Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 8). The sense of severance in the New World African was not just a result of being betrayed by his own, being transported to an unknown place at a considerable distance from the motherland, losing a familiar linguistic and cultural framework, but also having to live under laws which “stripped him of the rights of personality and denied him a sense of destiny, of a future” (ibid. 3). The past too became a lost domain as “the ties with community, with ancestors, with one's history, with one's land” were snapped (ibid.).

The need to counteract this type of enforced amnesia bred a spirit of defiance, which expressed itself in a history of cultural subterfuge, maroonage (escape from the plantations to join the Maroons in the mountainous interior), sabotage and resistance to unwarranted authority – all expressions of an attitude articulated by the nineteenth century Baptist deacon and political

nonconformist – later National Hero – Sam Sharpe (1801-1832) when he said that he preferred death to slavery (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 226).

Daddy Sharpe's peaceful protest, a sit-down strike of all the slaves in the western parishes after the three-day Christmas holidays in 1831, was taken over by militants and became a full-scale violent rebellion, which was subdued by military force on 5 January 1832. Sharpe was hanged for his parting the 'rebellion' "reset the timetable for freedom" (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 226). Had he lived, this national hero would have been 37 years old when 'Full Free' actually became a reality.

On August 1, 1834 slavery as a legal construct was abolished but the former slaves were obliged to work 40½ hours a week as without wages for their former masters 'apprentices' in exchange for lodging, food, clothing and medical attention (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 14). The Apprenticeship system was deemed a failure by all and was brought to a premature end on August 1, 1938 when 'Full Free' was declared. The Emancipation Proclamation was celebrated in the square in Spanish Town with much jubilation as 311,000 people across the island were freed. The date has remained an important marker in the history of Jamaica ever since though it was engulfed somewhat after 1962 by the celebration of Independence Day in August.

The LTM Pantomime *Bruckins* (1988) written by Ted Dwyer and Carmen E Tipling is about these celebrations and takes its title from the dance, which was instituted by the ex-plantation workers to celebrate their long-awaited freedom. The Programme Notes provide an outline of the story set on Squire Hardie's Estate, and which focuses on the lives of workers in the days leading up to full freedom:

Miss Elfreda, loved and respected by all, has all her hopes set on the future of her son Rufus, as her own attempts to buy an early freedom for herself have been thwarted. She uses her "powers" to speed up the process. MR BUCKY – Butler in the Great

House, feels he must secure the future of his daughter – PRECIOUS GRACE, as he himself is already old. Buckie poses a riddle, and the prize is Precious's hand in marriage. The relationship between Rufus and Precious Grace is slowed down by enmity between Elfreda and Buckie, the basis of which is not known to the workers.

The Squire and his wife Amanda naturally are not anxious to have full freedom, and hire a consultant to find the best way of keeping the workers on the estate. Throughout all of this, Anancy, "the present and the past" manipulates, schemes and uses all his powers to have things turn out in the workers' favour. After a slight backfiring, he succeeds. The workers get their freedom, the lovers "get through", Buckie and Elfreda are reconciled and the Squire and Amanda accept what they can't change – Freedom. (Little Theatre Movement 1988: 3 & 15).

In 1997, for the first time in 35 years, the first day in August, Emancipation Day – which prior to Independence had been "the most emotionally resonant anniversary in the entire calendar" (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 94) – was re-instated as a day of national celebration. The Little Theatre Movement's Pantomime Company produced a two-hour, high-energy performance of traditional and original songs, poetry, dance, colourful sets and costumes called *Augus Mawnin* that summer as a prelude to the event; and, it has remained part of the annual commemorative celebrations ever since.

The educational value of the show is indisputable and, under Brian Heap's direction, it has been created in a format that is accessible to the broadest possible audience and can be adapted to the limitations or opportunities of any theatrical situation – public theatre or schoolroom. Although *Augus Mawnin* "has a dramatic framework" it is not a Pantomime; it is not even a play for as the critic Michael Reckord points out, "there is neither plot nor character development" (Reckord 27/07/01). Nonetheless, he adds, "It is, really, a patriotic work; it aims at stimulating love for nation – something badly needed in these troubling times" (ibid.).

The title refers specifically to the morning when the Proclamation of Freedom was read out aloud in Spanish Town Square. A group of enslaved workers

leaves the plantation surreptitiously so that they can be there to hear the words as they are spoken. Of course, they are pursued, and in order to remain alert during the night they tell stories, sing songs and dance. Barbara Gloudon created the “line on which things are hung”, but the production features poetry by Lorna Goodison, “songs, ... and movement in the traditional folk style which is associated with Emancipation” (Anon. 10/07/97). Through this entertainment set against a simple backdrop, featuring fields of cane in the shadow of the Great House, is woven a cross-section of Jamaican culture from across the centuries. The play ends with the Proclamation being read in what is almost a Jonkonnu style.

It is clear that the production offered its audience the opportunity to participate imaginatively in a very moving interpretation of the process that led up to that Emancipation Day morning on 1 August 1838. The elation that accompanied the words of the Emancipation Proclamation resonates with intensity even in twenty-first century Jamaica as the continuing annual impact of this celebratory performance shows.

The sensitivity involved in shaping emotion of this magnitude is illustrated in the extended public debate, which accompanied the unveiling in August 2003 of the statue that marked the ceremonial entrance to Emancipation Park. “Redemption Song” sculpted by Laura Facey Cooper (who designed the set and costumes for the LTM Pantomime *The Witch* (1975) polarised the public in an extended discussion in the press on the statue’s intrinsic worth and symbolic value. The controversy triggered by the unveiling of the statue showed how contentious representative accounts of this transition from slavery to freedom could be in contemporary Jamaica.

According to Laura Facey Cooper “Redemption Song” – in itself inspired by the lyrics of the song by Bob Marley – was created as a tribute to those African arrivants whose spirit refused to be broken by their oppressors. Acknowledging that over a hundred people were involved in the production of

this signature sculpture for Emancipation Park, she explained the concept of freedom from mental slavery, which the statues embodied:

My piece is not about ropes, chains or torture; I have gone beyond that. I wanted to create a sculpture that communicates transcendence, reverence, strength and unity through our procreators – man and woman – all of which comes when the mind is free. ... It is all there; you need nothing more. Once you make that connection then the healing can begin. It is an individual experience and as each is healed so all are healed; everything is connected (“Redemption Song,” Jamaica Information Service website).

The journey within ourselves which her work advocates is further explained in

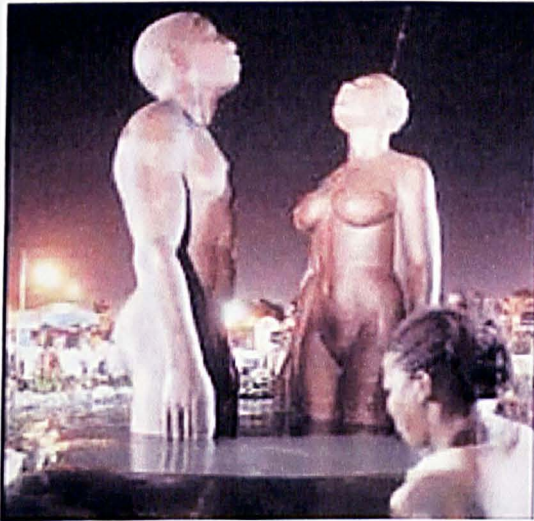


Figure 8: Redemption Song statue. Photograph by Rudolph Brown published in the *Jamaica Gleaner*, August 3, 2003.

a letter to the editor by Oren O. Cousins of Bog Walk, St Catherine who summed up the rhetoric with a sort of pragmatic humility, very characteristic of rural Jamaica: “We have to strip ourselves naked ... shedding the shroud of envy and greed, selfishness, licentiousness, hate, pretence, deception and sloth, in order to redeem ourselves. As rigidly or satirically as the nudes stand in Emancipation Park, we

individually need to learn to pause at moments or periods in our lives, not to bemoan our fate, not to lapse into hopelessness and helplessness, but in order to cleanse our minds, to renew our energies, to re-clothe afresh and then to leap into healthy, constructive action, each according to his or her ability or endowment” (Cousins 13/09/03).

Between 1805 and 1850, the price of sugar on the world market fell by 75% and the Jamaican sugar industry was almost wiped out (although a few members of the white oligarchy were able to shift their business interests into

bananas and coconuts). The establishment however, had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo so that “the non-European would never be anything but a worker in the social scale” (Eric Williams quoted in Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 250). So, political power was restricted to landowners and by keeping both the cost of land and property qualifications high, the planters remained in control.

Despite the “brutality and degradation” associated with the plantation system, there was a strong “material and emotional attachment” on the part of the workers to the “cottages and provision-grounds they had with time quite naturally come to regard as their property” and to revered burial grounds where many longed to be buried alongside their relations (Emmanuel Riviere 1970). However, the self-destructive nature of the plantocratic mindset meant that property owners tried to force field hands to work for less than subsistence wages. This, and other injustices, alienated the emancipated slaves to such an extent that with ‘Full Free’ there was a mass exodus of workers from the coastal plain to the mountainous hinterland of the interior.

A very important development, as an expression of freedom, in the post-Emancipation period, was therefore the growth of “free villages” situated on higher ground, i.e. ‘inferior’ land beyond the sugarcane belt. The non-conformist missionaries, who had previously been involved in outreach to the enslaved, intervened on behalf of those who wished to leave the plantations by buying large tracts of land in the interior and organising settlements for peasant communities. Sherlock and Bennett point out that in the twenty-eight years between Emancipation and Crown Colony government, “the African-Jamaicans with help only from the missionaries, and out of their own limited resources, had settled large areas of inland Jamaica and had founded a landed yeomanry with homes of their own” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 245). It is therefore, symbolically very important that the storyline of the LTM Pantomime frequently embraces the concept of the community as village.

After 1838 the racial mosaic in Jamaica - “approximately 300,000 Africans, 44,000 persons of colour and 17,000 whites” (Buddan 01/08/04) – expanded significantly with the introduction of new plantation workers from Asia to meet the labour shortage. The influx of East Indian and Chinese workers during the various indentured labour projects also made a valuable contribution to the resilient streak in the Jamaican character: you would have had to be an ambitious person and a hardnosed realist to travel halfway across the world to start life somewhere else knowing that you could not expect a bed of roses on arrival.

By the mid 1860s, drought, floods, poor harvests and the high cost of imports due to the American Civil War plunged the Jamaican labouring classes into a position of extreme distress exacerbated by hunger and the apparent indifference of the government to their plight. It was at this time that Paul Bogle, a Baptist deacon and independent peasant proprietor in a small mountain village in the parish of St Thomas, led a campaign of passive resistance to the oppression and injustice experienced by the poor black population at the hand of local government authorities. He was the political agent for George William Gordon, a fellow Native Baptist but a member of the Assembly whose political and religious convictions “alienated him from the white establishment as well as from his own class, that of the prosperous free coloureds” (Senior 2003: 218).

Protest in Morant Bay became rebellion when the Custos called out the militia and consequently the Court House was burned down and people were killed. Panic engulfed the island’s ruling elite as news of the violence spread and there were “fears of a general uprising, a ‘race war’ of blacks against whites” (Senior 2003: 329). As a result, the revolt was savagely repressed by the military with the help of the Maroons; martial law was instituted in St Thomas. Bogle and Gordon were hanged, and such a reign of terror was used to restore order in the parish that in the words of an observer, “no man could

open his mouth, you were almost afraid to hear your own breathing, such was the state of things” (Heuman cited by Senior 2003: 330).

Referring to this Rebellion as “a watershed in Jamaica’s history,” Olive Senior explains: “Effectively, it represented the common people’s assertion of their rights to consideration, fair representation, and justice. Today Bogle and Gordon are National Heroes and Jamaica’s National Heritage Week in October coincides with the anniversary of that fateful week at Morant Bay” (Senior 2003:328). Barbara Gloudon has said, “Paul Bogle’s walk from Morant Bay to Spanish Town to speak to the Governor, although he knew that it could’ve cost him his life, is one of the memorable incidents in Jamaican history” (Brown 2003).

Nonetheless, the story of the Morant Bay uprising has never been a subject of Pantomime. Maybe the psychological scars go too deep for these events to be treated in the light-hearted manner that the genre would require. The Jamaican public goes to the theatre in large numbers in order to laugh. They do not want to see “problem plays or tragedies” (Lindo 1969). Even though the tension between the dual functions of entertaining and instructing has always been a fundamental dynamic of the Little Theatre Movement’s annual Christmas Pantomime; the serious issues of life, social development and justice have to be tackled through humour or not at all.

So harsh were the conditions in Jamaica for all classes under the plantation system, that only the strong (psychologically and physically) survived. A milieu governed by cruelty engenders a climate of fear. In such a situation, gentleness can become an elusive quality because this characteristic is engendered by a sense of security and trust, the antithesis of fear. Historically, Jamaica’s social dynamics have largely been driven by coercion on the part of the empowered and deception on the part of the disempowered. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Jamaican is often categorised within the wider West Indian context as an aggressive person.

So much of plantation life was based on conflict: “black slave and white master, slave quarters and great house, provision ground and plantation, outlawed religious cults and established church, justice for whites and legally instituted injustice for blacks, chattel status for blacks and civil rights for whites, restricted movement for blacks and freedom of movement for whites, pickney gangs for blacks and schools for whites, the ‘bongo image’ against the ‘busha image,’ yard-talk and English, slave and freeman” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 151). One of the big challenges of the Independence movement was to find a way of straddling these differences in the national interest: hence the notion of an envisioned hybridity articulated in the national motto, “Out of many, one people.”

Although 90% of the island’s population is categorised as African-Jamaican, the contribution of a wide range of ethnic groups both to the island’s gene pool and history is far-reaching and transformative. As Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett attest in their much-celebrated history of 1998, “these all became valued partners in the movement towards nationhood and independence” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 1).

A more positive episode in the Jamaican story emerged however in the first stirrings of the island’s banana industry which took place in 1866 when George Busch, captain of a sailing schooner, profitably transported 500 stems of banana in 14 days from Jamaica to Boston (see Clarke 06/06/04). By the end of the nineteenth century the less labour-intensive banana industry had taken over from sugar as the leading export earner and Jamaica had probably reached its “highest pitch of general well-being: ...The rural population was well-fed and well-clothed” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 41). This prosperity beyond the degradation of sugar cultivation provided a whole new framework for self-definition within the rural Jamaican context: a quiet dignity rooted in the produce of the mountainside, which is captured very lyrically in poetry by Evan Jones in “The Song of the Banana Man”: “I’m a strong man, a proud man and I am free, / Part of these mountains, part of the sea” (Jones 1977).

This poem, a favourite with Jamaican schoolchildren who were born around 1962 (Independence), uses the contrast between the tourist's perceptions of things Jamaican with that of the islander who knows better, to feed the imagination with the joy, dignity and satisfaction of hard work. It begins,

Tourist, white man wiping his face,
Met me in Golden Grove market place.
He looked at my old clothes brown with stain
And soaked right through with the Portland rain.
He cast his eye, turned up his nose,
And said, "You're a beggar man I suppose."
He said, "Boy, get some occupation,
Be of some value to your nation."

Facing such ignorance, the banana man whose industry had become the bedrock of the economy, had to exclaim: "By God and this big right hand / You must recognize a banana man." To set the record straight, he explains the dignified self-sufficiency of the small settler who lives in the cool hills with streams full of fish, raising goats and cultivating his own ten-acre property with bananas, coconuts and yams. Then he talks about Banana Day, his special day when with the help of a laden, "dainty foot donkey" he takes the fruit down to the port to be tallied along with all the other hands of banana that will fill the hold of the ship at anchor, soon bound for England. His reply to the tourist concludes, therefore, with a carefully articulated assertion of self:

I'm a strong man, a proud man, and I'm free,
Part of these mountains, part of this sea,
I know myself, and I know my ways,
And will say with pride to the end of my days,
"Praise God and my big right hand
I will live and die a banana man."

The heyday of the industry continued until the 1920s and created an important spin off in the form of tourism.

Prior to World War II, the Jamaican economy was based primarily on agriculture but with the rural-urban drift caused by the growth of Kingston as a commercial centre and the weakening of the banana industry by disease,

much of the folk culture of the country was relocated to life in the city where newcomers lived in makeshift shantytowns. Jamaica Welfare Limited, which eventually became the Social Development Commission, was founded in 1936 within a framework envisioned by Norman Manley and funded by a voluntary cess of ½d on every stem of bananas exported by the fruit companies.

The “once flourishing banana trade dropped from a high peak of 28,000,000 stems in 1928 to 6,700,000 in 1949, owing to the inroads of Panama Disease and, to a lesser degree, of Leaf Spot Disease” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 228). So, a banana man’s ten-year old son born in the heyday of the industry would, before the age of twenty-one, live out the consequences of a 75% decline in banana production with its effect on the livelihood of parents and grandparents and his prospects for the future. By 1961, that same ten-year old would have become a thirty-three-year-old father in his own right, probably living in Kingston.

For the 1961 Pantomime season, the LTM paid tribute to the role that the banana industry had played in the development of national pride and economic wellbeing. *Banana Boy* (LTM 1961) was a wistful rendering of a country-dweller’s life story despite the adversities of the rural-urban drift. As the story goes, the juvenile lead Fred disappoints his grandmother by leaving banana cultivation in Portland to work as a clerk in Kingston while developing his skills as a scriptwriter and lyricist for an amateur acting troupe. The actors eventually get the opportunity to perform for a visiting impresario from London but they have to travel to scenic Portland for the all-important film test. This becomes a homecoming for Fred, alongside a time of much excitement and confusion for the troupe, but eventually dreams become reality.

The vitality of *Banana Boy* was reflected in the immediacy of a production that also afforded considerable scope for improvisation, sometimes to such an extent that the dynamic of the onstage performance could become electric in its unpredictability. Alma MockYen, who was asked by the director to make

something of a minor character called Angela, created an uptown girl who deteriorated through the play and ended up with a big-bellied Rastaman played by Delroy Menzies. Angela tended to spout foreign phrases with the wrong meaning, so once the character was given shape, it was easy to fill in as improvisational theatre took over from the original script. Consequently, she developed a rapport of her own with the audience. By the end of the show, despite her matted hair and blacked-up teeth, the rebellious Angela had the audience still roaring with laughter as she, ever faithful to her ill-suited lover, declared: “As my old grandmother used to say, ‘It is better to have loved a RAAS-Tafari, than to have loved and last” (MockYen, 2000). Urbanisation “showed poverty and joblessness for what they were, stark and ugly” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 359) and the comic tone of the Pantomime did not shirk this aspect of Kingston life.

Acclaimed by the critics for a professional standard worthy of London’s West End, the Pantomime was built on the traditional performance of its stalwarts. Good comedy anchored by the professionalism of Ranny Williams and Louise Bennett, along with the variety provided by Keith Bradley as the dame, Myrtle Robinson and Alma MockYen (in the difficult comedy role of Angela), supported a narrative that was carried “as much in the music and the dance as ... in the dialogue” (Bennett 05/08/62). In the 1980s, Inez Hibbert was awarded an Order of Distinction for her contribution to theatre. Despite her involvement as a veteran of many productions, the public most fondly remembered her as Grannie Rachael because in *Banana Boy* she made this role her own. The strength of the Pantomime resided in a combination of generally, well-polished performance with that element of “nostalgia for a rustic arcadia” (Gradussov 1970: 48) symbolised most strongly by this old woman so determined to remind her grandson of his rural roots.

With a script by local playwright Sam Hillary, original music written in a progressive jazz style by Carlos Malcolm, new lighting equipment recently installed at the Ward Theatre, and the continued integration of Jamaican dance

idioms as part of the action, the young director Rex Nettleford took the Jamaican Pantomime form to new heights. So popular was the show with the audience and so reflective was it of “the cultural and artistic life of the island” (ibid.) that it was revived as part of the Independence Celebrations in August 1962.

As the years moved on towards Independence (1962) and afterwards, it became more important for Jamaicans to recognize for themselves the value of what the island represented in its own right. Consequently, Nettleford tried to highlight the extent to which the Jamaican Pantomime had evolved beyond its original British model by coining the term ‘pantomusical’ as a more fitting label for the LTM’s annual offering, but the public rejected that description. Instead, it characteristically chose to bestow an old word with new meaning and the name ‘Pantomime’ persisted with specific reference to a Jamaican interpretation of that theatrical form.

C L R James acknowledged Marcus Garvey to be one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century (Sewell 1987:56). Focusing on “race and self-reliance” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 21), he formed Jamaica’s first modern political party in 1928 but his political stance was controversial (indeed many of his supporters did not have the vote) and the establishment in Jamaica hounded Garvey as relentlessly as he had been persecuted in the United States. Nonetheless, the concept of power to the people, rooted in Garveyism and espoused by his follower St William Wellington Grant (who described himself as a Jamaican of Ibo descent), was taken to new heights by Grant’s new associate in 1937: the maverick moneylender Alexander Bustamante who used to boast that he was half-Irish, half-Jamaican and ten percent Arawak.

Returning to Jamaica in 1933 after many years sojourn abroad, Bustamante, a self-made man despite limited educational opportunities, became an articulate agitator who challenged the colonial authorities to such an extent that, like Garvey before him, he was imprisoned. An acknowledgement of his Anancy-like strategy in his dealings with the political establishment summed up by the

bold 'trickster' himself in a letter to the *Daily Gleaner* (dated February 11, 1936) in which he declared: "As I am about to cross the path of the Editor of this paper, I think of the cunning yet silly fox trying to enter the cage of a prancing tiger" (Hill 1976: 88).

By 1938 the plight of agricultural and public service workers, whose wage packet had received no substantive increase for the seven years leading up to that point, was reaching critical proportions. Even as late as November 1938, one labour organisation (the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union) spoke of sugar estates, which remained "adamant in paying the same old starvation-slavish wages, whilst there are others who are paying their workers less than they had been paying up to three months ago" (Hart 1989: 33). The Governor, Sir Arthur Richards underestimated the extent of the problem and hoped to placate the advocates of the people by appointing a Commission of Inquiry to look into the employment conditions of field and day labourers.

However, before it could convene, the longsuffering plight of labour erupted into protest at Frome in Westmoreland on 2 May 1938 where workers who had expected to be paid 4 shillings (a dollar) a day "received amounts which they claim[ed] involved a reduction of their pay by sums ranging from three pence to six pence per day" (Hart 1989: 38). An explosive situation developed very quickly as strikers shouted that they would be "willing to die on the spot unless their demands for a dollar a day" (ibid.) were met. This is why the Pantomime playwright Gloria Lannaman called her account of these events, *Dickance For Fippance* (LTM 1974). Indeed, four people were killed by the police at Frome that day and many others were wounded.

Richard Hart narrates, "that night there was a large protest meeting at North Parade, after which St William Grant led a march to the offices of the *Jamaica Standard* to make sure that the popular protest would be reported. ... The whole island was in a state of considerable agitation" (Hart 1989: 40). Bustamante and Grant went to Frome immediately to act as mediators between the sugar factory and the workers. The political ferment spread

across the country and came to a head in a general strike on May 23, 1938, which began with organised protest by workers at the wharves in Kingston.

Performed in the equally tumultuous 1970s, *Dickance for Fippance* (LTM 1974) was set in the 1930s “when the Kingston waterfront strike started labour on its way for a new deal” (Lindo 06/01/75). This episode in Jamaican history slipped as anecdotal fragments into the oral culture but was not taught in school, so the National Pantomime *Dickance for Fippance* (LTM 1974) created quite a stir when it revived the controversial story of the 1938 disturbances in the public’s imagination.

The scriptwriter, Gloria Lannaman, who had “a knack for writing amusing and genuine dialogue” (Lindo 06/01/75), graduated in history from the University of the West Indies, Mona and was an active supporter of the JLP. She also supplied the lyrics, as well as music co-written with the director, Norman Rae and both were highly commended by the critics. There was no dancing but Rex Nettleford “excelled in staging the musical numbers” (ibid.). The events of the time were largely unknown to the younger postcolonial generation but vividly remembered by those who lived through those heady days on the waterfront, including the theatre critic Archie Lindo. Nonetheless, record-breaking audience figures show how



Figure 9: Statue by Alvin Marriott of Sir Alexander Bustamante (1884-1977) making his 1938 gesture of defiance on behalf of the rioters in Kingston. Picture from Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture website.

keen the public was to be told about the days that prompted the start of the decolonisation process as they expressed the “advent of political awareness in Jamaica” (Reckord 14/11/74).

In 1938, Bustamante and Grant were leading the Kingston dockworkers when armed police, determined to use force to restore order, confronted them. Legend has it that Bustamante stepped forward, bared his chest and shouted, “If you are going to shoot, shoot me!” (see Figure 9).

The following day, he was arrested on charges of sedition and held without bail. Eventually, mob-rule took over the streets of downtown Kingston. It is no surprise that Alexander Bustamante’s personality captured the imagination of the Jamaican public. His dramatic, bare-chested gesture had a symbolic resonance which stretched back to the Christmas Rebellion of 1832 when Patrick Ellis, a follower of Sam Sharpe, found himself surrounded by soldiers, stepped forward, uncovered his breast and cried out, “I am ready, give me your volley. Fire, for I will never again be a slave” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 226). Such dramatic gesture became permanently embedded in the public imagination and, of course, wound its way into Pantomime. In *Jack and the Beanstalk* (LTM 1941), the relevance of the Pantomime story to tensions within the society was clearly indicated in the opening scene when the clamour of the fair was suddenly interrupted by a pedlar who “jumps upon one of the stalls and *with Bustamante-like gestures* asks for Silence.”

On the 23 May, the barrister, war-veteran and Rhode scholar Norman Manley was in Frome representing the West Indies Sugar Company at the Governor’s Commission of Inquiry. He received a telegram from his wife, “Riot – come back,” and returned to Kingston immediately and tried to secure his colourful first cousin’s immediate release, recording in his diary that he ‘felt a martyr was being made’” (Hart 1989: 56). Unsuccessful in his attempts to get Bustamante and Grant released on bail, he was persuaded to take up the cause of the dockworkers in Kingston and managed to secure a wage increase for them during the week that their leaders were imprisoned. As it turned out, this

week in May was the genesis of the Peoples National Party, which was launched under the leadership of Manley in a meeting at the Ward Theatre in September 1938.

The Caribbean context is often portrayed as an environment in which people live in an eternal present, leaving quite comfortably for tomorrow what cannot be done today. Anthropological explanations have been given for the adoption of this fluid perspective to the strictures of time, especially when you belong to a disempowered majority whose time belongs to somebody else: living in the moment becomes a liberating strategy as an expression of personal freedom, autonomy and status (see Robertson 2002). Rastafarian Dread Talk (Pollard 1994: 36) reflects this focus on the here and now. It refers to the present era as this 'Iration' which uses as the boundaries for time the idea of yesterday as "first day" and next week as "in the strong", the latter with possible reference to the Christian notion of "in the sweet by and by."

Yet time is life: history, memory, survival, justice. The theatre offers a space for collective reflection. Furthermore, it allows both performers and audience to play with time: 'there once was a time' – history; 'time for a change' – politics; 'time is money' – economics; 'time is longer than rope' – justice; 'tomorrow is another day' – hope; 'no time like the present' – action; 'all's well that ends well' – forgiveness. The outcome is that reality can be examined in a fresh light.

Time, that equalising element given to all living beings 'cannot be tied with rope'. It is a strangely recurring motif in an island context which uses the phrase 'Jamaica time' (meaning at least half an hour late) to suggest scant regard for the constraints of the clock but which also produces sprinters disciplined enough to maximise the winning edge of a hundredth of a second in a global event. The first lesson of freedom is the importance of discipline. Proverbial wisdom has it that "time and hour wait for no man", and tradition has proved that neither does the National Pantomime because it always starts on Boxing Day and, most unusually, it always starts on time.

CHAPTER 5

THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY POST 1938:

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE PANTOMIME

The People's National Party (PNP) was launched in 1938 with the aims of serving the interests of the masses, developing national spirit and initiating the move towards self-government. Alexander Bustamante broke away from the PNP and set up the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) in July 1943 to be the party of the working class entrepreneur as opposed to the middle class intellectual.

Sylvia Wynter wrote of Norman Manley's main political rival, "if the word "charisma" had not existed, the eruption of William Alexander Bustamante on the Jamaican scene in the 1930s would have caused some political scientist or other to have invented it" (cited in Senior 2003: 83). Much of the entrepreneurial activity of his youth is shrouded in myth, but at the age of fifty he became a passionate pioneer of organised labour, a champion of the poor and ultimately a living National Hero. (Indeed that magnetism which characterises Bustamante's hold on the public imagination was the same family trait which re-emerged in good measure in his cousin Michael Manley, who led the PNP to victory at the polls in 1972.)

While Manley battled for constitutional reform and sovereignty, Bustamante fought the first universal adult suffrage election in 1944 with a cleverly orchestrated campaign which denounced self-government "as the road back to slavery and a certain means of leaving Jamaica bereft of British support and incapable of paying her own way" (Hart 1999: 302). He also made the claim that "self-government would mean 'brown man rule' which, in the estimation of the black masses, would be a fate worse than being ruled by the white man" (ibid.). Cunning rhetoric coupled with extensive electoral promises and

support from moneyed interests who thought Bustamante would compromise more easily than Manley, won the JLP a landslide victory in 1944 which was consolidated five years later with a second victory at the polls in 1949.

Above and beyond anything else, Bustamante like Anancy was a survivor. At heart, Anancy is no revolutionary for “he never tries to attack the system which threatens to defeat one of his small size and strength. Instead he finds ways to manipulate it to suit his own needs” (Bell 1983) and adapts himself to all conditions. Bustamante, the ‘silly fox’ (see page 112), was to become Jamaica’s first Chief Minister in 1944, knighted by the Queen in 1955; but in 2005, Robert Buddan of the department of government at UWI, still had reason to recall Governor Hugh Foot’s warning of 1953: “It is the task of enlightened statesmanship to defeat and destroy all efforts to split the people of the island into warring factions, and to save Jamaica from the disaster which would come if malice and hatred divided the island” (Buddan 27/02/05).

Paradoxically, it was the two-party system (in itself such a potent symbol of democratic government) run by members of the same family which became the root of a political tribalism that would come so close to tearing the country apart as Jamaica moved on through the twentieth century. The concept of unity is a major theme in Jamaican Pantomime. The anthropologist Don Robotham, reflecting on the national psyche and corresponding patterns of behaviour, points out that “unity does not come naturally in Jamaican society” because of “our natural contentiousness, disunity and individualistic attachment to human rights” and “our Robin Hood sentiments” (Robotham 05/06/05). Furthermore, “our quarrelsomeness, social arrogance, resentments and self-doubts are always readily to hand. They effortlessly kick into overdrive automatically” (ibid.). Nonetheless, he says, “If we understand this tendency in ourselves to be divisive and to emphasise those things that divide us, we can resist and defeat it. We can emphasise the many positives. It is vital

that we do so. It is crucial that, whatever our many differences, we put unity first” (ibid.).

In such a beautiful tropical environment, the priorities of an import-export economy determined the development of a tourist trade instead of a holiday industry. To go on ‘holiday’ in Jamaica means to ‘go abroad’. In fact the notion of ‘holiday’ locally is restricted to calendar events like Christmas and Boxing Day, Emancipation and Independence Day, test cricket matches, bank holidays and funerals. Any other expressions of ‘holiday,’ apart from legitimate respite from classes at school, means the occasional trip to ‘Foreign’ like shopping in Miami, visiting relatives in New York, or that once in a lifetime trip to Disneyland. Yet adopting an international perspective is a matter of course in every serious conversation and keeping up-to-date with both local and foreign news is a national obsession.

Tourism in Jamaica became a vital industry in the 1950s but catered to the upper end of the market. Richard Hart (1999) points out that as early as 1938, Norman Manley had reservations about the tourist trade adding to the prosperity of Jamaica as he felt that people were overestimating the advantages without carefully counting the cost. Nonetheless, his was a minority view and the industry began to grow apace when Tower Isle, “the finest and largest hotel in the British West Indies and one of the most luxurious in the hemisphere” (Chapman & Thwaites 1952: 131) was completed in January 1949.

As the Jamaican product started to grow in an organised fashion, the role of the arts was seen as significant in proving to the visitor that this tropical island was able to provide an intriguing cultural package to high standards. Paradoxically, the prestigious LTM Pantomime’s controversial but continued appropriation of folk culture meant that it was particularly exciting for wealthy tourists for whom Jamaica’s vivid local life held a great fascination. This attitude is reflected by G.A.V. in his newspaper review of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (1949): “Visitors to Jamaica are talking about this unique opportunity

of hearing some of the best of our native songs and music; to see for themselves the beauty and grace of the Jamaican girls; and one and all are full of praise for this excellent theatre fare, justifying the Little Theatre motto: "Drama: the Art where all Arts meet" (G.A.V. 1950).

In 1955, the year of Jamaica's Tercentenary, Norman Manley finally led the PNP to its first electoral victory and took over as Chief Minister. The staging of the first Jamaica National Festival of Arts was organised by the young civil servant Wycliffe Bennett who had come up with the idea. Louise Bennett who had been away since 1951 in London and New York, returned with her spouse the entertainer and impresario Eric Coverley and joined the Jamaica Welfare Ltd enterprise, bringing a new momentum to its work particularly in rural Jamaica. Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, with the advantage of more than forty years of hindsight, verify how well suited she was to the task for "as folklorist, writer and comedienne" she was "perhaps the most authentically Jamaican of all performers of her generation" (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 405). Louise Bennett again returned to Pantomime but this time with a script of her own, *Anancy and Pandora* (1955) directed by Maurice Harty, designed by Angela Waterlow who "took up art studies ... as a hobby after her children went off to boarding school" (L.S. 29/01/56).

The Pandora story resonates at many levels. Betty Radice explains in *Who's Who in the Ancient World* that it is retold by Charles Kingsley in his novel *The Water-Babies* "with a surprising moral slant: Epimetheus is represented as the honest hard-working man (unlike his suspiciously clever brother) who will be able to surmount his troubles with the aid of his wife and his experience gained from life" (Radice 1973: 184). Indeed, for many of the educated members of the LTM audience, *The Water-Babies* would have been as familiar a text as *Jane Eyre* or *Great Expectations*.

As this interpretation introduces a polarity between leadership styles, which has been at the heart of nationalist politics in Jamaica, it is worth dwelling briefly on the parallel. Those sympathetic to the policies of Norman Manley

could easily read him into this context as the Epimetheus-figure whose long-term political perspective stood in contrast with that of 'his suspiciously clever' cousin Alexander Bustamante (the potential Anancy figure) who recognised that the Jamaican poor were more interested in grasping a tangible present than a promising future.

The contrasting characters of the 'noble patrician' Norman Manley and the 'daringly flamboyant' Alexander Bustamante presented a choice between the intellectual or the entrepreneur, the prophet (Manley) or the chief (Bustamante). John Maxwell, as columnist for the Jamaica Observer, articulated a generally understood distinction between these two 'national heroes' by pointing out that Alexander Bustamante wanted to give the people more bread and Norman Manley wanted to give them the bakery (Maxwell 25/07/04).

As he tries to explain some of the dynastic intricacies at the heart of Jamaican politics, Adam Kuper in his anthropological study, *Changing Jamaica* (1976) makes the point that "both parties are regarded as the expression of the personalities of their founders" and they were both:

hero-figures, larger than life, [who] trailed immense personal myths of strength, courage and achievement. The present leaders, Michael Manley, son of Norman, and his distant relative ('cousin') Shearer, who is in turn fictive 'son' of Bustamante, are also the subject of endless local myths celebrating their sexual, intellectual and manly attributes. Other leaders are sometimes treated in a similar way, and indeed hero-worship, and identification with heroes, is a marked feature of Jamaican culture. Membership of either party, then, implies the possibility of association or even identification with a hero. (Kuper 1976: 120).

Whether or not Louise Bennett intended to include the Charles Kingsley spin on the Pandora story in her script for Pantomime, the reality of the political contest, which took place in the time period between the two productions of *Anancy and Pandora*, i.e. 1955 and 1967, meant that elements of the performance could be read in that light.

Pandora's box could easily be a symbol of the troubles let loose upon the world by the exploitation of the land through the impact of 'discovery' by the Europeans, Arawak genocide by the Spanish, the institutionalisation of slavery and the plantation system under the English, the political realities of post-Emancipation colonial rule, and even maybe, the country's choice of Independence over Federation for 1962. The social constraints of personality politics and tribalism supported by violence, which became characteristic of the post-independent period, reflected polarities of identity, which already co-existed in the emerging nation and had much to do with opportunism and access to economic empowerment.

Alma MockYen observes, in her broadcasting memoir *Rewind*, "Federation was a burning topic in the 1950s" (MockYen 2003: 76). Having placed Jamaica on the path to independence, Norman Manley – "advocate of education, development and Caribbean solidarity" (Lowrie-Chin 15/03/04) – began to work with other Caribbean leaders to form a political union with the British West Indian islands and British Guiana. Delegates from across the Caribbean, attending meetings of the Standing Federation Committee in Kingston, were taken to see *Anancy and Beeny Bud*, the 1956 LTM Pantomime at the Ward Theatre, and were full of praise:

The Hon. Robert Bradshaw, delegate from St Kitts spoke of the "splendid assessment of talent and cast including the blend of races which is so excitingly Jamaican – indeed West Indian." The Hon. Grantley Adams of Barbados expressed the wish that something similar would be done in his island. The Hon. Leigh Richardson from British Honduras and the Hon. Eric Gairy, Grenada, also expressed their appreciation. The latter hoped that the show could be taken around the other West Indian islands. (Anon. 15/02/57)

By 1957, with the exception of "defence, external relations and the justice system, which remained in the hands of an appointed attorney general, Jamaica had achieved internal self-government" (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 27). Culturally, the Caribbean presence was also beginning to consolidate its

voice in the metropolitan centres. Four songs – ‘The Banana Boat Song’, ‘Island in the Sun’, ‘Scarlet Ribbons’ and ‘Mary’s Boy Child’ – performed by Harry Belafonte dominated the UK charts for the whole year in 1957 (Belafonte 2000). With success on both sides of the Atlantic, Belafonte was set to become one of America’s biggest entertainers by the 1960s.

As Olive Senior explains, “Jamaica became a part of the West Indies Federation that was established in 1958 and Bustamante was Jamaican leader of the Democratic Labour Party that came to power in the Federal elections. However, he soon changed his policy and advocated the withdrawal of Jamaica from the Federation and a move towards Independence” (Senior 2003: 83).

The PNP won a second term of office in 1959 and Norman Manley’s title was changed to Premier as the island achieved full internal self-government under its new constitution. That year’s LTM Pantomime also coincided with the establishment of a second radio service, the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation modelled on the BBC. Robin Midgley, seconded from broadcasting in Britain to help the fledgling organisation get on its feet, was asked by Greta Fowler to direct *Jamaica Way* the 1959 LTM Pantomime. Fortunately, having worked with West Indian writers and performers at the BBC in London, Midgley had enjoyed ample exposure to West Indian culture through people like Lloyd and Barry Reckord, Sylvia Wynter and Jan Carew. Midgley’s role at the JBC meant too that he worked daily as a programme-maker alongside such figures as Louise Bennett, Ranny Williams, Charles Hyatt, Trevor Rhone, Adrian Robinson all closely associated with the development of live broadcasting on radio, and all members of the cast of *Jamaica Way*. Apart from the advent of the young choreographer Rex Nettleford’s involvement with the dance, the very exciting contribution of *Jamaica Way* to the art-where-all-arts-meet concept of the LTM was that it moved the emerging Jamaican Pantomime tradition even closer to populist roots in terms of its inclusion of a number of Jamaican folk forms as part of the production.

For many involved in the arts, the demise of the short-lived political union between West Indian states between 1958 and 1962 was a great disappointment. Henry Fowler himself was a founding member of the People's National Party and Louise Bennett reflected her response in a poetic letter of condolence: "Dear Departed Federation, / Referendum murderation / Bounce you eena outa space / Hope you fine a restin place. / Is a heavy blow we gi yuh / An we know de fault noh fe yuh" (Bennett 1966: 168).

The LTM Pantomimes during this period – *Quashie Lady* (1958), *Jamaica Way* (1959), *Carib Gold* (1960), *Banana Boy* (1961) and *Finian's Rainbow* (1962) – reflected the political developments very poignantly at times. *Quashie Lady* (LTM 1958) written by Ranny Williams was an attempt to establish a type of dramatic parity between the boards of the metropolis and the stage of the Ward Theatre in downtown Kingston; it was *My Fair Lady* in Jamaican terms. This production also mirrored the new-found confidence of an island government, which was beginning to establish its own priorities for development. Indeed the metaphor of the peripheral flower girl becoming transformed into a member of esteemed society, commanding attention in her own right through the power of education, had the potential to assume allegorical proportions in a colony moving inexorably towards independence.

Carib Gold (LTM 1960), based on a script by Cecile de Nobrega, opened in December 1960, and presented a story, Guyanese in origin, which was supposed to exemplify the broader West Indian framework of the federal experience. *Carib Gold* was accepted by the Jamaican public because though the setting (rice fields and rainforest), the language (Guyanese Creole), the mythological background (El Dorado) and even the topicalities (crazy driving on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway in Trinidad) were different, the music (under the direction of Carlos Malcolm) and the movement (by Rex Nettleford) were unmistakably Jamaican. Indeed *Carib Gold* contained a familiar strand of West Indianness, which illustrated how much the island culture was part of a bigger regional experience. This could be seen in an

attitude to time as a fluid medium; the practical, hardnosed wisdom of the folk; the role of the artist as dreamer; and the question of ambition and its relationship to pragmatism in proving oneself worthy in order to gain social mobility – all elements which traverse the territories and would have been familiar to the Jamaican theatre-going public.

The evocative *Banana Boy* (LTM 1961) was like a swansong to Federation because Norman Manley's federalist policy was rejected in the Referendum of September 1961 by the people's choice of "Jamaica yes, Federation no" posited by the Jamaica Labour Party under the leadership of Alexander Bustamante. So, after what Charles Hyatt, erstwhile LTM Pantomime Dame, describes as "the foul-up of the Federation" (Maynier Burke 1981: 15), the achievement of national independence in 1962 was for the party of intellectuals something of a damp squib. *Finian's Rainbow* (written by Harburg and Saidy) a smash hit on Broadway in 1947 was an American musical which had been a triumph in London and as it turned out, worked in Jamaica too. In 1961, Henry and Greta Fowler had spent quite a lot of time in England (Henry was involved in preparatory work for the creation of the Jamaica Broadcasting Television service) and having seen the play there, they realised that it "would do well in Jamaica. And we had nothing else" (Fowler, 1996).

In 1962, Jamaicans rose to the challenge of self-government as the island gained political independence from Britain. The choice of *Finian's Rainbow* (LTM 1962), "the Broadway boomerang" (Moss 18/10/62) for that year, was a thinly veiled reflection of a disappointment felt in the celebration of Independence without Federation. The critics expected the production to fail, but such was the quality of its music and direction that it was successful even from the opening night. In a *Gleaner* review with the headline "A star is born", theatre critic Harry Milner found it an ideal offering for the Independence year and stated that "the fact that it is not Jamaican in its insular

and narrow sense shows a healthy national artistic confidence as we go out to face our destiny in the wide world" (Milner 30/12/62).

In the post-Independence version of *Anancy and Pandora* (1967), while the Widow takes everyone to show them round the official residence (of the Prime Minister) a teenage tourist remains on stage with the Chief and engages the prominent bachelor in conversation:

TOURIST Aw, gee, Chief, I hear you are
the most powerful man. I just
love the thought of power -

CHIEF Power can corrupt you know,
unless you love.

TOURIST (*meaningfully*) Tell me – who
do you love?

CHIEF Ah that's a secret. I am still
searching for the special "she".
But perhaps I can tell you who
and what I love. I love my gay
easy-going, many-coloured,
people: and I love every inch
of this country from its
towering mountain tops to its
bright sunlit shores.

TOURIST Aw, Jamaica is beautiful, but it
is such a tiny, quaint, old-
fashioned place, it hasn't a
chance in the modern world.

CHIEF (*blazing*) Don't you make that
mistake. Size doesn't matter.
The greatest civilizations have
sprung from the small countries.
It is the spirit that is important,
and it is that which we mean to
keep alive, and to create a
country of promise and
opportunity. That is why we
have taken power in this country
of ours.

(*Anancy and Pandora*, Act I, Scene 4)

An older tourist coming in search of the teenager conveniently interrupts the conversation at this point, the scriptwriter's 'sermonette' to the audience having been delivered.

Despite the nationalistic euphoria, there was nothing easy about being an independent nation. Firstly, full responsibility with no practice was an exercise replete with potential for painful mistakes. The challenge of evaluating the country's resources and, in the light of that, formulating moral, social and economic priorities proved that independence went beyond the gift of nationhood to the development of a state of mind prepared to handle the cost of self-determination.

Progress might mean arriving where we started and knowing the place for the first time (Eliot 1944: 48), but the evolutionary process is an essential part of growing up, and as tortuous as it might be, it is the route to the privileges and responsibilities of independence. Change, especially in terms of social mores, is invariably controversial. Charles Hyatt summed up post-1962 notions of sovereignty in the following terms: "I can draw an analogy. If yu han' bruk, and yu deh a bush and yu not able to seek medical aid, it starts to heal. When you come into a 'civilised area' shall we say, and you go to a doctor to heal it good, firs' ting when him do – him bruk it again! Right. So the violence of breaking the hand, the fact that you did not fall down and break it as in the first instance: this time the man de going bruk it fi yu – in order to set it properly. So drastic situations need drastic actions ... But the self-assertion was not out of disrespect, and still is not out of disrespect, what it is trying to do is to get rid of all the colonial trappings" (Maynier Burke 1981: 15).

As the outcome of the Federation referendum had shown, the electorate had a government which was finally responsive to the will of the people. With the growth of a monetary economy and Kingston as the gateway to the island through its port and airport, the city developed exponentially as a commercial centre providing new opportunities in education and business. The University College of the West Indies (affiliated to the University of London) had begun

with the first Medical Class in 1948 and in 1962 it became an independent University. Education certainly provided social mobility for those who had access to it. Certainly within a context of “responsive government and the notion of planned change” (Alleyne 1984: 2-3), money talked.

It is interesting to see how the LTM Pantomimes of the 1960s pick up the theme of the importance of money. With industrial development entrusted to the private sector, the country’s GDP almost quadrupled between 1950 and 1961. There was tremendous expansion in the manufacturing sector and the Americans and Canadians moved in to develop the bauxite mining industry. However, this newfound wealth was not evenly distributed and in 1958, ten percent of the population enjoyed almost half of the national income (Phillips 1977:10). The lyrics of a song in *Queenie’s Daughter* (1963, 1966, 1973) sum up the social commentary from the point of view of the poor: “Money is a funny ting; a quick fi done ting. It never nuff fi do all yuh want it, come and go like breeze a blow, and you don’t got it.”

Bredda Buck (LTM 1964) revolves around the fate of a small farmer turned fat cat. Mr Buckfast who suddenly acquires a great fortune, sets out for Kingston “where he can blossom forth like the rose he is” (Little Theatre Movement website “Bredda Buck”) and where he benefits materially from the advice of Mr Parker Smith. As it turns out, financial and social success go to Bredda Buck’s head and he forgets the values of neighbourliness, which had previously characterised his life in the rural village of Cubbitch Hole. Now as a man of substance, he infuriates his wife by deciding that only a Prince from Africa is good enough to marry his daughter and so he makes every effort to sideline her long-time sweetheart. Of course, his plans are foiled



meet our “Bredda Buck”

Figure 10: Section from Scotiabank’s advertisement in the LTM Programme Notes, *Moonshine Anancy* (1969:16)

and the happy couple wed in the end.

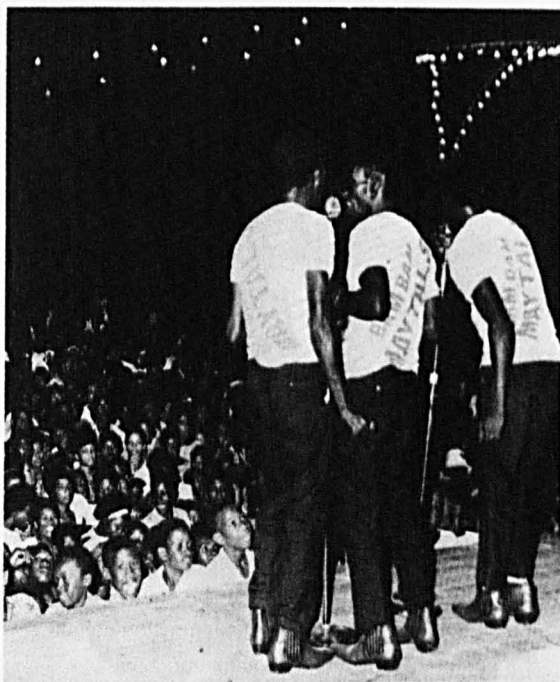
That this Pantomime caught the spirit of the times is reflected in the Scotiabank Jamaica advertisement that was inserted in the Programme Notes for *Moonshine Anancy* (1969) and which read: “The Bredda Buck of Pantomime fame brought many a smile (guffaws even) with his goings-on onstage. Our Bredda Buck – of more recent vintage – has brought a smile to the pockets of the many Jamaicans who have taken advantage of Scotiabank services. Whether for saving or safekeeping, investment or financial advice. There are 39 branches islandwide to serve you. Scotiabank Jamaica – *Where People Come First*” (Little Theatre Movement 1969: 16). The personification of the dollar in the Pantomime character also acts as a reminder of the power of the sponsors and their support for the annual production, which is sometimes straitjacketed artistically as it is obliged to reflect a style and a set of values compatible with the interests or bias of the business world. Advertising revenue depends on the sponsors wanting to be identified with the Pantomime product.

The progress in fiscal development made between 1944 and 1969 is evident in the fact that “after 100 years of post-Emancipation economic stagnation, the Jamaican economy was one of the best performers in the world for 25 years after adult suffrage” (Buddan 01/08/04). This was the period that saw the rise of the middle class, creating social mobility for some, especially the educated and those involved in the formal commercial sector, but also highlighting the frustrations of the ‘have-nots’ who travelled from the country districts to Kingston in search of better employment opportunities and often ended up swelling the ranks of the urban poor.

This was also the period that saw the rise of gun violence in the ghetto as politicians began to consolidate their territorial control among the dispossessed who in turn defended their ‘champions’ with fierce loyalty. Keeble McFarlane, veteran journalist, recalls how things changed in his lifetime: “As a youngster the only guns I would sometimes see were rifles

carried by soldiers on parade, or the odd shotgun some people used to shoot birds. ... But somewhere around the mid-1960s, we began hearing with increasing regularity about people dying from gunshots. The epicentre was west Kingston and the nearby parts of St Andrew, and politics was the underlying cause” (McFarlane 07/02/04).

The period between 1960-1966 was the time when Jamaican popular music began to emerge as a form in its own right with the development of reggae. The first Festival Song Competition took place in 1966 and was won by Toots and The Maytals with their entry ‘What a Bam Bam’. Toots Hibbert explains to the authors of *Reggae Routes* that it was “sort of a revolutionary song” because ‘Bam Bam’ means, “I don’t trouble no man, but if he trouble me it will be like a fight. You know, stand up for myself” (O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 102).



Toots and the Maytals win the first Festival Song Competition with ‘WHAT A BAM BAM’.

Gleaner photo, 1966

Figure 11: Toots and the Maytals. *Gleaner* photo. Picture from Jamaica Cultural Development Commission, *The Jamaica Festival Story* (1987: 22).

O’Brien Chang and Chen suggest that ‘Bam Bam’ with its unmistakably African feel was perhaps “the first glimmerings of ‘roots’ reggae” and they highlight the impact of the group as role models for the audience, adding: “If reggae’s greatest achievement was to win the unmitigated loyalty of its own people, no man was more responsible for this than Frederick ‘Toots’ Hibbert. For during the crucial formative years, from 1963 to 1966, Toots and The Maytals stood head and shoulders above all others as the best and most

popular vocal group Jamaica had ever seen” (O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 95).

What was also exciting about that first Festival Song victory was the simplicity of the staging of the event. On the open-air stage, under supplemented street lighting, in matching tee-shirts, drain-pipe trousers and ankle boots, the Maytals shared a stand-up mike while Toots had his own as they sang to an enormous crowd, spear-headed by a cluster of very excited schoolboys standing at their feet. The music did all the talking. The appeal that reggae would have for the young is evident in the faces of those children closest to the stage as they listened with delight to the winning entry. There is room to argue that the rise of reggae music in the ghetto prevented the scale of social protest in the 1960s that had been seen in the 1930s. Bob Marley expressed this street poetry in ‘Trench Town Rock’ (1971) as he sang: “One good thing about music / When it hits you / You feel no pain.”

1967 was the year that Alexander Bustamante (popularly called “the Chief”) retired from the leadership of the Jamaica Labour Party shortly before it won a second term of office under a new leader, Bustamante’s nephew-in-law, Donald Sangster (Prime Minister, February-April 1967). Unfortunately, Sangster died within months of taking office and the post passed to Hugh Shearer a young, handsome and charismatic trade unionist, and cousin again of both Manley and Bustamante. The 1967 LTM revival of *Anancy and Pandora*, directed not by Greta Fowler – who nonetheless tried to bring her experience to bear on the production – but by the ‘young’ thirty-year old RADA-trained and seasoned performer Leonie Forbes, reflected this transitional period from one generation to another.

Once the fight for self-government had been won, “the question of national identity shifted to definitions about *who* comprised the ‘native population’ and, by implication, *what* constituted the ‘nativeness’ of the society” (Nettleford 1970: 10-11). As ‘the new times’ of political freedom began to unfold, the idea of change acquired such force that the members of the old Establishment

had to acknowledge, as Norman Manley did in 1967, that the social momentum had increased at an incalculable rate. He observed in his September 1967 address to the 29th anniversary banquet of the People's National Party, "I can almost see history being made in Jamaica, daily" (quoted in Nettleford 1970: 167).

Black Nationalism tried to reassert itself in 1968 through the influence of the historian George Rodney, described by Philip Sherlock (Vice-Chancellor of UWI in that period) as "perhaps the finest scholar, historian, that UWI has produced. I am talking about the people who came as students to UWI" (Baugh 1983:30). Rodney had been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Marcus Garvey and challenged a society "in which he felt that there was still hostility, an inner hostility, toward people who were black. ... he compelled the university, and the society, to consider the implications of blackness" (ibid). On October 16, 1968, the Government under Prime Minister Hugh Shearer barred the Guyanese lecturer who was a member of staff at the University of the West Indies, Mona from re-entering Jamaica upon his return from an academic conference in Canada. The riots that ensued in Kingston triggered the transition of the Black Power Movement from the radical talk shop of the University campus to the front page of the *Gleaner* and the forefront of national consciousness.

Just like the nation's leaders, the stalwarts of the LTM faced the challenge of making space for the younger generation's reinterpretation of their society as it disengaged from its colonial past. This was the point at which a new voice – that would bridge the gap between stories about 'the man in the moon' and the presence of 'man on the moon' - entered the LTM sphere as a scriptwriter. Barbara Gloudon's *Moonshine Anancy* (1969) heralded a new appraisal of 'history' as 'current event.'

Anancy was about to be rocketed into the space age beginnings of a twenty-first century perspective, Jamaican style and hot on the heels of NASA. When you contrast this level of cosmic awareness with Olive Lewin's observation

that, “as late as 1945, radio was a rarity in rural Jamaica” (Lewin 2000: 121), you realize how quickly society had begun to change in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet there were other things that remained the same. In the Programme Notes for the 1969 revival, *Moonsplash* (LTM 1994) the director Brian Heap remembers with pride that “twenty-five years ago Barbara Gloudon had her own Miss Corpie proclaim: ‘One giant step for Mankind, but no big t’ing for a woman’ – So it was then – So it is now” (Heap 1994: 5).

In *Mirror Mirror*, his 1970 study of nationalism’s effect on social reform, Rex Nettleford presents a summation of what the generation of Bustamante and St William Grant, Norman and Edna Manley, Roger Mais, Philip Sherlock, Greta Bourke and Henry Fowler, Ivy Baxter, Vic Reid, John Dunkley, Ranny Williams, Eric Coverley, Louise Bennett and many others had tried to accomplish: “Norman Manley in his last days repeatedly pointed out that *his* generation’s mission had been to create a national spirit for the purpose of achieving independence. With that mission accomplished he admitted that the new generation had the right to expect its leaders to proceed to the social and economic reform (and some would say transformation) of this country so as to put an end to what he himself described as ‘the continued denial of economic power in our own land’” (Nettleford 1970: 167-168). Norman Manley died on September 2, 1969, having handed over the mantle of the party to the leadership of his younger son, Michael.

In his celebratory survey of the musical theatre of Broadway, Alan Jay Lerner (1986: 203-204) notes that the period of the 1960s in America was “the scene of the greatest social upheaval of the century,” a phenomenon which he attributes to the immediate post-war baby boom and consequent explosion of youth culture, the development of rock music as those children became teenagers, and the attitude of social disillusionment and rebellion triggered by the assassination of President Kennedy. During the last four decades of the twentieth century, the link between the Caribbean and the new superpower, the United States of America, was strengthened to such an extent that

according to common parlance, “if America sneezes Jamaica catches cold.” Not surprisingly then, Rex Nettleford observed in *Mirror Mirror* that “the nineteen sixties will probably be in time recorded as one of the most troublous periods of Jamaica's contemporary history” (Nettleford 1970: 9). As it turned out, the immediate post-Independence period was just the beginning of a total revaluation of all that was familiar in Jamaican society.

The idealistic leadership of the New Jamaica proved to be just as susceptible as the rest of humanity to the potential headiness of power. An extra complication was that, unlike the Westminster model, which was adopted, Jamaican party politics rested on trade union rivalry with the associated divisive effects of tribalism and discontent in the face of large unemployment figures. Looking back on progress made by the new nation in its first decade, the historian Douglas Hall pointed out that contrary to the idealism of the pre-Independence phase, the practice of government in the New Jamaica ended up showing that “experience is a better guide than principle, and that ‘democracy’ means the right of those who can to get away with it” (Hall 1972: 3).

Around the time that he and Sonia Mills were co-writing the National Pantomime *Anancy and Doumbey* (LTM 1968), Don Mills – director of the government’s Central Planning Unit – gave a lecture at UWI for Radio Mona on the subject of migration, asking the question “Where do we go next?” (Something of an ironic question because he took up the post of Development Permanent Secretary in the Bahamas in 1969 and few years later, he would become Jamaica’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations). Starting from the late nineteenth century, Mills listed several examples of the Jamaican presence in other lands:

Between the 1880s and 1920, net emigration from Jamaica amounted to about 146,000 - 46,000 went to the U.S.A., 45,000 to Panama, 22,000 to Cuba (to work in sugar), and other countries like Costa Rica (for railroad building and banana cultivation) drew some 43,000. Some 10,000 went to Britain during the Second World War for war work, while some 48,000 went to the U.S.A. in the Farm Work Scheme. The post-war period saw

migration largely to Britain where nearly 200,000 Jamaican first generation now live. Emigration to Africa is the dream of some Jamaicans, who endow their sentimental attachment with religious fervour in the 'Back to Africa' movement. But West Africa has benefited from the skills of Jamaican and other West Indian migrants who went to Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the old Gold Coast as engineers, teachers, lawyers, civil servants and missionaries." (Quoted from Nettleford 1970: 20)

In July 1975, Prime Minister Michael Manley went on his first state visit to Cuba. On his return, rhetoric got the better of him and he "said some spur-of-the-moment words he would have to explain for the rest of his life" (Manley 2000: 218). His daughter, Rachel, explains:

Euphoric from the trip, inspired by what he had witnessed and facing increasing opposition at home, he tried to explain that people must not be motivated only by the selfish desire to become a millionaire overnight; that they had an obligation of service to Jamaican society. No one is quite sure what his exact words were, but it is claimed that he said that for those who wanted to go, "There are five flights a day to Miami," and that this phrase caused the middle class to flee. It seems that he did suggest that whoever couldn't live with his politics was free to leave.

The words were repeated in the media for days. Jamaica was in an uproar. (Ibid.).

This speech triggered a new and devastating wave of emigration from Jamaica. A generation later, the concept of harnessing the economic power of the Jamaican Diaspora, as a force for rebuilding the national spirit, would become the core of another PNP government's policy for national development. In November 2002, Prime Minister P J Patterson addressed Parliament with this commitment: "I reaffirm my will to do all in my power to ensure that every Jamaican – irrespective of racial origin, religious belief, political affiliation, income level, gender, place of residence, every Jamaican – at home and abroad – can feel a sense of ownership in this precious space which is our homeland" (Patterson 2002: 9).

By looking at the Pantomimes in retrospect, it becomes clear that many of those stories that tackled the community's need to make its peace with folk spirits troubled by unacceptable behavioural patterns – like *Anancy and Doumbey* (LTM 1968), *Brashana O!* (LTM 1976) and *Tantaloo* (LTM 1982) – assumed an almost prophetic role when measured against “the rising number of malcontents and the concomitant social chaos” (Dixon 15/02/04) that became characteristic of Jamaican society as it moved towards and into the 21st century.

However, the 1970s was an idealistic decade inspired by the principles of democratisation, self-sufficiency and the centrality of African-based heritage in the cultural landscape. This was also a time of significant development in the field of reggae: “Kingston in the seventies was a musical pressure cooker with deejays producing records in their shops and testing them out on an audience that same night” (BBC Worldwide 1998). Trevor Rhone provided the script for the 1971 LTM Pantomime *Music Boy*, a production set in the ghetto which picks up the story of Junior, the Principal Boy's dream of becoming a reggae star. *Music Boy* also introduced to Pantomime a future superstar of the Jamaican theatre Oliver Samuels – at the time still a student at the School of Drama – who got good reviews for the small part that he played. In the 1974 Pantomime, Oliver who again made much of a small part in the first cast, very successfully doubled up in Ranny's role in the second cast.

The politics of the Michael Manley regime was about democratisation, economic self-sufficiency and roots. The Black Power stirrings of the late 1960s came into political fruition with the PNP victory in 1972 as the party embraced a discovery and valorisation of grassroots culture. The vehicle for delivering the message of social transformation was to be reggae, symbolised in the campaign song ‘Better Mus’ Come’. The authors of *Reggae Routes* present a carefully considered summary of the 1972-1980 period:

Campaigning to the rhythms of 'Better Must Come', [Michael] Manley and the PNP danced to a landslide victory in the 1972 general elections.

Jamaica was full of optimism and to many a limitless future beckoned. An idealist in the best and worst sense, Manley promised a future where no one was poor and announced grand social programmes to eliminate poverty. Free education for all was decreed, and even opposing JLP ministers joined in praising the leader's vision of universal literacy. ... The themes of universal brotherhood were as tissue in the face of economic reality. Jamaica's productivity would have had to soar to pay for Manley's socialist programmes, but it stagnated as the work ethic weakened. ...

Doctrinal fanaticism began to creep into politics of all stripes, and both the PNP and JLP armed political henchmen in ever increasing numbers. A Pandora's box had been opened and soon no one controlled these vicious gangs walking the streets with M-16s. Gun crime soared. (O'Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 147).

The lack of personal development opportunities for many who lived in ghettos downtown or on the side of gullies uptown, stood in stark contrast with the ostentatious lifestyle of others in a period of rapid upward social mobility for some. It is not surprising that the society began to split into two groups at the end of the seventies – the 'oppressed' and their perceived 'oppressors'. Minority groups were targeted and eventually with the added threat of Jamaica becoming a communist state, the business community emigrated and the Jamaican economy went into free fall.

In 1976, Max Romeo ('War inna Babylon') had sung, "tribal war inna Babylon, it sipple out deh...Look at dat! So, whah fi do?" while Leroy Smart ('Ballistic Affair') commented on the personal cost of gun fighting in the ghetto with the lyrics, "Everyone is living in fear just through this ballistic affair." The fateful consequences of opening Pandora's box again in the 1970s was the consolidation of garrison communities and a level of political violence, which eventually triggered a state of emergency in June 1976.

Although 'The Seventies,' and in particular the period between 1974 and 1980, was (until the millennium) "the most tumultuous period in the island's

post-slavery history” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 32), this phase was also an opportunity for much blossoming in the world of Jamaican theatre. As Honor Ford-Smith of *Sistren* saw it, the country experienced “a moment in history in which there is the possibility for those who are oppressed to intervene...and transform their society... State facilities opened up to grassroots people” (Ford-Smith 1989: 20).

In 1974, a new and controversial player – “one of Jamaica’s most creative and prolific writers” (Little Theatre Movement 1982: 9) – entered the LTM National Pantomime circle and brought with her a fresh challenge to the status quo. After Barbara Gloudon’s triumphant *Hail Columbus* (1972) and the exquisite reworking of *Queenie’s Daughter* (1973) by the LTM old-timers in its third and most memorable form, Gloria Lannaman followed on with the book, the lyrics and some of the music for *Dickance For Fippance* (1974). With a big cast directed by Norman Rae, the story plunged into that period of civil unrest in the 1930s, which had launched the labour movement’s efforts to strike a new deal for manual workers. Naturally, “the serious undertone” was disguised by “many amusing episodes” with “witty lyrics” and “genuine dialogue” (Lindo 06/01/75) but this was truly history as topical event. Indeed it would have been part of the lived experience of many members of the audience who enjoyed the show in the sparkling, refurbished surroundings of the Ward Theatre. The critic Archie Lindo wrote in his review, “I had no difficulty with the language in which the musical is written. After all I was, myself, young at the time; actually I was working on the waterfront in the Quarantine Department and so am quite able to remember what it was all about” (Lindo 06/01/75).

The extent of the challenge to Barbara Gloudon’s reputation as up-and-coming principal young writer for Pantomime is encompassed in Archie Lindo’s glowing praise of an area which overlapped but went beyond her expertise as a lyricist: “I loved the music. I thought this was, perhaps, the best music and lyrics I had heard in any local show for many a moon” (ibid.). The timing of

the production is also of considerable significance. One wonders if *Dickance For Fippance* was deliberately scheduled to engage with Barbara Gloudon's writing pattern of producing a Pantomime script over a three-year period (1969, 1972) so that it would just precede the 1975 offering. Inevitably the two writers, both women with productions coming back-to-back, would be compared. Lannaman's work (she was an ardent JLP supporter) exhibited an unapologetic interest in the plight of the common man; Gloudon (political affiliation unknown but probably more in the school of the Manleys) was fascinated by the power of women in history and associations with place e.g. the moon landing, Columbus's arrival, and the mysterious owner of Rose Hall.

Barbara Gloudon's *The Witch* (LTM 1975) was a comedy based loosely on the legend of Annie Palmer 'the white witch of Rose Hall' and that Pantomime would also be Louise Bennett's swansong. Yvonne Brewster directed this innovative and glamorous production, full of new ideas, with music composed and directed by Peter Ashbourne, unconventional set and costume designs by Laura Facey, and musical numbers staged by Rex Nettleford. As Larry Shadeed recorded at the time, Laura Facey and Yvonne Jones-Brewster "came up with a particular theme which is reflected throughout the Pantomime both in costumes and scenery. This particular theme is fantasy" (Shadeed 02/11/75).

That was also the year that Greta Fowler, Founder and President of the LTM, paid tribute in print to the "integrity and ability" of the talented, young scriptwriter who had begun to make her mark by keeping the Pantomime in tune with the times: "And now welcome, welcome to Barbara Gloudon and her *Moonshine Anancy*, *Hail Columbus* and now *The Witch*. It's really not her fault that her name never cropped up in programmes of 35 years ago! It's because she's young enough and sensitive that she's 'with it' now. Her integrity and ability are to be cherished. And she's wise enough to appreciate the abundance of talent and co-operation in these 35 years that have led to the

development of that community centre so vibrant with activities and promise for the future” (Fowler 14/12/75).

With its unusual costuming and story based on an evil woman’s attempts at using witchcraft to control the world around her, the 1975 Pantomime would have been an intriguing theatrical event but how did it compare in terms of popularity with the appeal to the everyday life of ordinary people that the multi-talented Lannaman, whose creative work could be excruciatingly funny, was so good at producing? To make matters worse, Gloria Lannaman did a two-year turn around in 1976 and sandwiched the new Gloudon show between *Dickance For Fippance* (1974) on one side and *Brashana O!* (1976) on the other. Certainly, Lannaman was proving that **she** was capable of producing a new script, lyrics and music within two years.

It is important to note that the history of the late 1970s is most graphically reported in the voice of the people through reggae music. A review of the island’s oral culture as expressed in the pop charts between 1975 and 1981 would show the extent to which the lyrics of songs resumed the role of being the newspaper and soapbox of the people as the culture of the ‘dread’ moved into a position of intellectual dominance. Rastafarianism with its message of social justice shifted from the fringes of society to occupy a subversive though commercially viable position centre stage.

Yet in order to gain full acceptance at home, a talented individual (and most certainly one from the ghetto) had first to make his or her mark abroad, and then return in the glow of that success to be taken seriously within the island context. Rita Marley is a case in point. She had been a professional singer for nine years. In 1973 she had received the Red Stripe Award for best singer and the I-Threes (of which she was one) had taken the place of Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh as harmonisers for Bob Marley with the 1975 platinum-selling album *Natty Dread*. In 1976 she had not long returned from singing in Bob Marley’s two live concerts at the Lyceum Ballroom in London, when rehearsals for Pantomime began.

The LTM's *Brashana O!* (1976) was dubbed "a new Jamaican musical" by the producers, and it is instructive to note that the cover for the 1976 Pantomime Programme Notes presents the title of the play in lower case letters - *brashana o!* – possibly underscoring the focus on ordinary people, the commoners in the community, which was a characteristic of Lannaman's *new jamaican musical* style. Nonetheless, when the young reggae 'starlet' Rita Marley joined the cast (in the role of Myrtle Davis), she was treated as just another member of a very musically proficient chorus, alongside figures like Stan Irons and Paula Johnson (NDTC Singers), Dorothy Cunningham (Fine Arts Chorale and Inter-Frat Youth Chorale) and Turnell McCormack (2nd place winner in the 1974 Festival Song Competition).

The pressure was now again on Gloudon who rose to the challenge and rallied with a change of direction. As the columnist Stella and Editor of the daily evening tabloid *The Star*, she had long demonstrated a natural flair for keeping her finger on the pulse of popular culture in rhythm and language. She picked up the *Music Boy* concept instigated by Trevor Rhone's 1971 LTM Pantomime, which had gained even more kudos as a storyline through the release of the Trevor Rhone-Perry Henzell scripted film *The Harder They Come* in 1972. Furthermore, in 1977-78 Bob Marley, backed by the I-Threes, had acquired superstar status on the international scene with *Exodus*. Rita Marley had sung as a member of the chorus in *Brashana O!* (LTM 1976) but Gloudon, still needing three years to produce a good script, went a step further in 1978 and brought the culture of the ghetto as expressed in reggae music to the centre of the stage in her LTM Pantomime *Johnny Reggae*, which also took Montego Bay by storm.

Greta Fowler, the "Mother of the Pantomime tradition" (Little Theatre Movement 1982: 33), died on November 30, 1978. Earlier on that year, she had passed on the mantle of responsibility for the National Pantomime to Barbara Gloudon, her successor as Chairman of the LTM Committee of Management. Henry Fowler became the Little Theatre Movement's President.

Despite programmes designed to better the quality of life for the nation's poor people, 22% of the population was unemployed and 50% of the population was functionally illiterate in 1977. The political instability and the social tension worsened. In 1979, the reggae singer Willie Williams ('Armageddon Time') predicted a conflagration beyond all reckoning as hunger, fear, sorrow and injustice overwhelmed the poor:

A lot of people won't get no supper tonight
a lot of people going to suffer tonight,
cause the battle is getting hotter
in this Iration it's Armageddon.
A lot of people won't get no justice tonight
so a lot of people goin to have to stand up and fight.
But remember to praise Jahoviah
and He will guide you in this Iration.
It's armageddon.

The prophetic, yet redemptive, nature of the song 'Armageddon Time' is emphasised by the versioning embodied in the title, which is a compilation of two Biblical proper nouns: Armageddon (the final conflict) and Gideon (the destroyer but who was also the first of the judges to rescue Israel, without violence, from the idolatrous hold of its enemies).

Mas Ran, King Wanluv (his final role) of Jamaican Pantomime died in 1980 but not before passing on the responsibility of portraying Anancy on stage to an equally talented comedian of the next generation, Oliver Samuels, who acted the part of the Honourable Politician who was Minister for Everything in Ranny's last Pantomime *The Hon. All Purpus and the Dancing Princesses* (1979). King Wanluv was father of the dancing princesses and no wiser than any father in Pantomime before him, but his name (from the 1976 hit song 'One Love') is also a tacit endorsement of Bob Marley's ascendancy to the international stage as superstar and undisputed King of Reggae.

The National Pantomime without Ranny Williams was inconceivable. In the post-Independence era alone he had played the part of Columbus, Henry Morgan, Finian McLonergan the dreamer, Moutamassi the dame, Mackie the

moneylender, the corrupt politician Amos in *Bredda Buck*, Mr Nuffus/Baldhead the music producer (who has high hopes for his daughter Princess), plantation Headman, P. C. Stripeless, King Wanluv, as well as Anancy in various guises: Tata Webby, Rockstone Anancy, Baba Cunny, Samfie the Minister of Tourism, the Minister for Positive Action Annanias N. Nancy, and Bredda Jah Jah Soul (alias Anancy) astronaut and leader of Jamaica's lunar expedition. His character on stage was always representative of the people but usually in positions of empowerment either due to money or political influence. The exceptions – Finian McLonergan (1962), Moutamassi (1966) and P. C. Stripeless (1971) – represent in turn, a poor emigrant who deserves a break, an ugly woman whose words are her only asset, and a benevolent police constable who has served the force for years without promotion. The kind of people who would have identified with the reggae singer Delroy Wilson when he sang about his own frustrations as a struggling reggae singer: “Oh my people can't you see / they're trying to take advantage of me / Better must come, one day,” in 1971.

The loss of such a senior member of the Pantomime family was soothed in *Mansong* (LTM 1980) by Dada, the pragmatic old man (played by Charles Hyatt) retelling the historical account of the people's champion Jack Mansong – the only hero to die in Pantomime but – whose achievements would live on to be celebrated in the lives of others.

By the middle of 1980, the social confusion in Manley's Jamaica was at breaking point. The country's physical and human resources could not keep up with the politicians' rhetoric and an uncertain economic climate created by capitalist opposition to democratic socialism had put the island on course for bankruptcy. Some of the choices were highlighted by reggae artist Freddie McGregor ('Joggin' 1980) who took the pragmatic line as a Rastafarian realist – “I and I preparing fe leave yah” – in contrast to complacent uptowners in “cris' [*designer*] track shoes and thick bobby socks” who handled the stress by devoting themselves to the fashionable activity of early morning jogging.

In a gentle reggae ballad – yet so very disturbing because it is laced with irony – McGregor commented: “In this time of confusion / people preparing themselves (for armagideon) / and without even knowing / they are keeping fit (fit for the fire),” i.e. the inevitable bloodshed. Jamaica was on the verge of implosion.

Yet, “somehow the abyss was avoided and British-instilled parliamentary tradition held. Manley ... called elections ... he allowed the people to speak, accepted their verdict, and graciously handed over the reins of government to Edward Seaga’s JLP” (O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 147). So, for both the LTM and the Jamaican public, Christmas 1980 heralded the beginning of a new era.

Mansong (LTM 1980) picked up the release of this social tension as it tackled in Pantomime a serious adventure story about fighting for freedom with ample possibility for it all to end in tragedy. It was up to the veteran Pantomime actor, comic and exponent on national behaviour, Charles Hyatt to steady the production while the audience got used to the idea that Ranny had gone. The script for that year’s National Pantomime offering was written by Ted Dwyer and directed by Dennis Scott, then Director of the Jamaica School of Drama. Hyatt played the part of Dada the elderly storyteller who prompts the literate to start writing down the stories of Old Jamaica before they are lost:

Yes we tell we tell we story wud a mout from gination to
gination. But sometime mout kean slip an story tell wrong, or
head kean go bad an story feget. But when you write it dung like
Backra eena book it keyan go wrong an it won’t feget.
(*Mansong*, Act I, Scene 1, p. 4)

The Daily News theatre critic Verena Reckord, a co-writer of the music for the previous year’s Pantomime, was lavish in her praise of the star: “Hyatt gives a fantastic performance. He is clearly the best, by a mile, on stage, in this production and grandly represents the calibre and strength of “the old cast” who have all, but one, relinquished the Pantomime to “the new blood”. Hyatt’s timing, movement, delivery is [sic] sharp. Here is a master at work,

with now no need to resort to overplay, as he sometimes did in the past. One can't help seeing Dada, the story-teller and obeahman, as an extension of this actor's "Pa Ben" of Trevor Rhone's *Old Story Time*" (Reckord 08/01/81).

The historical reality of the Mansong story meant that the scriptwriter was inevitably playing a game with the audience as he strove for historical integrity while steering the plot towards an obligatory happy ending despite the death of the title character. It is indeed a tribute to Ted Dwyer's storytelling prowess that he was able to square the circle. As usual some of the comedy was provided by topicalities, as when the old man Dada looked into the future at the request of the Principal Boy and Girl; but what he saw seemed so farfetched to a rational mind in the 20th century (and an impossibility to the seer from the 18th century) that the ironic realisation of its absurd truth as a reflection of everyday reality in 1980, would have made the audience laugh:

Dada: (As if in a trance) Darkness! Gloom and doom. A see de future. Strange names. Strange tings happening. Strange place. Don't know wha dem mean. Trouble eena de future, yes. Hermitage shall run dry again an Kingstonians shall thirst. They shall sit an talk and shall not produce. Tribal war shall bruck out. Pot hole big as a ting call micro dam shall appear all over Kingston an tings call motor car shall fall in dem an de people shall drown. De causeway shall sink into de sea and Portmore shall be cut off from civilization. Politician mout shall be closed and there shall be no more speeches. (*Mansong*, Act II, Scene 6).

The reason why the Pantomime format suits the Jamaican theatregoer so much is in the assurance that regardless of the tribulations suffered by the characters, the story has to end happily. So space always has to be made for hope. The Principal Girl Teena says, "The sun gone but the moon will shine and de stars will guide the way. Look Dada, the evening star. De worl is full of light Dada. There is always light an when dere is light, dere is hope. Hope for tomorrow Dada, hope" (ibid.).

After a dramatic reconciliation between African brothers – "the moment of healing" in Act II, Scene 7 – an uncomfortable decision needs to be made on

the way forward in the pursuit of freedom. Both Quashee and Jack turn to Dada for advice. His wry reply is, “No, no oonu lef me out a dis. Oonu mek oonu own decision. Dem call it self-reliance,” as he alludes to the failed political experiment of the previous decade.

Such questioning of previously fashionable concepts was also reflected sartorially in the corridors of power. The practical and anti-colonial Cariba, the shirtjack-suit which became official wear in 1969 Guyana and subsequently symbol of Michael Manley’s ideology of self-sufficiency in Jamaica, began to give way, as formal dress for men, to the metropolitan three-piece suit which once again became the ‘uniform’ of the empowered who would travel and



Figure 12: Picture of Trinity record cover from O'Brien Chang & Chen, *Reggae Routes* (1998: 171).

work in an air-conditioned environment. The very talented reggae deejay Trinity illustrated this social statement in his 1977 hit that despite the heat of the tropics the poor associated the idea of shirt, waistcoat and jacket with success.

With a JLP victory at the polls and the country’s fiscal policy being managed by the new Prime Minister Edward Seaga, metropolitan interests regained some measure of control over the economy and the import-export relationship was re-established so that the national debt repayment schedule could be honoured. In *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981), Captain Rackham taps into a fusion of style and intertextuality by adjusting his original plan to arrive in Jamaica as a Cariba-clad investor. As he reconsiders his ‘costume’ he sings a song about the necessity to dress the part in order to go to the top and, in so

doing, arrives at the conclusion that “a three-piece suit / will make the ugliest man look cute.”

The death of Bob Marley from cancer in 1981 was followed by a state funeral in Jamaica, which created a sense of national unity not to be seen again until 1998 when the Reggae Boyz football team made it to the finals of the World Cup (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 148). Three years after *Johnny Reggae*, and this time with Gloria Lannaman providing the lyrics, Barbara Gloudon returned to the historical theme and brought out the swashbuckling *Pirate Princess* (1981).

The following year, Lannaman – known for her “energy and fighting spirit” (MockYen 2003: 324) rallied once again with *Tantaloo* (LTM 1982). Still tackling life from the perspective of a mythical village and adopting an integrated approach to word, melody and movement, she handed over responsibility for the musical composition this time to Grub Cooper who also directed the music. In the Programme Notes for the production he is cited as saying that “he gave himself a special challenge to bring together many of the Jamaican musical expressions, from traditional sources to contemporary influences”- ska, reggae, poco, mento, the deejay culture “and a blend of Caribbean and North American soul, among other things” (Little Theatre Movement 1982: 13).

With set and costume design led by Henry Muttoo and first-time choreography by the talented NDTC dancer Tony Wilson, this production would have been visually, melodically and rhythmically exciting. Bari Johnson the director had danced with Berto Pasuka in the Ballet Negre in 1940s London, so he too – like Norman Rae – would have had a particular interest in the variety of dance movement that would have been required by the musical range.

Again, Gloudon countered and for the first time, she shifted her writing pace up a gear and changed her turn around between Pantomimes to once every two

years. In 1983, she produced *Ginneral B*, which according to Brian Heap “she still maintains is her best” (Heap 2000). Gloria Lannaman took up the reigns of the crisis-ridden JBC in 1983 and died in 1985 so she was no longer a contestant for the role of principal scriptwriter. Nonetheless, Barbara Gloudon kept up the gruelling pace of producing a new script every two years for the rest of the 1980s.

Starting with the celebratory *Fifty Fifty* in 1990, her involvement as a writer became even more intense and her name or influence became synonymous with the LTM Pantomime script on an annual basis. Apart from spurring what proved to be Gloudon-dominance of the Pantomime writing process, Gloria Lannaman’s contribution caused Rex Nettleford to rethink the role of the dance as an integral part of the production; prompted the integration of contemporary Jamaican rhythms (reggae, dancehall) alongside traditional patterns (mento, revival) through the talent and ongoing involvement of Grub Cooper; and shifted Barbara Gloudon’s emphasis as a writer away from historical excitement to the social concerns of the ghetto as urban village, before she returned quite openly to the setting and values of the rural community in search of solutions to the city’s problems.

Edward Seaga’s JLP government identified closely with the policies of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, restored fiscal stability and boosted the power of the business community between 1981-1989, but at the expense of many of the social welfare programmes of the 1970s. The entrepreneur had taken over from the demagogue within the political elite; and in some quarters, the national propensity to match rhetoric with style “in a more glorious and extravagant form than it is said, and therefore done, anywhere else” (Survey Jamaica 1983:18) led to inevitable excesses. Hence, the development in Pantomime of the monopolistic *Ginneral B* (Gloudon, LTM 1983), the misguided egotist *Sipplesilver* (Cumper, Reckord & Scott, LTM 1984) and the disturbingly subversive *King Root* (Anderson, LTM 1987) – powerful figures

on the local scene who selfishly presented a threat to the harmonious balance of community life.

A fundamental polarity in Jamaican society has always been the distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Though this framework was put on the agenda for change by Edward Seaga in a 1961 speech to the Legislative Council, a *Gleaner* editorial in June 2004 entitled "Bridging a deep divide," shows how relevant this schism in society has remained: "The twin-nation tag has other labels such as uptown versus downtown; inner city versus the city at large; or perhaps, the lawless and the law-abiding. There are no sharp dividing borders but there is a gulf in the sense of civic pride in ownership, for example, of shacks as against mansions in the hills of St. Andrew. Uptowners hardly ever see the ramshackle of the ghetto; and the reverse is mostly true" (Editorial 21/06/04).

A critique of the widespread culture of greed was presented by the LTM Pantomime *Trash* (1985) with the premise that "the people are now ready to take over the 'commanding heights' of the society" (Reckord 09/02/86). Probably the most controversial Pantomime of all, *Trash* celebrated the culture of the brash, urban ghetto and challenged the territorial divide between rich and poor. In a review of the production, the *Gleaner* critic Michael Reckord acknowledged the authenticity of the set and costumes (designed by Jennifer Chang and Norma Russell, respectively) but confessed, "I simply got tired of seeing so much slum and so many rags. King Nuff's lovely home was a relief. No wonder the Trash Towners wanted to take it over" (ibid.).

Alex Gradussov, co-writer with Sylvia Wynter of the Pantomime-cum-morality tale, *Rockstone Anancy* (1970) had talked about challenging the prejudice arising from class distinctions created from within the midst of the Jamaican people: "And the classes are not cut and dried. When we speak of the rich we can't mean the *Upper Class* because there is no such thing in Jamaica. And when the Middle Class is attacked it is but the segment of that class – the aspirers after wealth in the purely material sense – who are subject

to the attack. Between rich and not so rich there is a difference but not one easily defined or easily discerned. Each group can with the aid of education become aware of the falsity of the value system. Each individual within these groups can change. The change must be accepted by the individual freely" (Gradussov 1970: 52).

During the course of 121 performances, 72,000 individuals sat in the prestigious Ward Theatre and watched as the National Pantomime portrayed an extraordinary social change, which had arisen from the empowerment politics of the 1970s. Barbara Gloudon presented the argument on stage that it was quite legitimate for Queenie from Trash Town to tell wealthy King Nuff of Ready Heights, "We is people too." As Rex Nettleford emphasizes in his 1993 critique of this production's contribution to a 50-year-old tradition, "Oliver Samuels, the talented comedic successor to Ranny Williams, brought to the character of Nuff his impeccable timing and total understanding of the vulgar pis-elegance of the 'just-come'. It was a damning portrayal of the obscenity of sudden and unexpected opulence and it hurt certain spokespersons of the acquisitive middle-strata. The language of the streets, which was used, bothered even more. Yet the people who speak and create this language for daily communication approved. They loved and understood *Trash*" (Nettleford 1993: 4).

In his review, the critic Michael Reckord acknowledged the genuine sentiment which had fed *Trash*'s 'grassroots' approach: "Anyone who has read Barbara's journalistic pieces over the past 25 years or so, or seen her six previous pantomimes (and other plays) over the past 17, or has heard her as a radio call-in show hostess or in person will know that her admiration for 'the common people' is unbounded" (Reckord 09/02/86). Supported by the scriptwriter working in tandem with the imagination, enthusiasm and more socially detached perspective of the director Brian Heap, a Lancastrian from Burnley with a deep love for the people of his adopted country, this production

reinforced a very important link between the sensibility of Barbara Gloudon the journalist and that of Louise Bennett the poet.

Changing perceptions of the 1970s were not matched with changing opportunities in the 1980s, especially in terms of employment. In considering the future of the country's youth from the perspective of 1985, Trevor Riley writing for the *Gleaner* looked with some measure of despair at the facts: "When one is told that more than half of the population is below the age of 20 years and that 78% of the unemployed are below the age of 34, a picture of grief begins to form" (Riley 07/10/85). These statistics explain the beginnings of a social pressure cooker, which started letting off steam two decades on when employment opportunities even for the educated youth were so limited that they had to join the idlers on the street corner.

The lack of consideration that members of society (and especially those in the transport sector) were beginning to show towards the nation's youth and their efforts to acquire a good education became part of the subtext of the LTM Pantomime *Schoolers* (1989). This title arose from an increasingly familiar phrase "no schoolers" which was used by mini-bus operators who didn't want children to use up seats which would be worth more if taken by adults paying the full fare. Suddenly school children were left without transport to school. In a society that had always prided itself in collectively monitoring and encouraging the progress of its children, this was a new and uncomfortable development.

Despite some measure of buoyancy in the private sector, as the government's spending priorities were determined by international lending agencies, the country's education system was seriously underfunded and beginning to collapse. *Schoolers* (LTM 1989) presented a good-natured critique of the elitist grammar school system, which in many ways preserved values of a bygone colonial era and commanded fierce and competitive loyalty within each institution.

So highly prized were the free school places in the traditional system, that the exclusivity of it all could not be openly criticized. A good education was seen to be seminal to upward social mobility and several educators in this sector mounted a vanguard action to preserve 'familiar standards' against the tide of rebelliousness that was associated with Black Power, Patwa and the Dread Culture. They had the full support of many poor people who expected bright children to be culturally transformed by their education. Miss Dorcas, higgler at the school gate criticised the girls for using slang ("Yuh mother never send you to this good good school for you to talk like monkey") and for being too cavalier about their educational opportunities:

DORCAS: The only study your friend Sophia want is fe study de football fellow deh .. what him name .. Ragga?

JUDY: That's not fair, Miss Dorcas... Sophia is much brighter than you think.

DORCAS: Me never say she not bright.. but she gwan too flighty-flighty..

JUDY: I gwan flighty-flighty too?

DORCAS: You not so bad .. though you always a look pon de fellow Richie like say.. him is king...

JUDY: Ohh .. Miss Dorcas. Cho .. that's not true.

DORCAS: Awright .. awright .. but .. me don't want to see any of you girls wasting time when you should be studying and passing exam ... You see me? When I was your age, I would do anything to go to high school .. and graduate and get certiticket .. that way me wouldn't be selling at school gate.

(Schoolers, Act I, Scene 3)

Though considered by those committed to it to be on par with the best in the developed countries, the high school system was old-fashioned and loathe to adjust to the dramatic social changes, which had engulfed the wider society. Survival, however, meant change; and, on a shoestring budget, modifications to the system had to be driven by economics rather than philosophy or sentiment. Time-honoured values continued to be undermined by the

exigencies of profit margins, opportunism, and increasingly intense competition for access in the unequal distribution of the country's limited resources.

A seasoned journalist described Hurricane Gilbert, which struck the island on September 12, 1988, as “beyond doubt the greatest natural disaster to hit Jamaica” (Bowen 27/09/88). The country was cut off from the rest of the world for a week and in the chaos that followed this terrible event, the Little Theatre Movement found itself running behind schedule in terms of having a script ready for that year's annual Pantomime. Fortunately, in the midst of this crisis, two playwrights Carmen Tipling and Ted Dwyer happened to have a potential Pantomime script in hand. There was no electricity in the aftermath of the hurricane but Carmen Tipling got the Delco Plant (emergency generator) running at work just to power the computer in her office so that she could get their offering printed for submission to the LTM committee. Having written *Mansong* (LTM 1980), Ted Dwyer who felt that the strength of the musical play should lie in the plot had proven success as a scriptwriter for the National Pantomime. The Organising Committee accepted the Tipling & Dwyer script for what was expected to be a limited run but rejected the title. The response from the writers was: no title, no Pantomime; and so *Bruckins* it remained.

Contrary to the expectations of the Pantomime Committee, *Bruckins* (LTM 1988) was an enormous hit with the audience and had a successful run but Carmen and Ted have not had a play put on by the LTM since. Nonetheless, it could be argued that the Tipling & Dwyer Pantomime of 1988 would prove to be a forerunner of Barbara Gloudon's commemorative tribute to the spirit of the ancestors *Augus Mawnin* almost a decade later.

In time honoured fashion, the electorate kept the JLP government in office for two terms and then changed back to the PNP, voting Michael Manley back in as Prime Minister in 1989. Gone were the socialist ideals of the 1970s as

Jamaica strove for social stability, which would keep the tourist sector healthy and the national economy afloat.

Nelson Mandela was released from his South African prison in February 1990 and the LTM Pantomime *Mandeya* (1991) picked up Jamaica's jubilation as a legend of the 20th century visited the country to say thanks for its consistent anti-apartheid stance. In the show, a park is named in his honour but a typically Jamaican spelling error provides the opportunity to simultaneously echo the African hero's name and the sentiment that in Jamaica too the time had come when African Jamaicans were charting the nation's future. As one of the Pantomime's songs put it, "we run tings round yah".

Due to ill health, Michael Manley retired from the post of Prime Minister in 1992 and was succeeded by P J Patterson. Anthropologist Don Robotham noted a lull in the 1980s between "the enormous rise [*in the 1970s*] of a black middle and upper class, first in the state and then in the private sector," and, a forceful resumption of the cause of Black Nationalism in the 1990s "under PJ Patterson our first really black Prime Minister" (Robotham 02/03/03). This he saw as "the most important achievement of Mr Patterson, his many failures notwithstanding" because "black Jamaicans grew more self-confident and began to cast off the inner self-doubt which made them automatically defer and show 'manners' to their brown and white 'betters'" (ibid.). The 1990s were heralded as 'Black man time' but this also meant that at times "an understandable racial pride has worn the masquerade of intolerance and even retribution" (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 37).

Nonetheless, this extract from the poem "Meditation in Yellow" by Olive Senior (1994: 14-15), summarises the extent of the PNP's *volte face* and the renewed effect of the import-export economy's hold on the Jamaican worker in the 1990s:

At some hotel
overlooking the sea
you can take tea

at three in the afternoon
served by me
skin burnt black as toast
(for which the management apologizes)

but I've been travelling long
cross the sea in the sun-hot
I've been slaving in the cane rows
for your sugar
I've been ripening coffee beans
for your morning break
I've been dallying on the docks
loading your bananas
I've been toiling in orange groves
for your marmalade
I've been peeling ginger
for your relish
I've been chopping cocoa pods
for your chocolate bars
I've been mining aluminium
for your foil

And just when I thought
I could rest
Pour my own
- something soothing
like fever-grass and lemon –
cut my ten
in the kitchen
take five

a new set of people
arrive
to lie bare-assed in the sun
wanting gold on their bodies
cane-rows in their hair
with beads – even bells

As the generation of immigrants to Britain from the Windrush era reached retirement at the end of the 1980s, many tried to realise their lifelong dream of returning home to enjoy old age in the rural communities of their youth. They built big houses as a symbol of their life's work, spoke old-fashioned Patwa or Jamaican Standard but altered by English accent and idiom, and had acquired a much more orderly and systematic approach to life than was characteristic of

their compatriots. In the 1970s returning residents who did not fit in with the prevailing roots culture were mocked for being different, but by 1990 this set of very anglicised Jamaicans of a bygone era became an essential national asset because they received a regular pension in foreign exchange. Socio-anthropological questions of identity still connected to a Black Nationalist discourse that equated Jamaicanness exclusively with an afrocentricity expressed in skin colour, 'navel string' allegiance, roots culture and Patwa, slowly began to re-visit the aspiration articulated at Independence that "all a we is one."

Jangah Rock (LTM 1996), scripted by Alvin Campbell and Barbara Gloudon, revolves around the tensions in village politics between competition and co-operation in the management of the community's resources and the long-term consequences of both approaches. The President of the Fishermen's Co-op is intent on promoting the short-term dividend of exploiting the community's natural resources to the full even though it will result in the over-fishing of the stock in Jangah Bay. Opposing his environmentally unfriendly plans is the enlightened 'green' Miss Mae, an upstanding citizen who had lived for many years in the United Kingdom but who is now very much a part of the village community. Furthermore, she has a daughter with a degree in Environmental Studies who also joins the fight to preserve the ecological balance of Jangah Bay.

With Emancipation dawned a new era, which would be signposted by the events of 1865, 1938, 1944 and 1962, as the struggle for government of the people by the people evolved. Cricket,* the performance of Jamaican athletes on the world stage, the presence of Colin Powell (of Jamaican parentage) as Secretary of State for the USA, the choice of Bob Marley's work for the song of the century, all became proof of what people felt all along: the ability of Jamaicans to hold their own among the best.

*For example, the achievements of Courtney Walsh: "What Walsh has accomplished with the cricket ball is singularly comparative to what Bradman achieved with the bat; Babe Ruth in

However, it would seem that just as seven miles of beautiful white sand beaches in Westmoreland's tourist resort at Negril need the swamp of The Great Morass of the Black River in St Elizabeth to keep them stable, so too in the ecological balance of human nature the international achievements of Jamaicans abroad have been offset by high-profiled malcontents like the

Washington sniper's sidekick, the so-called 'shoe bomber', and Abdullah el-Faisal (once Trevor Forrest from the small farming community of Point in rural St James and deputy headboy at Maldon Secondary school) the imam from a mosque in Brixton convicted in 2003 for sedition.

So, Jamaica began to acquire a reputation for exporting boorishness, violence and criminal behaviour and as a *Gleaner* editorial pointed out, "other people are not prepared to put up with it and are exercising the option of excluding us from their countries ... we are discovering, the taint ultimately affects us all" (Editorial 18/01/03). The newspaper editor added, "we seem intent on making ourselves into international pariahs; or to paraphrase President Bush, not so much a rogue state as rogue people" (ibid.). In fact, America's ejection of Jamaicans from their criminal system created a new character type in the island context (and for Pantomime) – the 'deportee' or repatriated criminal.

Under the guiding hand of Barbara Gloudon, the Pantomime *Baggaraggs* (LTM 1997) was developed by a new group of writers (Jeremy, Mark & Michael Taylor, Suzanne Brewster, Theresa Brown, Celia McKoy and Michael Lorde) although according to the novices, Michael Taylor "eventually did most of the writing from our end" (Little Theatre Movement 1997: 3). It mirrored a new social reality – the lives of offshore garment industry workers – cheap labour for the U.S. market. Citronella works in a factory run by her wicked stepmother until she meets her Prince at a 'crucial bashment' (a dance party) and is ultimately saved by marriage.

baseball; Roger Bannister in the mile; Pele in football; and Michael Jordan in basketball" (Henry 23/03/01).

In his review of *Baggarags* the critic Mervyn Morris highlights the comments made in the Programme Notes by director Brian Heap who speaks of “the challenge of producing this annual show in a difficult economic and social climate” as “unique and remarkable ... even if some take it for granted and some even seem to resent the fact that the LTM continues to do it” (Heap 1997: 5 & 7). Obviously beleaguered, the LTM’s production team had to work with “a smaller tighter cast, as much out of financial necessity as artistic choice” (Heap 1997: 5).



RUDOLPH BROWN

A scene from the opening performance of the LTM National Pantomime “Anansi Web” last week Saturday evening at the Ward Theatre, downtown Kingston.

Figure 13: In *Anansi Web* (LTM 1998) Mama Sky’s shop becomes an international communications centre and consequently, she is able to triumph over Anansi. *The Weekly Gleaner* (UK), January 6-12, 1999.

Economics continued to be the theme on stage in *Anansi Web* (1998) as Bredda Anansi the high-flying and wily entrepreneur tries to ‘encourage’ Mama Sky (vendor of Jamaican hats, flags and baskets) to sell the site of her

old-time shop to him as its central position is spoiling the tone of his new cosmopolitan mall. The critic Mervyn Morris notes, “Mama Sky and the services she offers are set up as representing decent, old-time values, in contrast to Anansi’s open appeals to greed. But when Mama Sky triumphs in the end, it is mainly because she has made good use of new technologies. There is a development parable here” (Morris 08/01/99). As it turns out, the Internet (World Wide Web) is used to triumph over Anansi’s web of deceit.

Keith Noel felt that the 1998 Pantomime was a show to be seen more than once – the first time for fun and then, for its multileveled message. In his review of the show, he told the public, “Ignore the occasional weakness in the staging and listen. Explore its intellectual and sociological position. And then think about it” (Noel 09/03/99).

One year on, however, worldwide anxieties about technological mayhem arising from the possibility of computer failure at the dawn of the millennium were acknowledged, but tackled in typically humorous manner by the LTM in the Pantomime for 1999. The producers of *Bugsie, The Millennium Bug* (1999) took two chances: they finally brought the dancehall culture on to the Pantomime stage and they tried to initiate a new writer Conliffe Wilmot-Simpson in the exigencies of shaping a script for the LTM.

In the story, the Browns return from England to their place of birth bringing with them the concept of “technology for prosperity” (Little Theatre Movement 1999: 13) to improve their hometown. At the same time, Bugsie, a social virus with strange habits, arrives as a “mysterious deportee” from the USA and is accompanied by a posse of Pink Mealy bugs. Also born in Jamaica but schooled in criminality abroad, Bugsie (also known as ‘the dread Y2K’) gains popularity through promises (like access to visas) based on corrupting the legal way of doing things and consequently presents a serious threat to the leadership of the Mayor Miss P, guardian of “the good old time values.” As the Programme Notes tell us, “The stage is set for a showdown.”

Indeed, during the remainder of the 20th century, Jamaican society gradually lapsed into a form of divisiveness even more destabilising than political tribalism – the illicit drug trade. Consequently, the country staggered into the new millennium with the majority of its people still burdened by poverty and fear. As the newspaper columnist Jean Lowrie-Chin has put it, “With drugs flowing, so did dirty money, and we became addicted to ‘bling’. And so, our post-Emancipation Jamaica, from which a productive peasantry had sprung, once again became enslaved by guns and drugs” (Lowrie-Chin 03/08/04). Overwhelmed by the corruption and violence inherent in becoming “an increasingly significant cocaine transshipment country” (Vascianne 04/06/01) for a trade originating in Columbia, island-based Jamaicans were rapidly becoming a society of ‘have nots’ with inspiring examples of much-celebrated excellence coming mainly from citizens no longer based at home.

With the dawn of the 21st century the boundaries of Jamaica moved from the perimeter of the island’s coastline to incorporate a dispersed international network of Jamaicans abroad as the intense nationalism of the 20th century gave way to the idea of the Jamaican Diaspora. In his Christmas Message at the end of the century, the Deputy Prime Minister, Seymour Mullings sent special greetings “most especially to the members of the Jamaican family abroad” and called on “all 5 million Jamaicans irrespective of location to play their part in ensuring that Jamaica takes its rightful place in the world which is now evolving” (Mullings 15/12/99). In one fell swoop he articulated tacit government endorsement of the reality of a Jamaican Diaspora and gave this half of the ‘citizenry’ emotional parity in a framework of belonging, which suddenly reached beyond the geographical boundary of the island’s shores to encircle the globe.

The 1989 LTM Pantomime, revived in 1995 as *Schoolers 2*, had commented on the topical concerns of entrepreneurial incursions into the education system, the economic plight of teachers and the growing threat to schools of drug-trafficking. The fate of the educational system continued in its

downward slide as large-scale recruitment of Jamaican teachers by the developed world exacerbated the effects of inadequate investment. By 2004, the government could only afford to allocate 9 cents in every revenue dollar (30% of all non-debt spending) to education. Errol Miller, professor of teacher education at UWI, articulated the harsh reality: “we are sacrificing the future of our country and the future of our children. We have to address this issue.” He added, “To find a time when we provided less for education out of the national budget than we are doing in 2004, you have to go back to the 19th century, somewhere about 1870, before all of the reforms that came into place after the Morant Bay rebellion were implemented” (Miller 11/05/04).



Figure 14: Las May cartoon, *Jamaica Gleaner*, December 5, 2002.

In 2004, after thanking the Lord “for His many great favours,” Father Ho Lung – friend of the poor, songwriter and religious dramatist too – presented his assessment of Jamaica’s achievements after 42 years as an independent nation in his *Gleaner* column “Diary of a Ghetto Priest.” On the one hand, he acknowledged, “the magnificent individuals our country has produced in the arts, education, science, athletics, and politics.” Then he pointed to the fate of

half a million poor or marginalized people living in the slums of Kingston alone and pointed out that “incarcerated by a debt that will never be cut except by a miracle of kindness,” the country needs “inspirational leaders ... that can create a vision of nation-building through self-sacrifice, hard work, and a strong sense of justice” (Ho Lung 09/08/04).

The Pantomime for December 2002 saw a revival of *The Witch* (LTM 1975) but the scriptwriter Barbara Gloudon realised that to retell that story in such cruel times meant that it would have to be reworked so that the atmosphere of menace in the original version could be transformed by redemptive humour. Nonetheless, that year, neither Pantomime nor Santa Claus (it seemed) dared to go to downtown Kingston. The new version was called *Miss Annie* (LTM 2002). Six months later, Kingston had been included on a British list of ‘Ten Cities to Beware’ (Hart 25/06/03).

In considering the achievements of Independence, the columnist Peter Espeut condemned the ‘unity’ espoused by the politicians in Parliament: “Both parties are united ...to facilitate a politics based on the distribution of scarce benefits and spoils through nepotism and corruption.” Furthermore, despite the rhetoric of unity emphasised by the annual Independence celebrations, “social and economic cleavages in Jamaican society are greater than in 1962. We have the 11th largest gap between the rich and the poor of all countries, and the fastest growing gap in the world!” (Espeut 20/08/03).

Yet in 2003 the LTM Pantomime was being replayed for the public by local television to boost morale and remind families gathered for their Independence celebration of the joy of the country’s traditional values. Martin Henry, communication consultant and Gleaner columnist, described how his relations decided to mark the nation’s 41st birthday “with a family gathering replete with ole time Jamaican sinting”:

TVJ (ole JBC) was showing Barbara Gloudon’s pantomime “Miss Annie” and it then became as difficult to get youngsters of the TV and computer age to work on the preparation of ole time

Jamaican food as it was to get Miss Annie's slaves, who had perfected the art of making haste slowly, to work without the whip. Miss Babs has explored the slavery/emancipation theme quite a bit in her dramatic works with great liberty of interpretation getting us to laugh while reflecting on the hardships that we've been through. Last year we went to see "Augus Mawnin" (Henry 27/08/03)

Despite the unstemmed tide of violence, the desire for the land to be a 'home below Zion' (see Figure 25) has remained embedded in the national psyche: "Jamaicans, everywhere, hope one day that the land of their birth can be a place of which they can be proud, a haven to visit and feel safe and, for many, a final resting place to spend the evening of their lives" (Chuck 31/12/03). The political leaders in their arrogance had lost the plot so ordinary people began to look at traditional rural values again in an attempt to reestablish a sense of direction for the Jamaican story.

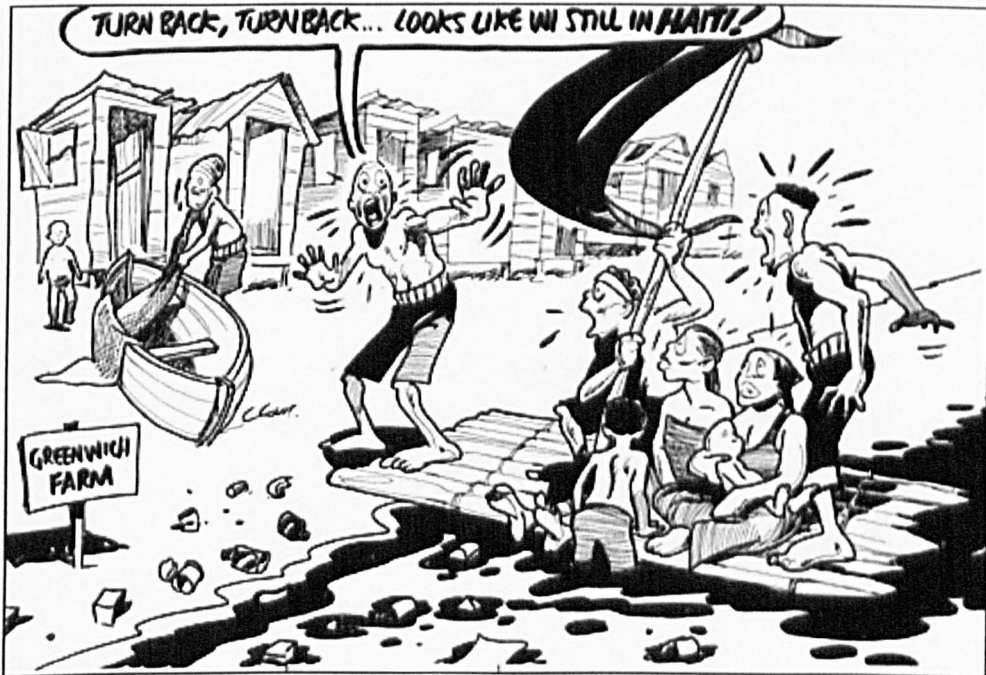


Figure 15: Editorial cartoon by Clovis, *Jamaica Observer*, February 23, 2004.

During the crisis that involved the collapse of the Aristide government in neighbouring Haiti in 2004, even before the Jamaican government offered temporary sanctuary for the ex-President and his family, the poor people of the coast reminded the nation of the time-honoured tradition of Jamaican

hospitality as they welcomed and sheltered the Haitian boatpeople who arrived with nothing but the hope of a better life. That they should have been so openhearted and generous in the midst of their own impoverished circumstances set an example for the rest of the country to follow.

As Trevor Radway of Brown's Town, St Ann told the editor of the *Gleaner*, his faith in his country – “this little rock, this paradise, West of Eden, this God-blessed country” was rekindled by the magnanimity of the impoverished villagers who welcomed “our poor brothers and sisters from Haiti. As if they were our own flesh and blood” (Radway 31/03/04).

However, within Jamaican culture all, powerful emotion – even intense admiration – is handled most safely through the filter of humour. So the general public laughed wryly, but with profound approval, at the idea of Haitians seeking refuge in a fishing community poorer than the one they had left behind, and at the even greater irony of people who did not have two cents to rub together to meet their own needs still doing all that they could to welcome in the strangers who had washed up on their beach.

Somehow, in the midst of the poverty and potential despair, indefatigable optimism and that ironic and redemptive sense of humour – that has so often in the past come to the rescue of the Jamaican psyche – still come to the fore in order to create space for people to be able to both evaluate reality dispassionately and continue to hope. This is one reason why so many people still go very appreciatively to watch the annual National Pantomime at the Little Theatre.

CHAPTER 6

LANDSCAPE AS NARRATIVE DEVICE

The Trinidadian novelist and cultural activist, Merle Hodge holds fast to the position that “the world of the story has a greater impact upon our imagination than does the diffuse scenario of everyday living” (Hodge 1990: 206). From the start, the Jamaican context has inspired the indigenisation of the LTM Pantomime. It is as if as if the island itself becomes the protagonist of an ongoing LTM-packaged story. Its image is recreated anew on stage each year through set design, costumes, props, lighting, background sound, special effects, movement and voiced in the lyrics of songs. Decade after decade at the Ward Theatre (and then the Little Theatre), the Pantomime has provided an in-between place where poetic sensibility networks with elements of everyday life in a multisensory entertainment.

Atmosphere is everything and in the theatre it can be created and controlled by painting with light. As the audience physically crosses the entry threshold, the light of outside is transformed into darkness – a fresh canvas on which scene after scene can be painted. The audience suddenly has an opportunity to synthesise its experience of reality by going “from the whole to the detail through a process of focusing within a set frame” (Harstrup 1992: 18 quoting Levi-Strauss). The first step in the psychological process of focusing the mind in readiness for the performance is in the hands of the lighting designer’s preset which makes you look and ask, “Why is that object there?, Where is that light coming from?, Why is the light that colour?” And you start thinking. And then, when that light goes down and the show starts, you are with the stage.” (Carter, 2000 interview). Time set apart is reshaped in the vivid imagery of performance as universal truths are scrutinised through the prism

of particular moments in the lives of stereotypes for the benefit of the community.

As Barbara Gloudon, the most prolific of all National Pantomime writers put it, “We try to create another time, another place” (Little Theatre Movement 1981: 11). Indeed, much of her work in Pantomime has been inspired by a memory of ‘home’ in the country, for she was born in the village of Malvern, St Elizabeth. Gloudon made her name within the Jamaican Pantomime tradition by reinterpreting the rural culture of the ‘folk’ in the city. Ultimately though, she had to reach back to the rural values, lessons and philosophy characteristic of her childhood experience of home to help the urban-dwellers to find a way out of the alienation,

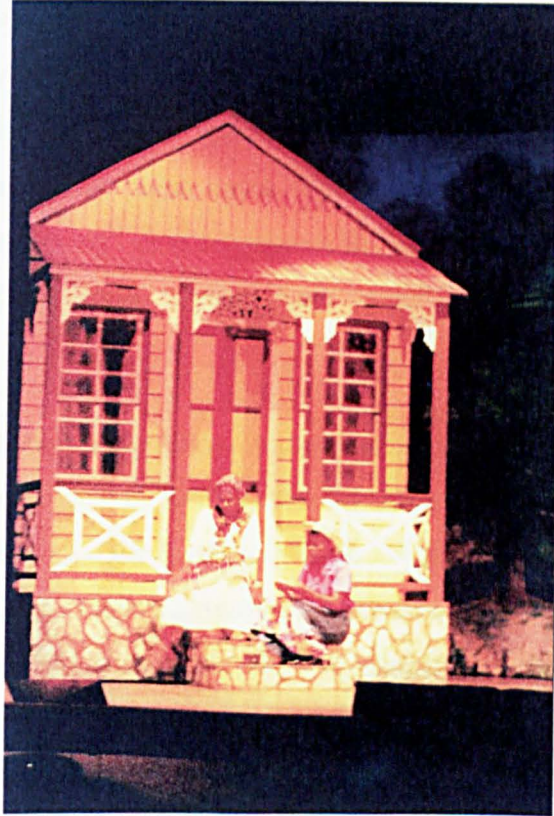


Figure 16: The setting of the final scene of *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000). Miss Daisy (the Earth Mother) tells Angelina (the Principal Girl) how glad she is that peace has been restored to the village. Photograph by Owen Minott.

fragmentation and social disintegration which characterized the city born-and-bred who had not been exposed to the old ways.

With good reason, an early Pantomime like *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (1954) can present “the clowning magic of Anancy, Obeahman, Pocomania Shepherd, and Princess Bamboozle, known as Bammy from St Elizabeth” (Anon. 07/12/54). University academic and outspoken political journalist Mark Wignall recounts the joy of spending Ash Wednesday on holiday in

South St Elizabeth, “transported into a different time zone, a different civility and a feeling that there is something, after all, called home, yard, the good, real Jamaica” (Wignall 13/02/05). Wignall’s day-out attests to the need for this kind of ‘nostalgia’ as an antidote to the dis-stress of city life: “Our journey to the bread basket of Jamaica breathed new life into us and gave us hope in these stressful times.” Apart from the “little pastel-painted houses dotting the gentle inclines, green meadows ... *[plots]* of thyme, escallions, tomatoes, onions right out to the roadside,” what struck Wignall as he and his companion spent a day in the “storybook” environment of St Elizabeth “was the beauty of the people strolling along, waving back at us” (Wignall 13/02/05).

The real star of the LTM National Pantomime show is the island itself and the Jamaican audience expects its homeland to be re-presented episodically in many easily recognisable guises such as The Land of Hill and Gully, Jangah Rock, Anansi Land and Jah-Mek-Yah. From Zazamaica the potentially idyllic kingdom of wood and water in 1954 to a more blighted (bewitched and thorny) Zu-Zu Macca in 2005, Jamaica is painted afresh so that island realities and collective identity can be assessed collaboratively by performers and audience as the production consolidates a mutually acceptable scenario. These elements of lived or recounted experience are interpreted through the appropriation and development of a performance-based vocabulary of shape, colour, movement and sound found in an entertaining blend of frustration, resilience, pragmatism and nostalgia that arises from daily living.

In essence the Pantomime plot celebrates the privilege of belonging to this wonderful place and explores how its people can engage with the problems of everyday life in order to create a win-win outcome at the end of each Christmas season’s episode. Usually inspired by a combination of youthful zeal and courageous support from the elderly, the village’s inhabitants learn how to tackle their social problems head on – despite the crisis that this action inevitably creates. Finally, with the help of the island’s spiritual power, evil is

repelled (or translated) and social harmony is restored. Though not necessarily folk or fairy tales, the stories are always familiar and predictable.



Figure 17: Water lock-off. A scene from *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000). Against a lovely backdrop of poinciana trees, mountains and sky, the villagers bemoan the control that the Giant exercises over their water supply. Mas' Ambrose (on the left) tries to turn the faucet on but with no success. This latest crisis in the lives of the people makes them decide that the problem of the Giant has to be tackled. Photograph by Owen Minott.

A **reading** of the script for *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1941), the LTM's first effort in the Pantomime genre, would suggest that the setting of the opening scene could easily have been mistaken for a quaint community in the English countryside. The village of Nettlefold had timbered, white, thatched-roof cottages and church surrounding the green with several villagers seated on wooden benches outside the tavern "absorbing beer" and small boys playing "Ring O' Roses" amid the hubbub of vendors calling out their wares. Nonetheless, the Jamaican situation kept breaking into the Pantomime scenario at unexpected, and delightful, moments, for it was market day and there was much buying and selling. The stalls and the people, all young, gave "a startling impression of colour." In the heat of a tropical evening, amidst the shortages of World War II, the land of fairytales might well be portrayed on stage as an idyllic Elizabethan hamlet, but this version of the popular

pantomime story had been written specially for the LTM by a young and handsome English schoolteacher working at Calabar College in Kingston.

Jack Bruton’s fresh insight into Jamaican realities provided room for the inclusion of those characteristics unique to the island context, which would flavour the show with its own distinctive elements. The photograph in Figure 18 provides an example of the type of dwelling that could belong to a small farmer. This almost Hansel-and-Gretel-like cottage in the Jamaican countryside illustrates the necessity of finding new meanings as old words and



Figure 18: 20th century, rural, Jamaican, thatched cottage. Photograph by Owen Minott.

their associations – like ‘thatched’, for example – are translated in a ‘New’ World context.

Too young to be an ingrained constituent of the local empowered class, but attractive enough to be socially winsome with those who were the arbiters of official taste, Bruton was able to experiment with partially adapting the traditional British pantomime form to the local situation. He did so in a whimsical mixture of the trivial and the serious – inflammatory political gesture and obeah, corned beef and condensed milk, thatched roofs and beans,

the Missing Ball Competition and the social aspirations of the Carib cinema attendant. Even as the show derided the pretensions of the nouveau riche (the Squire and his Wife), it poked fun at the unassailable pre-eminence of that culinary delight, the centrepiece of the Jamaican Sunday Dinner, rice and peas – “The people of Jamaica/ Think that rice and peas is nice/ But if we grow more beans per acre/ We can do without the rice/ So I’m going to give you beans!” (Bruton 1941).

Indeed, Bruton’s British identity made it more acceptable for him to pen the mild satire of local politics, which mocked the inefficiency of municipal government and referred to the controversial internment of the political activist Alexander Bustamante by the then Governor Sir Arthur Richards. Mr Youngman, “a most sedate and imposing English gentleman” (Fowler 1968: 5), well-known as an amateur actor but also, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Governor’s Nominated Member on the Legislative Council, played the role of the Giant. Greta Fowler recalls, “It was not till after the first review appeared that he rang me up in great surprise, – he’d only just discovered that the Giant he portrayed had been written as a parody on the “performance” of the then Governor who had interned several well-known people in Jamaica in the Concentration Camp at Up Park Camp. But Mr Youngman stuck to the part – the Governor came to the Pantomime – and the show went on!” (ibid.).

What is exciting about Bruton’s script is that it did try to interweave the local context into the fabric of the production, especially in terms of elements, which reflected the spirit and attitudes of those who peopled this island colony. Despite having two hundred years of experience under her belt, the Pantomime’s Witch had emigrated from England to Jamaica in a moment of confusion, prospered for a while in the early 1930s but then hit upon hard times due to the independent attitude of the local obeah men coupled with increasing government red tape. In fact business had been so bad that she had been obliged to seek work in the theatre in order to redeem her pawned

broomstick. She wanted to move on to Germany – “where there’s a lot to do ... before you finish off this Hitler” (Bruton 1941).

Furthermore, the set was designed by the cartoonist and self-taught painter Carl Abrahams (1913-2005) who by the end of the twentieth century, vied with his contemporary Albert Huie for the title of “Father” of the well-established field of Contemporary Jamaican Art. Indeed, he continued to be known for the intense wit and irony of his work and one can only imagine how his sardonic humour interpreted the description of the set as envisaged by the scriptwriter. Undoubtedly, Abrahams’s satirical perspective contributed to the LTM’s choice of him as designer because on a visual level, this gave further scope for the production’s playfully political intent.

In this first LTM Pantomime production, the mixture and potential transitions between the ‘high’ culture of Europe and the ‘low’ culture of the island were also embraced. *Harlequin* (symbol of the historical tradition of proper English pantomime) sets the scene for the show in the Prologue with his mischievous welcome to “highbrows and lowbrows/ And just so-and-so brows.” His presence is counterbalanced by the variety act of Amos and Andy (local folk and vaudeville performers) assuming respectability amidst a middle and upper class cast on stage at the Ward Theatre. In Act I, Scene 2, the stage directions introduce the comic duo probably in blackface, who enter from the right “against a backcloth scene of trees etc. not very well lit,” then notice and “pass suitable comment” on Jack and his Cow “asleep on the ground, lit by a spotlight.”

Ranny Williams, who would become a pillar of the LTM Pantomime tradition, was Andy, the straight man, to Amos played by Lee Gordon, described by Norman Rae as “a little man touched with natural genius” whose “rolling eyes and that flashing grin topping off the rotund little body have small need of coherent lines in which to express themselves” (Rae 31/12/56). Using Patwa as an additional vehicle for the humour, the two popular comedians would then get down to “their real business” – as defined by the stage directions – of

improvising “a Jamaican dialogue, which must lead up to the question of Obeah and witches.” In this way, they would inadvertently introduce the pantomime Witch, who in turn, “approaches unnoticed, takes up a menacing attitude behind them and lets out an ear-splitting shriek” (Bruton 1941).

One of the extraordinary incongruities of this production, from the 21st century point-of-view, is that the part of the witch was played by Ethel Rhodd – a schoolteacher of distinction and one of the “women pioneers who led the way in establishing a tradition of social concern” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998: 360). As the only black member of the cast, Ethlyn Rhodd’s mere presence on stage in a leading role in the LTM 1941 scenario was in itself a tribute to her significance within the island community. Ironically, the better Rhodd’s presentation of the Witch, the more powerfully would her performance detract condemnation from the social injustice perpetrated by the white Giant and underscore the intrinsic negativity of all things black. So, within a framework that had blackness denoting the bottom of the social order and whiteness the top, her role would ultimately be belittling to her person.

Within the colonial hierarchy, and for much of the twentieth century, “skin colour was a badge of status” (Sherlock & Bennett 1998:12) so that was not the only paradox in terms of casting. Conversely, young Norman Read – styled 35 years later as “a well-known doctor” (Fowler 14/12/75)– was a visible member of the colonial elite. In 1941 he was the nimble, freckled, redheaded adolescent son of the British expatriate who set up the fire service in Jamaica. His presence on stage as servant of the Giant merely emphasized, therefore, the extent to which the status quo was underpinned by the advantage of being born into the right social circle (with its corresponding skin colour) so that an individual obviously too young to have achieved anything of social significance in his own right would still find employment at the heart of the political establishment.

So ingrained were elements of class and social status in the challenge of integrating the LTM project into the mainstream of Jamaican cultural life in

the pre-Michael Manley era that, even as late as 1975, Greta Fowler listed among the achievements of the 35-year-old Pantomime tradition the fact that “Ethlyn Rhodd, a noted teacher played the Witch in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and Norman Read, well known doctor was one of the giant's servants” (Fowler 14/12/75).

The country is a historical melting pot in which topographical variety celebrates a diverse colonial history in the form of metaphorical place names that inscribe their resonance of other realities (physical or spiritual) on this Caribbean island context: Seville, Edinburgh Castle, Lluidas Vale, Bath, Auchtembeddie and Aboukir – exotic reminders of European experience – commingle with indigenous place names from an Arawak past like Liguanea, Guanaboa and Agualta Vale. Other names – Morgan’s Pass, Lovers’ Leap, Bog Walk, Ocho Rios, Constant Spring – provoke romantic echoes of their own either from historical incident or geographical features.

Nonetheless, the majority of Jamaicans, whose antecedents were in Africa, had to mark their history by the dominance of their presence on the cultural landscape. The type of historical artefact that is safeguarded in memory, finds embodiment in the act of *performance*, in which is enshrined the transmission and preservation of culture and values as elements of survival. This process involves the creation of templates. These inherently reflect a multi-faceted inheritance, recorded in the immigration pattern associated with each geographical area, but ultimately divulged for public consumption by the insight, integrity and craftsmanship of the community’s artists.

Albert Huie’s painting “Crop Time” (1955) provides one such model. It illustrates the expansion of the sugar industry that took place under English rule and the timelessness of the human toil required to feed the demands of the factory. It also shows, however, that in the midst of this gruelling regime there is style and music. On the surface, the workers are merely an extension of the smoking cluster of metal buildings which nestles pragmatically at the foot of the hills so as to maximize the sugarcane-growing potential of the north-

western plain, is not the limit of the workers' experience because from the field they can look beyond the factory to the mountains – a symbol of freedom – and away from the factory to the sea.



Figure 19: Albert Huie “Crop Time” 1955 showing the harvesting of cane on the Barnett estate. The yellow arrow has been inserted on the page to highlight the all-important presence of the musician. The photograph is taken from David Boxer, *Jamaican Art 1922-1982* (1983: 58)

Every worker's head is bowed to the task, for the team in its diversity is completely focused on bringing in the harvest quickly. The quality of the sugar produced depends on minimising the time lag between cane cut in the field and crushed in the factory. The painting presents a picture of order and efficiency as the workers in different sections of the cane-piece collectively tackle their arduous job – cutting, gathering, collecting and loading – but in movement patterns, which are synchronised by rhythmic singing to the melodic line of the Kromanti flute in the foreground. The rhythms of the

movement of the labourers suggest a unity in song, which underpins the entire cane-cutting exercise.

The sugarcane worker in the foreground whose ‘work’ it is to provide the music symbolises the hidden efficiencies of a system capable of transforming rigour into rhythm. Hence, a difficult task is made easier by the style – that “certain kind of way” (Benítez-Rojo 1996: 20) – in which it is done. The musician is also a tribute to the influential status of slaves from the Gold Coast on the development of Jamaican folk language and culture (see Mordecai 2001: 80-81).

At the start of Act II, Scene 5 of the Pantomime *Mansong* (LTM 1980), the enslaved workers sing as they leave the cane-field at the end of the day’s work; one man takes the lead and the chorus support him:

Man: Up in de mountain
Three finger Jack
Fight him war oh
Kean ketch de man oh
Up in de mountain
War oh

Chorus: Warrior man oh!
Warrior man oh!
African fighter
Warrior oh
Up eena de mountain
War oh! War oh!

It was recognised that the workers were more productive when they sang in the fields, so narrative was often conveyed in song within the plantation system. The language was Patwa and the seemingly innocuous introduction of new lyrics into tunes already familiar to the overseers provided the opportunity for much coded communication to be transmitted collectively. This song ‘War oh’ is a case in point.

One of the most visible aspects of locating pantomime in a Jamaican setting is the presence of Jamaicans on stage. In this land of contrasts, where ackee from

Ghana and salted cod from the eastern coast of Canada are combined to form the national dish, the country's motto "Out of many, one people" provides an oft repeated mantra described by the poet-teacher-artist Gloria Escoffery (1923-2002) as being "like a lesson learned before we could even begin to read" (Escoffery 1986: 51). Addressing the Philadelphia Bar Association in 1967, Norman Washington Manley articulated the ultimate social objective by which development can be measured: "No society will achieve the true goal until colour ceases to have psychological importance in the mind of the society itself...the world will not be civilized until that goal is finally achieved." (cited in Blake 1993: 5). Nonetheless, in the 1940s such attitudes were more of a political dream than a social reality. In fact the theme of unity remains a constant feature of the Pantomime stage. As the anthropologist Don Robotham wrote in the *Gleaner* a generation later, "We are all in this boat called Jamaica together and we have an overwhelmingly common interest... We must put unity first" (Robotham, 05/06/05).

Vera Bell's script for *Soliday and the Wicked Bird* (1943), the LTM's third Pantomime, was based on the culture of the Maroons – the most African, non-colonialised group in the whole of Jamaican society whose independent existence symbolised escape from life in the canefields. Naturally, it was set in the remote and mountainous interior.

The need to pay lip service to historical accuracy meant that the show had to be 'black' (more in the ideological than the actual sense of the word, for most of the performers would have been called *brownings* in late 20th century parlance) and in a very daring move the producers cast Lucille Mair and Hugh Morrison as the juvenile leads. Such a departure from Anglo-Saxon norms seemed an excitingly apt overture to 1944 the year in which universal adult suffrage was introduced in Jamaica.

However, the entrenched nature of the colour question in Jamaican society of the 1940s created a dilemma that dogged this production. The Christmas show was as much a social event as a theatrical enterprise and, in keeping with

societal norms, the expectation would have been for plot-inspiring fairy tales to be English and for leading ladies in the Pantomime to be "drawn from some prominent family of quality (including the First Family in the colonial mansion)" (Nettleford 1993a: 5). So, the casting for *Soliday* proved to be too revolutionary for Jamaica in the early 1940s. Nonetheless, change was in the air and by 1956, West Indian politicians attending a conference in Kingston on the subject of Federation were delighted with the reflections of identity that were presented on the LTM Pantomime stage: "The Hon. Robert Bradshaw, delegate from St Kitts spoke of the "splendid assessment of talent and cast including the blend of races which is so excitingly Jamaican – indeed West Indian." The Hon. Grantley Adams of Barbados expressed the wish that something similar would be done in his island" (Anon. 15/02/57).

Writing in 1991, Wycliffe Bennett recorded the social crisis that the Pantomime of 1943 provoked: "When an obviously coloured girl was announced for the romantic lead, racial exclusiveness which some people had highly prized was removed. Some upper class families reacted by deciding to withdraw their sons and daughters from the chorus; Lady Huggins, wife to the then Governor, Sir John Huggins, settled the problem by instructing her daughter, Diana, to apply for admission. The coloured girl was none other than Lucille Waldron, now Senator, the Honourable, Dr Lucille Mair" (Bennett 1991: 44). What an extraordinary marker the theatre provided for how times had changed across the span of 48 years! And in the interim, Lucille Mathurin Mair, author of *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies during Slavery* (1975), had pursued a historical study of women in Jamaica from 1655-1844 to PhD level, moulded a younger generation of female undergraduates as Warden of Mary Seacole Hall on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies, and promoted the cause of Third World Women through a diplomatic career with the United Nations.

For this radical LTM Pantomime script, designed to legitimately embrace the more Afrocentric side of the Jamaican heritage, the set design was provided by

the "precocious talent" (Boxer 1983:17) of 23-year-old Jamaican painter Albert Huie. As an artist, he found his inspiration in portraying elements of everyday life: "baptismal scenes, the reaping of crops, market vending, washing by the river" (Boxer 1983:17). Like Carl Abrahams, Huie was part of a core of young artists who "laid the foundation for an indigenous iconography" (Boxer 1983: 17). Between the polarities of black and white, red, blue, yellow, green and gold would pulsate across the landscape.

In 1948, the year that Philip Sherlock's dream of a university community in Jamaica became a reality, Noel Vaz returned from two years at the Old Vic Theatre School and was employed by the LTM to facilitate the enterprise of building a national theatre. Equipped with an innovative understanding of modern stagecraft gained under the tutelage of Michel Saint-Denis in London, the young director was able to bring an informed perspective to the type of up-to-date development of local theatre that Greta Fowler had always hoped to achieve through the LTM project. Full of high hopes for new theatrical techniques, which would also introduce an element of social and political awareness in keeping with Norman Manley's aspirations for a country striving for independence, Vaz was given the task of preparing a version of *Beauty and the Beast*, for LTM's Christmas season in 1948.

Although the script had been adapted for local audiences by a young Jamaican poet, it presented an almost insurmountable hurdle to this director because not only was it full of irrelevant elaboration (anathema for a dramatist trained in methods derived from Copeau) but it also tried very hard to mimic perceived, but no longer current, conventions of the English pantomime tradition. Despite a promising start with quick-paced and witty dialogue very much in the style of the *commedia dell' arte*, the play became increasingly poetic and laboured in Acts II and III and ended up with the feel of a melodrama from nineteenth-century Toy Theatre. The Pantomime was "set in distant lands" so its music was an eclectic mixture bordering on a hodgepodge: contemporary American and British popular songs, classical music used for a burlesque

ballet, 'Jumbo Rhythms' played by a calypso quartet which gave the accompanying singers Amos and Andy the opportunity to fit in their topicalities, and a good dash of Scottish wistfulness as the show was closed with 'Auld Lang Syne'. Bing Crosby's 1944 hit 'Swinging on a Star' carried the show's message and picked up the idea of making something of your life or 'having ambition' as Jamaicans would put it.

Consummately professional, Noel Vaz struggled to deliver the best version of Pantomime that he could from this "ghastly script" which, in his words, was "a contradiction to everything I had learnt to reject in the course that I did" (Vaz 2000). Nonetheless, it was this experience that provided the impetus in the year that followed, for the development of the most pivotal production in the history of the LTM Pantomime tradition, *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (1949).

LTM lighting veteran George Carter, who started off as a stage manager in the 1940s, paid tribute on the eve of his retirement in 2001 to the creative calibre and discipline of Noel Vaz whose commitment to the visual elements of the performance and professional packaging of indigenous material, justified him being called "one of the most prolific and successful dramatic directors for the Little Theatre Movement" (Baxter 1970: 263).

As guest tutor in drama at the Knox College Summer School in the summer of 1948, Noel Vaz developed the idea of integrating the figure of Anancy into the Bluebeard story. Using Louise Bennett's ear for dialogue and knowledge of Jamaica Talk, he co-wrote with her a script for a student production called *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy*. These two leading Jamaican dramatists realised that this project could be adapted by the LTM for use in Pantomime particularly as Vaz was not prepared to engage in the *Beauty and the Beast* experience again. In fact, he was intent on producing a Pantomime that was truly Jamaican: "it was the result of turning against that importation of stuff

that prompted me, forced me, to do the *Busha Bluebeard* * ... I spent every effort Jamaicanising it” (Vaz 2000). As it turned out, the show was a Jamaican experience in its totality.

It is worth noting that the story “Mr Bluebeard” was already an integral part of the Jamaican folk repertoire. It had been collected from the oral culture of the Port Royal Mountains behind Kingston by Walter Jekyll and published in his 1907 collection (see Jekyll 1966: 35-37). So, empowered with an authentically Jamaican interpretation of a theme which also represented a crossover from British pantomime, Noel Vaz was finally able to implement the Little Theatre management’s espoused policy of working “towards the building up of a National Theatre.” A newspaper report of the time boasted, “author, producer, cast and others directly concerned are all Jamaicans” (Anancy 15/12/49). Vaz handpicked a specialist team of Jamaican artists to develop what proved to be an innovative, and very popular production, which pitted the cunning of the island’s folk hero Anancy against the 19th century, mythical, wife-murderer Bluebeard.

Although much of the Jamaican fine art tradition would emerge only as the British colonial experience was being discarded, the intrinsic creativity of the people and the development of an ongoing artistic sensibility, expressed mainly in the realm of performance, was a centuries-old psychological buffer against the brutalising consequences of enslavement. The work of the folk artist who, in the words of Edward Seaga, “makes us see things as if we were looking at them for the first time” (Boxer 1983: 22), reflects the same fundamental principle of Jamaicanness that the poet Louise Bennett recognised in folk music and Patwa and Noel Vaz, as director, conceptualised and harnessed along with Bennett for their 1949 success. The island would blossom out of the experience of the people.

* It should be noted that Noel Vaz is referring to the original 1949 production. ‘*Busha Bluebeard*’ – the name given to the 1957 revival of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* – is frequently used in the reminiscences of informants as a catchall term for either or both versions of the Pantomime.

The action of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* was set in a plantation context redolent of the pre-Emancipation “White Witch of Rose Hall” (Anancy 05/12/49) period but the design elements tapped the unnerving combination of phantasmagoria and tropical earthiness best captured in the paintings of the first among Jamaica’s Intuitive artists, the Kingston barber John Dunkley (1891-1947) who is now widely accepted as Jamaica’s greatest painter (see Bihalji-Merlin & Tomašević 1984: 215).

Although his talent was publicly revealed for the first time in a 1938 Exhibition in Kingston, such was the originality of this self-taught artist that his paintings and sculptures were being used to highlight the creative potential



Figure 20: John Dunkley, *Banana Plantation* c1945. Picture from the cover of David Boxer, *Jamaican Art* (1983)

of the people and the valued cultural contribution of the creative imagination to the New Jamaica project. Dunkley’s role in the development of Jamaican art would later be likened to “a new sapling of an uncultivated variety, from seed which had been carried by the wind and which had grown in the ground beyond the garden” (Cresswell 1993: 30).

In terms of Pantomime, though, the opportunity for Dunkley’s highly individualistic style and interpretation of things Jamaican to hold sway in a wider artistic sphere came in 1948, after his death, when the artistically activist

Institute of Jamaica mounted a Memorial Exhibition of his work. Just at the time that Vaz was trying to do a new thing, Dunkley’s work presented an opportunity for other Jamaicans to see things differently too. The importance

of Dunkley's original perspective, and especially his interest in the fantastic, is seen through his influence on the work of Carl Abrahams who also dared to be different and Colin Garland, set designer for the LTM production of *Finian's Rainbow* in 1962 and the revival of *Queenie's Daughter* in 1966. But in terms of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy*, his worldview seemed to have inspired Noel Vaz's interpretation of the landscape and his choice of the young painter Gloria Escoffery as set designer to provide backdrops for the period costumes designed and produced by Winnifred Doran and Lola Abrahams, and the quite startling animal masks created by Stella Shaw.



Figure 21: A photograph of Rose Hall Great House, which is likely to be the inspiration for Bluebeard's mansion. This house built between 1770 and 1789, sits up high on a hill, facing the ocean, about five miles east of Montego Bay. Rose Hall image from Internet.

As Noel Vaz recounted, “Busha Bluebeard lived in a mansion on top of the hill ... [and] in one scene you saw his mansion stuck up on top – painted on a backdrop by Gloria Escoffery” (Vaz 2000). In *Modern Jamaican Art* (1998), David Boxer and Veerle Poupeye experts from the National Gallery describe Gloria Escoffery's work in this way: “Typically, even her genre scenes have surreal overtones: slightly distorted figures appear alienated and isolated and are placed in desolate settings” (cited in Turner 2000: 265). A fine colourist, she was probably the only artist of her generation who had the literary background, rural understanding and surrealist imagination, to try to capture

for the theatre that insight into Jamaicanness that Dunkley's work had revealed.

The production presented "a lavish display" lit by George Carter with creative dance by Ivy Baxter (pioneer in the development of a Jamaican dance idiom) and the rhythm of the 'old Jamaica songs'. Vaz continues with his description of the busha: "And I remember his first entry. He came in a carriage. Of course the horse was a pantomime horse with two dancers – well known – playing the front and back legs. And Ranny was with a whip and a top hat and so on, and this man sat in an open landau with wheels and everything: I mean, it was properly made" (Vaz 2000).

Ouida Rowe – who went as a young girl to see her uncle, Ranny Williams, in performance at the Ward Theatre from about 1943 onwards – remembers that she began to really enjoy the Pantomimes in 1949 "when the Anancy series started because Uncle Ran then had a substantial part." She realised that the success of the show owed much to the creativity of Noel Vaz – "I thought he was such a great man, such a theatrical person" – and 50 years later she could still remember that "there was a ghost scene – the first time that they had introduced that type of eerie scene, which remained a part of pantomime after that" (Rowe 2003). In truly Jamaicanising the British pantomime form, Noel Vaz applied his directorial imagination and mingled glamour, romance, topical illusion, witty songs, ballet sequences and surrealist fantasy with a pallet reminiscent of "an African severity of rhythm, form, and color" (Boxer 1983: 16) characteristic of the work of Dunkley.

At the time, this new approach caught the imagination of the theatregoing public and any box office jitters were immediately dismissed as "hundreds were unable to get seats for the first performance, owing to late booking," which prompted the LTM to advise the public "to book early at the Jamaica Times Store today" (Anon. ?/12/49) because no tickets would be available at the door for the second performance. As Noel Vaz reminisced, *Bluebeard and*

Brer Anancy (1949) “ran for the longest time of any Pantomime up to that date – twenty or so performances” (Vaz 2000).

All these elements created a sense of identification between production and country, which contributed significantly to the popularity of the show. They also created a visual vocabulary for Jamaican Pantomime, which would be explored and expanded in future productions. The Great House, for example, is as important an icon of power as is the whip and would resurface as a symbol of oppressive dominance again and again across the decades. The architecture of Rose Hall very appropriately provided inspiration for the Giant’s house in the LTM’s sixtieth anniversary production *Jack and the Macca Tree* (2000).



Figure 22: In *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000) members of the village community come to the Giant’s house to wish him well for his birthday but quake in fright when he roars at his wife (centrestage) that he wants meat, not vegetables, for his dinner. Photograph by Owen Minott.

Although *Bluebeard* and *Brer Anancy* was the de facto beginning of the national Pantomime in Jamaica, the term ‘National’ was not applied officially to the LTM productions until almost two decades later with *Anancy and Doumbey* in 1968. Nonetheless, the importance of the Jamaican ingredients as essential aspects of the template had been established.

To redefine the parameters of the genre requires extraordinary confidence in understanding the moment, the audience and the language of performance. Indeed as Vera Bell – the first LTM scriptwriter to fundamentally challenge the Eurocentric mould – attested: “Undoubtedly Noel Vaz has done a magnificent job both as co-author with Louise Bennett and Producer. It takes something more than mere talent to weld together such diversity of abilities and personalities into a smooth and pleasing whole” (Bell ?/01/50).

The metaphorical function of filling the empty box of the bare stage with performance art is an act of the imagination. The visual poetry of the stage – light and shadow, prop and dress, canvas and beam, mask and gesture, curtsy and whirl, illusion and magic, allusion and nostalgia – provides the resonance on which the rest of the production is mounted. The fact that the Pantomime reaches back one hundred years in history for every decade of its own existence, presents a subliminal message of continuity between past and present and emphasizes that the writers have access to many chapters of an old, old story from which to shape the latest staged offering. In *Queenie's Daughter* (1973) the Principal Boy sings in tribute to his island home, “I saw my land in the morning/ And oh, but she was fair!” It is in this respect that the visual artists (painters, sculptors and wood-carvers) presented a model – consistently applied to Pantomime – for combining the legacies of the past with an understanding of the present.

As discussed in chapter 3, in the early 1950s the course of the indigenising process did not run smoothly. Nonetheless, the 1956 offering *Anancy and Beeny Bud* not only consolidated the link between Pantomime and the Anancy story but also reaffirmed the value of patterns of popular entertainment as it tackled the question: ‘why spiders live inna house top – is Anancy mek it’.

Once again, for this 16th Pantomime production – which aspired to be “an ever-moving kaleidoscope of colour, dance and song” (van Courtland 11/12/56) – a cluster of creative Jamaican pioneers worked together to tap the folk tradition as they continued to explore a sense of island identity from the

grassroots up. In fact, the production was criticised for having a proliferation of song and dance routine and “a splendid evasion of story-telling” (Rae 31/12/56) that made it more Christmas Morning Concert than ‘pantomime’ in the more generally understood sense of the word. Louise Bennett, Patwa-poet and raconteur, wrote a script, which was directed by the creative and innovative Maurice Harty whose role in developing a new theatrical idiom for the island subsequently qualified him to be listed among the LTM ‘greats’ alongside his mentor Noel Vaz (Nettleford 1993a: 5). It seems that members of the audience agreed that the plot was not up to the very high standard of the previous year’s *Anancy and Pandora*, yet more than 21,000 tickets were sold for what proved to be a very popular show.

By 1956, comedy had become “by far the most important ingredient in Pantomime” (Rae 31/12/56). Eric “Chalk Talk” Coverley, the variety star, was a leading cast member as “a very bold, very bad pirate” (van Courtland 11/12/56). Indeed, the story of Beeny Bud gave much “scope for unusual and exciting scenes – a pirate tavern, a Jamaican village, a haunted house, and an enormous waterfall, very real and very wet” (van Courtland 11/12/56). The critic Norman Rae pointed out that Ranny Williams handled the role of Anancy smoothly, Charles Hyatt ran amok as a red-wigged “Miss Piggy”, Louise Bennett made the most of her “warm, friendly contact with the audience” but the “real comic triumph of the evening” was Lee Gordon: “He need only walk on to have us convulsed with laughter. Indeed, if there is a serious point to be made, he has first to be led off the scene before it begins to have the slightest chance” (Rae 31/12/56).

There was much eclecticism terms of dance because apart from the ballet by the Soohih School of Dance, which closed the show by tradition, there was a wide range of styles provided by an international cluster of Captive Maids – Spanish, French, Egyptian, Chinese, Hawaiian, African and Javanese. Music and lyrics were written by Robert Lightbourne and directed by Mapletoft

Poulle who had previously accompanied the dance theatre of the Baxter Group.

Eyrick Darby, a very talented modern dancer and choreographer with interest in West Indian folk forms, directed the dance and played the disconcerting

Anancy and Beeny Bud 1956
EYRICK DARBY AND OL' WITCH BOY



Figure 23: Ol' Witch Boy from LTM Programme Notes, *Anancy and Beeny Bud* (1956: 25).

role of Ol' Witch Boy, the half-despised, half-feared brother of the beautiful Principal Girl Beeny (played by Noelle Hill). As this character was without the power of speech, he could only express himself through movement. On one level this concept would have echoes of the amazing use of dance by Eddy

Thomas in the role of Dummy in Greta Fowler's *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (1954).

This time though, the dancer was a strange and unsettling figure who embodied difference and the whimsical intolerance of others towards the unconventional. Yet, his name indicated that despite outward appearances, he would never constitute a real threat to the community. It is important to note that the negative impact of the word 'witch' is transformed as it is bracketed with the affectionate terms 'ole' and 'boy'. Even though he knows what lies ahead when others do not, he proves to be the unwanted, foolish one whose efforts at communicating eloquently through movement are not understood by his community: "And he mutely asks why was he not born as other men, and why this must be he" (Little Theatre Movement 1956:25). The insertion of such a character into the Pantomime context is almost prophetic of the plight of the 'rude boys' from the ghetto who had already begun to emerge on the

reggae scene. They too would be treated at first as nonentities because all they could do was sing, and the society would not begin to take their voice seriously for another two decades.

Brilliant dancer that he was, Darby's enactment of frustration had none of the appeal of the inarticulate spluttering of the comedian Lee Gordon, who was beloved by all. In contrast to Darby's portrayal of character through dance, Gordon's comic antics proved that effective communication with the audience was not restricted to the realm of eloquence, for as the critic Norman Rae noted, "most of the time, [*he*] seems to utter sounds only vaguely familiar and yet this is enough to crease anybody" (Rae 31/12/56).

Even for the Jamaican theatrical sophisticates, Darby's efforts in the part of the Ol' Witch Boy did not succeed in adding depth to the show: "the dances had either too ephemeral a quality – they were over in thirty seconds flat – or they were long passages of walking and emoting" (Rae, 31/12/56). It is interesting to note, however, that at a gala performance of *Anancy and Beeny Bud*, Darby's solo work garnered praise from Noël Coward – who according to his diary (see Payn & Morley 1982: 341) – liked little else about the production, except the colourful costumes. It would seem that for "the grand old man" of the British entertainment industry, the gulf between his expectations and this unfamiliar theatrical experience that bore the label 'pantomime' was too great. His connection with Jamaica (his refuge) was solely at the level of the elite; consequently, the aesthetic sensibility of the folk eluded him.

These two ways of handling the challenge of communicating beyond the realm of speech (i.e. the genius of dance versus the genius of laughter) illustrate the Jamaican audience's sphinx-like response to comedy and tragedy. This does not mean that the audience is incapable of looking at the more painful aspects of life. The realm of popular culture is "a politicized space...an arena for the public display, negotiation and contestation of the varied social tensions and struggles of the society" (Nurse 2002: 3). Yet, the

rules of engagement always require the balm of humour in the exploration of painful truths, if the production means to appeal to a broad-based Jamaican audience.

This worldview, as it stems from folk experience, is ironic and encompasses therefore a perception of absurdity in the tragic suffering, which arises out of the enigma of events that happen, and the puzzling cross-purposes at the heart of human nature. This approach lies at the heart of storytelling. Andrew Salkey points out that many short story writers within the West Indian context “wear the comic mask with more assurance than the tragic” (Salkey 1960: 10). Nonetheless, he adds, their “themes are passionately serious, themes of protest and revolt; and when not of them, inspired by them. But ... wit and humour are used as effective weapons for a serious purpose” (Salkey 1960: 12).

This is exactly what happens on the Pantomime stage. In *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (LTM 1954) for example, the magic of dance and laughter is packaged in “the glistening luminous web of Anancy spread out over Spanish Town; a flight of blue birds carrying the Magic Mirror; ... [and] hidden treasure rising in illuminated brilliance from [the] heart of the earth” (Anon. 07/12/54). In *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (LTM 1949) the set contrasts the menacing atmosphere of the Great House (with its locked strongroom, strange creatures in the garden of weeds, dungeon, and the seven sympathetic spirits of Bluebeard’s former wives) with the revelry of the village.

According to the critic Verena Reckord, Mansong (LTM 1980) along with “fantastic jonconnu figures,” which opened the show and a “marvellous cane-field scene”, the Great House ballroom scene seemed almost “bawdy” and a calypso-like “looping rainbow” backdrop was used for the front-of-curtain scenes; yet, the beautifully colourful sets provided “convincing depth and atmosphere” (Reckord 08/01/81). Despite the whirl of colour within which the action is packaged, the Pantomime discusses the subject of treachery and the high cost of the fight for freedom. The intensity of the production’s



Figure 24: Photograph of *Mansong* (LTM 1980) by Dennis Valentine from Lois Grant, "40 years of Pantomime" *Sunday Gleaner*, January 11, 1981.

invocation of the power of obeah to protect Jack Mansong is reflected in the photograph by Dennis Valentine in Figure 24.

Even though he has been 'blessed' in this way, the titular hero dies. In the final scene, the young lad Tuckey is comforted by the old man Dada as he grieves for the loss of his hero – the Jamaican Robin Hood. Dada uses the analogy of kingship to explain the power of a historical legacy, just before the John Canoe band and musicians return to the stage to celebrate the wedding of the Principal Boy and Girl. The wise old man says: "One day me was by the Great House. Backra did a read newspaper come from Englan say de king dead, an den Backra say "de king is dead, long live de King". It neva mek no sense to me. Life is a mystery an death is a mystery. It depen on what you mean by death Tuckey. Death depen on how you live. Wha Jack live for, wha him fight fa is wha have meaning to all a we. Dat is wha you mus tink bout. Be happy fe wha Jack mean to we. Jack was a hero. A hero kean die Tuckey.

Come cheer up. As Jack say “Look to de mountain”” (*Mansong*, Act II, Scene 8).

The sense of the island as a key player in the unravelling of any aspect of its own story has persisted in the National Pantomime and the framework of a landscape belonging to all has served to underscore thematic appeals to accord and community spirit, which are intrinsic to the concept of national development. Intrinsic to this contextual fabric, too, is a system of shared beliefs, which constitutes the philosophical landscape from which elements of the production are drawn: folk wisdom; a Christian (or neo-Christian) worldview based on loving one’s neighbour and seeking forgiveness for wrongdoing; a belief in guidance and punishment by the Creator; a marriage of the soul to the island’s natural environment (mountain, sea, sky); a fearful respect for the power of Obeah and its antidote, Myal; the usefulness of Anancyism as a strategy in matters of survival; the importance of mutual respect; and above all, a commitment to the concept that while there’s life, there’s hope.

In a 1982 interview with Sonia Mills, renowned painter of the Jamaican landscape Albert Huie explained the fascination of his subject: “It is almost as if this country was designed and laid out by an artist. But there are also some funny things that happen in the Jamaican landscape, which are very challenging to an artist. For instance, if you look generally at an English landscape, you see a logical sequence in the landscape. You will see a close, middle distance and distance . . . to infinity. You are not always able to interpret this in the Jamaican landscape in the same sense. For instance, stay on Mona campus and look over the hills of St. Andrew. Look at what is close to you, depending on the time of day that you are observing this thing and look at your mountains in the distance. When the sun strikes the mountains at a certain time, you are able visually to touch the mountains, and yet the middle distance, which is not as far from you as mountains, seems to vanish into

infinity” (cited in Boxer 1983: 7). Starting with its landscape, Jamaica has its own logic.

According to the 16th century Spanish historian Andrés Bernaldez, the island’s loveliness at the point of encounter outshone the splendour of “the smiling orchard lands of Valencia” (cited by Manning-Carley 1963: 18). Fittingly, elements of the majesty of landscape were captured by Eddy Thomas, set and costume designer for *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972). Gwen Wright who began sewing costumes for the annual LTM Pantomime in the 1950s referred to *Hail*



Gaston Tabois, Home Below Zion. Oil on hardboard, 16 x 20".

Figure 25: “Home Below Zion” by Gaston Tabois. Photograph from Gloria Escoffery’s review of the 1985 National Art Exhibition, “Acrobats and Artists” in *Jamaica Journal* 19: 1 (1986: 52).

Columbus as “the most spectacular show I’ve ever worked on. ... It was a rich-looking show and the costumes were so nice and pretty” (Kitchin 18/05/80). By not only capturing the spirit and look of the period but also by making the person wearing it feel so comfortable and in tune with the role, “a

great costume designer can make all the difference in the world” (Phillips 2002) to the success of a show.

Five centuries later, the landscape’s basic qualities have not changed: Jamaica is so extraordinarily beautiful that poets compare it to Eden and prophets relate it to Zion. In the painting “Home Below Zion” (Figure 25) the Jamaican intuitive artist Gaston Tabois, captures the “exquisite combination of majesty and domesticity” (Escoffery 1986: 53) that characterises rural existence, especially when remembered on a moonlit night in the city. Indeed there is an “arcadian yearning” that easily encompasses city-dwellers “cut off from nature by their concrete walls” (Gradussov 1970: 48).

Prior to emancipation, the plantation workers lived against the background of cane-fields, in villages on the coastal plains. When the Apprenticeship period came to an end, many ex-slaves became small-farmers within a free-village system set up in ‘the bush’ by missionaries on land unsuitable for cane and often in the hilly interior of the country. It is to these places in the countryside – districts with names like Tranquillity and Retreat – that the city-dweller looks with nostalgia for answers to the complex questions of urban existence and their associated discordance.

Olive Senior, born in 1941 and a Commonwealth literary prize-winner for short stories based on growing up in the ‘bush’, draws on the experience of her childhood in Trelawny to describe how isolating life in the rural village could be even in the middle of the twentieth century: “The village I grew up in had no running water, no electricity, one or two people might have had a radio. There was only a dirt road and even a trip to the nearest town was a considerable undertaking. There was virtually no transportation. ... So even the rest of Jamaica seemed very far away. People think of us islanders as all living by the sea. I grew up in the mountains. I never saw the sea until I was pretty old. It was a very isolated kind of existence” (Rutherford 1989: 212).

This lack of communication with the wider world meant, however, that many of the old ways – customs, courtesies, beliefs and outlook – were preserved in the village context. In Pantomime the village is recreated almost as a time capsule which still manages to hold on to the values of the past and which will provide a message for the future. As part of the process of nationalisation, the story also tends to be told from the point of view of the members of a ‘village’ community, whether in town or country, and the theme revolves around issues of community empowerment. In *Jack and the Macca Tree* (2000), the Principal Boy returns to his home community, having completed his university studies, and helps the villagers to solve their water crisis through the use of traditional technology – letting the water flow through bamboo.



Figure 26: Jack is able to bypass the Giant’s monopoly of the community faucet by rigging up his own water distribution device in *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000). Photograph by Owen Minott.

The contribution of the Pantomime process is to perceive elements of ordinary life in a new and empowering way. As a historian by training, the scriptwriter Lannaman was very conscious of the role of the village as a symbol of freedom. Her second LTM Pantomime script *Brashano O!* (1976) dealt with issues related to national life as interpreted through the experiences of a village coming to terms with the destructive presence of Brashana, the

terrifying Rolling Calf figure of Jamaican folklore, while the audience plays its part as creative collaborator in the drama that unfolds.

Costume Design



Figure 27: Production drawings by Richard Montgomery for the costumes from LTM Programme Notes, *Brashana O!* (1976: 32).

The play is meant to be a light piece full of humorous moments but in the denouement, “a more serious theme appears under the laughter” (Rae 1976:3). The characters operate within the context of the hardworking yet fun loving,

self-reliant yet interdependent, rooted yet restless, traditionally sovereign yet currently disempowered village community. In the words of the designer, “when you see the stage pictures, they should seem to be peopled with real people” (Montgomery 1976: 5) and he presented his working drawings to the audience, in the Programme Notes, for its perusal (see Figure 27).

“The setting belongs to a Jamaica of timber framed houses and fret work in abundance, shingled roofs, the village shop selling local produce and tinware – which may already be a romantic view of the country parts – as cement blocks and tin louvers find their way up mountain paths and plastic takes the place of locally made hardware,” (Montgomery 1976: 5) wrote the set designer Richard Montgomery in the Programme Notes for *Brashana O!*. Miss Becky’s shop also “doubles as an adult education centre when she is in that mood” (Little Theatre Movement 1976: 22).

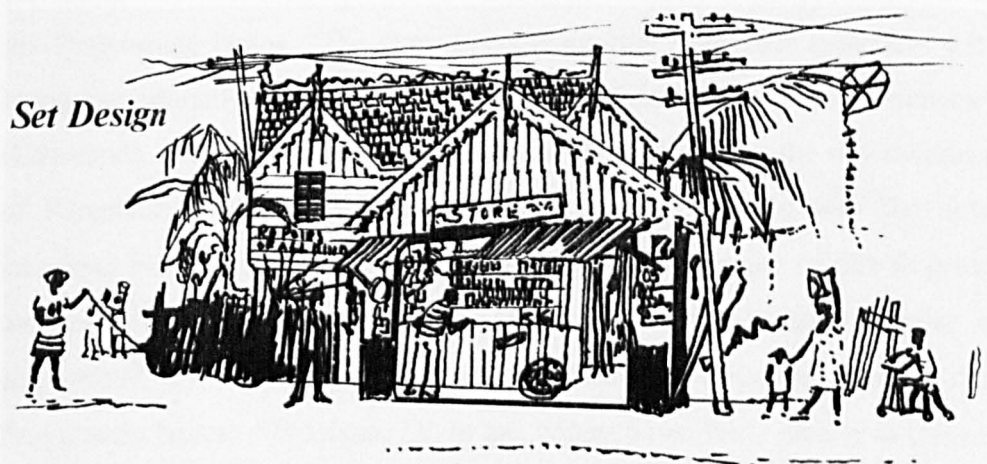


Figure 28: The local store, which sometimes doubles as an adult education centre. Production drawing by Richard Montgomery for the set from LTM Programme Notes, *Brashana O!* (1976: 27).

The action (half-real and half fantasy) takes place in and around the village of Belvedere: at the village crossroads, in “Tata T’s big, big house and eventually the bedroom therein”, the shop and “from time to time...the near countryside where Brashana roams.” (Little Theatre Movement 1976: 22).



Figure 29: Tata T's big, shingle-roofed house. Production drawing by Richard Montgomery for the set from LTM Programme Notes, *Brashana O!* (1976: 27).

Set in 1976, the story was intended to be a mirror to the reality of everyday experience for members of the audience. As the scriptwriter herself put it in the Programme Notes, “The story is contemporary – and our audiences will recognise immediately the personalities, situations and topical references” (Lannaman 1976: 11). The last sequence of the play allows the city-dwellers of Kingston to juxtapose “the older way of Jamaican life with the new Jamaican life-style; the contrast of the folk with an emerging culture in great measure stimulated by the town” (Rae 1976: 3). The need to make a choice is emphasised by the director as he addressed the audience through the Programme Notes: “*Brashana O!*, to me, comes down fairly clearly in favour of one of these. I wonder whether you will too” (Rae 1976: 3).

Jamaicans at home and abroad often refer to the island affectionately as “‘The Rock’...‘Jamdown, ‘JA,’ or simply ‘Yard’” (Mordecai & Mordecai 2001: 85). The notion of ‘folk’ usually refers to a homogenous community (generally quite small) and generally based in a rural or agricultural context, like a village. In Barbara Gloudon’s *Trash* (LTM 1984) the village becomes a ‘street’ in Trash Town while in the commemorative *Fifty Fifty* (LTM 1990) it is the community of people associated with one ‘yard’ at 50 Poinciana Street.

It must be noted, however, that the idea of encompassing the urban ‘yard’ within the setting of Pantomime had featured as early in the tradition as *Quashie Lady* (LTM 1958), written by Ranny Williams, when Bob Carpenter’s set had been singled out as “exceptional” by the critic Harry Milner because it reminded him of “Ralph Campbell at his best” (Milner 03/01/59). Campbell, a “social satirist, mystic and seer, who abandoned rules of proportion, perspective and ‘rationality’ in search of intuitive revelation,” was a landscape artist who did much to establish the genre in Jamaica because he was capable of capturing the light. In the words of his fellow artist, Gloria Escoffery, he was known “as one who never faltered in his enthusiasm for singing the sun in flight” (Escoffery 1986: 51).



Figure 30: Jubilee (Solas) Market provides the set for the opening scene of the 60th Anniversary Pantomime *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000). Photograph by Owen Minott.

As the violence in Kingston escalated, Gloudon as a playwright depended more openly on the values and philosophy characteristic of an arcadian landscape to craft an alternative reality for the present. She openly revisited “ancestral roots” by returning to the rural village in a spirit of “remembrance” of “things past” (Little Theatre Movement 2000: 3). Yet, the marketplace scene which opened *Jack and the Macca Tree* (2000), though reminiscent of

old time Jamaica, was still a Kingston location because the architecture of the building identified it as Jubilee Market situated only a few streets away from the Ward Theatre. Of all places, the market is probably the closest interface that exists in Kingston between the rural and the urban existence. The use of the market as a symbol of potential economic empowerment for the community was as much a tribute to sixty years of Pantomime tradition as it was an attempt to help the born-and-bred urban majority to find a way out of the alienation, fragmentation and social disintegration which characterized city folk who had not been exposed to the old, country ways.

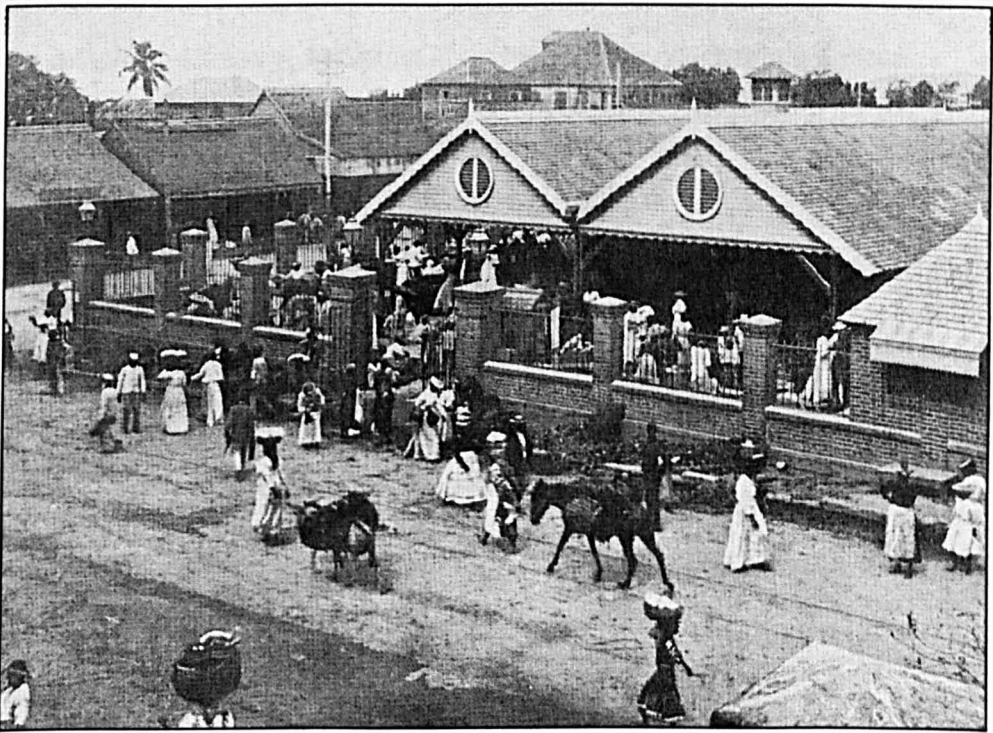


Figure 31: A National Library of Jamaica photograph of Jubilee Market in the first half of the 20th century. Picture from entry “Jubilee Market” in Olive Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* (2003:261).

The choice of Jubilee as a Kingston market is also important because it is the same site on which Solas Market, of the folk song “Come we go down a Solas Market,” used to stand. The multiple levels of meaning embodied in the set, present the story as an important opportunity for engagement between performers and audience. It is certainly the case that many patrons will not decipher, on their first visit to the Pantomime, the full range of island-based references that are projected through sight and sound. The sense capacity for

discerning these cultural clues contributes greatly to a feeling of belonging and members of the audience will go back to see the show again and again so that each time the sense of familiarity is increased.

In the words of Larry Shadeed, Front of House Manager for many years, "No matter how good the script, the acting or the music, it is the stage picture that sets the mood for a show" (L. S. 29/01/56). Sandra Phillips, a dancer in *The Twelve Million Dollar Man* (LTM 1977), summed up the key to the Pantomime tradition's enduring success: "the formula is there, you just need to paint in the colours" (Phillips 2002). The quality of the production depends on the insight and artistry, discipline and synergy with which this is done.



Figure 32: Mary Cromoochin, who used to be a member of the village community but is now sidekick and servant to the Giant's wife, is about to conduct the animals to the pot while her husband, Charlie, goes off stage to find the book *How to Stew a Donkey*. A scene from *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000). Photograph by Owen Minott.

And there have been a number of surprises for the audience over the years. In *Jack and the Macca Tree* (2000), the overwhelming size of the Giant was illustrated repeatedly by examples of his clothing (sandal, hat, shirt, trousers) and other props associated with his food, like fish and bammy. The real scale of the problem though is emphasised within the confines of his house, when

Jack's friends – Man Cow, Goat, Donkey and Pig – are trussed and seasoned up by the Cromoochins in preparation for being the main course at the Giant's birthday meal.

The Pantomime is a spectacle and therefore needs to dazzle in order to delight. "I have seen ships come ashore and pirates alight. I have seen characters battle a fearsome dinosaur, I have watched a John Crow fly, an alligator dance, and an aeroplane take off" (An Insider 20/04/99), declared a young adult from Kingston who had grown up so much a part of the Pantomime 'family' that she styled herself 'pantogirl' in her email address. The excitement of the event is also reflected in the observations of an older member of the audience, again a long-term aficionado of the LTM Pantomime tradition, who was so caught up in the visual poetry of the stage that it seemed a travesty to analyse it. Elsie Sayle wrote in to the *Gleaner*: "HAVE YOU ever found yourself, all of a sudden in a storm and you hear the thunder roll and you see the lightning flash and even see a house washing away and tree bending low, but the funny thing is that you don't feel the breeze blow nor feel one drop of rain water? Well that will be your experience when you go to see this year's pantomime, *Combolo*.... I could not attempt to review *Combolo*, I simply enjoyed it" (Sayle 06/01/04).

So important is the question of design and scenic effect that some Pantomime productions which have been lambasted for weaknesses in the writing have, in fact, been saved by the atmospheric elements of the show - the sets, costumes, props, lighting, special effects, rhythm and movement. The director provides an overall sense of direction for the production and, as an artist, "interprets, shapes, guides, inspires the entire performance" (Guthrie 1961: 122). However, the technical process of transforming this vision into practical reality – the business of building and integrating all those components designed to support the actor and the script – is the responsibility of the Stage Manager. The roles of the director and the technical enabler are analogous to that of the captain and his chief engineer on board a ship.

George Carter, veteran lighting director, stage manager in the 1940s and longest-serving member of the LTM team, gives a first-hand account of the painful exhilaration of the stage manager who on opening night has to be backstage with the technical crew while “the director and everybody else stays in front and finds all the faults.” He adds, “They say you are ‘nervous’; it’s not nerves; it’s excitement! I have never been nervous, but I have always been excited to see if this is going to work, and when the public is there, if they are going to accept it. ... And when the curtain opens, and you get applause – aah – you’ve got a start, and the stage manager is ready to flow ... they [*the audience*] are with him” (Carter 2000).

Elaborate sets, quick changes, evocative lighting, special effects, appropriate props, sound effects, the prompt corner, the wardrobe, the orchestra pit, understudies and curtain calls all fall within the purview of the stage manager. Good communication skills, teamwork, an orderly mind, discipline, perfect timing, sustained concentration, an informed understanding of the needs of the actor, and the ability to remain calm under pressure are essential qualities for the post. Hitches due to inefficiency or inexperience can ruin the atmosphere of a production irrevocably.

It is not surprising then that the LTM has depended on the tried and tested abilities of a select few for its Pantomime productions: firstly George Carter, Philip Morris, and then Lauriston ‘Larry’ Watson, whose work “was to become vital to the success of the annual show after 1985” (Nettleford 1993a: 6). At the 2004 Actor Boy Awards ceremony, the International Theatre Institute of Jamaica honoured Lauriston ‘Larry’ Watson – “the acknowledged dean of Jamaican stage managers” (Edwards 25/03/04) – with a Special Award for Outstanding Achievement in Technical Theatre. The emcee for the evening, actor Karl Williams commented, “It’s about time” and the audience concurred with its applause.

For more than two decades as the lead ‘Technical Actor’ for the LTM, Watson has also worked on lighting design, set design and costume design and at the

Actor Boy ceremony he was quick to acknowledge all the various teams he had worked with over the years. Even before his time, the programme Notes for *The Pirate Princess* (Little Theatre Movement 1981:47) describe these invisible players as “the unsung heroes” of the theatre world who quietly and efficiently “make sure that on opening night, the show comes off like a well-oiled machine. People have their tickets; the actors are on stage when they should be; props are in place; sets are changed on time; costumes are available and in good condition. In short that the show works as the director intended it to.” The empty box becomes the embodiment of visual art as darkness is converted into light both literally and figuratively.

The Pantomime story is powerful: Anancy moves out of the rooftop into the limelight of centrestage. He remains true to his ethic of ginnalship through most of the play but is always redeemed at the end through the positive influence of the “cuny Jama ’oman”, the earth mother who leads the community at a practical level. Moreover, the Jamaican audience no longer needs to dream of a white Christmas but looks forward, as the poets would say, to the vibrancy of overdressed poinsettias surrounded by red, yellow and dark green sound, in a December of sorrel; all constituting a pulsating potential playground of perfection: it is like everything makes sense at last.

The island is, in reality, the main character of the annual LTM Pantomime narrative. Through their transformative function and often working at a subconscious level, the design elements of the production support the centrality of metaphor by articulating a sense of collective identity beyond the script. The Pantomime routes the theatre audience through the inhabited landscape: the realm of cane-field, great house, village, riverside, mountain-top, sandy shore, limestone cave, market, shopping plaza, mini-bus, helicopter, cricket match, classroom, playground, urban ghetto, street corner, university, airport, hotel, pirates' den, revivalist meeting, worldwide web, towards self-definition.

CHAPTER 7

WE DERIVE TO': THE USE OF JAMAICA TALK

The National Pantomime provides a multi-layered description of a historically based, complex sociocultural situation of mixed heritages, which is constantly being articulated and explained in the form of metaphor. 'Jamaica Talk' – the linguistic repertoire within the reach of the Pantomime player is extensive. Firstly, there is potential access to the full "continuum of language variation" from Patwa (the basilect) at one end to Jamaican Standard English (the acrolect) at the other. The art of code switching involves each speaker employing "a certain body of forms and variations" and "a repertoire of linguistic material" from an appropriate zone within this continuum to match "the sociological and psychological context of the speech situation" (Alleyne 1980: 8).

The language of Pantomime also embraces an ever-increasing range of idiomatic styles (sometimes referred to as 'voices') and can include such elements as Dread talk, 'speaky-spokey', 'vintage' slang, RADA English, advertising slogans, current street talk, revivalist hymns, "Kromanti talk" (Beckwith 1929: 198), catchphrases, nonsensical mumbo-jumbo, quotations in the style of Shakespeare and the King James Bible, and more.

This chapter will consider language as it is used in the LTM National Pantomime from a cultural rather than a linguistic angle. The greatest difficulty, however, still arises in the definition of terms to describe the national language, especially as it is derived from English and yet significantly different. As Mervyn Morris points out, "this language spoken by the majority of Jamaicans has been called by various names" like, "Jamaican Creole, Jamaican dialect, 'nation language', patois, Jamaica talk" (Morris

1999: 17). As the average member of the Pantomime audience would unhesitatingly describe the Jamaican language as *Patwa*, this is the term (and the spelling) that has been chosen in this study to refer to that mass language of Jamaica so strongly rooted in the African aspect of the island's colonial heritage.

The title of this chapter, *We Derive To*, refers to an occasion in concert when the poet Louise Bennett (1983) muses in mock puzzlement over the anomaly which allows people to classify the mother tongue of Jamaica – Patwa – as a ‘**corrupt** language’, while English – an equally hybrid tongue – is viewed as a ‘**derivative** language’. Outraged, Miss Lou asks the London audience amidst considerable laughter, “Oonoo hear de wud? ‘Derived.’ English is a derivation but Jamaica Dialect is corruption. What a unfairity!” (Bennett 1983: side 1, Track 3; Bennett 1993: 1). After reasoning the matter through with those present and highlighting the double standard and damaging prejudice involved, the performer/poet insists on parity in terms of status between the two languages, by asserting, “No massa, no’n no go so: we da corrupta, and dem derive! We derive to’. Jamaica derive. We derive” (Bennett 1983).

Jamaica Talk is rich in its combination of wit and wisdom, its extraordinarily powerful use of imagery based on commonplace objects and the use of the evocative elements of storytelling: parables, riddles, lies, and proverbs which crystallise the experience of generations in a single image. (The word ‘lies’ refers to the narrative technique of exaggerating for effect, e.g. “I see a boy lick a ball from here to Panama.”) It is important to note that the style of delivery is as important as the content, and sometimes, delivery is content. So Jamaica Talk also includes the tools of silence, non-verbal but articulated conversational sounds, facial expressions, gestures, poise and movement.

In the national Pantomime, this diversity of language is used by the cast to articulate a social construct for the audience’s perusal and amusement. The Jamaican sense of humour pivots around a moralistic worldview which enjoys the yoking together of opposites even as it revels in an exploration of the gap

between what is asserted and what is actually the case. Quick-witted insight provides much scope for a redemptive ironic response, against an emotional background in which violence can so easily prevail when words fail and laughter ceases.

In the first Act of *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981) the junior lead, William (secretly a prince disguised as an ordinary seaman and subsequently shanghaied by the pirates) rather grandly seems to assert his willingness to fight with the words, “Death before dishonour!” Yet in doing so he gives voice to a fundamental principle of the Jamaican psyche and the reason why conflict can so quickly degenerate into chaos. Without the weapon of irony and satire to parry perceived provocation and provide room for the accompanying release of tension in laughter, an irreconcilable “conflict of incompatibles” leaves the individual with a choice between fight (no holds barred) or flight (turning fool-fool).

The crucible of experience which has forged the need for a constantly self-affirming Jamaican mindset against a historical backdrop of negation (based on skin colour) leaves no room for passive submission, the indulgence of cynicism or despair. Laughter is essential because without it, Anancy the Jamaican Everyman, is left bereft of reason in a grotesque world still demanding action as a form of self-assertion and affirmation.

The importance of a philosophical framework in terms of defining humour is explained by Philip Thomson in the distinction between irony and the grotesque: “irony depends on the resolvability, intellectually, of a relationship (appearance/reality, truth/ untruth, etc.), while the grotesque presents essentially the unresolvability of incompatibles” (Thompson 1972: 50). Irony, which provides an opportunity for self-definition, represents self-awareness and the ability to *overstan* a situation, as expressed in Dread Talk because “if you are in control of an idea, you must stand over it” (Pollard 1994: 6).



*THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CRIMINALS
AND LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS...*

Figure 33: Las May cartoon from the *Jamaica Gleaner*, December 2, 2002.

The self-mockery of the educated reader of the *Gleaner* (and even the cartoonist for he would belong to the same social class) in Las May's pictorial commentary (Figure 33) vividly emphasises new meanings for the phrase "behind bars" as the lawabiding person becomes imprisoned by the crime wave while the perpetrators are freed to strike again. The tragic absurdity of a type of daily living that provides so little room for decent behaviour has to be laughed at so that it can be endured. By portraying the truth, as painful as it is, the cartoonist is at least giving the reader the opportunity to be *in control of the idea* of how serious the crime situation has actually become.

As much a question of style as of language, Jamaica Talk is characterised by its use of the evocative elements of storytelling. The ability to play with words exemplifies a mastery of discourse. Yet there is a quality of directness that could seem, at first glance, to be at odds with "the heightened language of orature" (Cooper 1993: 119) that is Jamaica Talk. According to Miss Lou, "Aunty Roachy seh dat Jamaica Dialect is more direc an to de point dan

English” (Bennett 1993: 2). There are some situations when extra words are used for emphasis, “but most of all we fling weh all de bangarang an trimmins-dem an only lef what wantin, an dat’s why when English smaddy seh “I got stuck by a prickie” Jamaican jus seh “Macca jook me”!” (ibid. 3). English itself plays an important part in the context of the Pantomime because it represents a passing high status norm with which Jamaica Talk can spar and in the Pantomime context, usually conquer.

As soon as the show opens, promptly, at 6pm on Boxing Day, a first-time visitor to the National Pantomime would notice that the language of the production is engagingly distinctive. Despite a long-established link with tourism, however, Pantomime is not something that is done primarily for visitors. The show makes few compromises to accommodate the cultural inexperience of the uninitiated but depends instead on the spectacle and emotional vibrancy of the performance to straddle the comprehension gap where it might exist.

For the audience, access to the meaning of the enactment lies not only in familiarity with topical cross references, cultural allusions and geographical landmarks, but also with the shades of meaning in the use of voice – code-switching, naming, syntax, sound gestures – and body language, as well as rhythm and pace. This exclusivity or excludedness of Jamaican Pantomime creates a sense of complicity, involvement and belonging in the audience which itself expresses, through detailed interactive response, each individual’s ability to tap collectively into a shared island and national memory.

The Jamaican audience will take the language completely for granted until the first big joke, when in the midst of laughter and probably voicing an echoed repetition of the comic phrase, it is collectively engulfed in a feeling of proud delight as it revels in the effective use of the national tongue to dispense an element of shared truth and one-upmanship. As Louise Bennett puts it, “We African ancestors-dem pop we English forefahders-dem. Yes! Pop dem an disguise up de English Language fi projec fi-dem African Language in such a

way dat we English forefahders-dem still couldn't understan what we African ancestors-dem wasa talk bout when dem wasa talk to dem one annodder!” (Bennett 1993: 2).

Pantomime in this context is an active and ongoing relationship of stimulus and response between player and spectator, so the audience has to engage in the discipline of remaining alert for the next opportunity to respond vocally to a performance that will be characteristically Jamaican in terms of content, nuance and variety.

There will be oblique references to current events, which only the local audience will fully appreciate. In Act II, scene 2 of *Queenie's Daughter* (LTM 1973), Aloysius Samfy, the Director of Tourism and local expert in things Jamaican, explains to the visiting European travel-writer Mrs Margaret Bottomley-Hume, that communication in Jamaica can be a taxing business:

Mrs B-H: Tell me, Mr Sandfly, what is the name of the fruit I see higglers selling by the wayside – it has a pink pod and opens to show yellow fruit in three parts, each with a large black seed?

Samfy: Ackee, ma'am.

Mrs B-H: (*writing*) The name of this quaint fruit is “Ackeemam”.

Samfy: That's right.

Mrs B-H: Oh, I must ask you this, - do all Jamaicans speak the same language?

Samfy: We Jamaicans speak two different and distinct languages – a foreign language and a native language.

Mrs B-H: Yes

Samfy: De unsensable Jamaicans speak de national language which is very expensive – cost dem four dollars every four letter word.

Mrs B-H: How interesting – this explains it (*writing*) many of the Jamaicans I met seemed awfully dumb. But it was explained to me that they dared not speak, for in their language the words are heavily taxed.”

Samfy: That's right, ma'am. You could call it Outcome Tax.

Samfy: Yes, ma'am. Out come de word, and de sentence carry de tax.

Even as Anancy was duping her, Mrs Bottomley-Hulme observes in her notebook, "Many of the Jamaicans I met seemed awfully dumb," which would be seen in the context of the show as further proof of how out of touch with reality she really was. Yet ironically she presumed to be a travel writer who would misguidedly package this island experience for other potential visitors. In fact, in Pantomime, speaking in Standard English, especially Received Pronunciation, has come to represent the Other, historically connected to the overlordship of the plantocracy.

A sense of belonging to the island community is consolidated in the language of the production. Like looking at a photograph (a friend's holiday shots, for example), "the picture may invoke the memory of the space for the person who experienced it, but it cannot reveal its texture or essence to outsiders" (Harstrup 1992: 11). In *Moonshine Anancy* (LTM 1969), the zealous street artist who recycles asphalt dug out of "good size potholes up a Hope Road" in order "fe fill some other pothole at Spanish Town Road" because "one hand wash the other, you know" is eventually rewarded with the title of "Honorary Pothole Ambassador for moon here on earth" and is enjoined by the Man on the Moon to "continue the good work" of road decoration.

While the show assumes bilingualism on the part of the audience in Patwa (the language of the heart/hearth) and English (the official language), the players manipulate questions of status associated with both languages, and privileging neither, turn a serious social debate into a game. In Pantomime, the play *between* the two national modes of communication is as important as either one of the languages for it is the ability to play with words and meaning which exemplifies a mastery of discourse. The traditional Jamaican proverb provides the assurance that *big wud bruk no man jawbone*, so loquacity has full rein. Consequently, choice can be exploited with delight and provides for

heightened levels of complexity and sophistication in a discourse where dexterity is everything.

The use of language allows the tree of performance to be rooted in the culture of the audience. So, recognising the fact that the language framework of the National Pantomime production has shifted over the years to the point now where Patwa often has the upper hand, the term ‘Jamaica Talk’ encompasses the way language in its entirety is used to shape a particular worldview through “the heightened language of orature” (Cooper 1993: 119) and of everyday discourse which, in turn, informs the performance. Jamaica Talk values the oral tradition and the local context, heightens a sense of belonging, emphasises the creative act of naming and expresses personal identity.

The Jamaican sense of humour revels in an exploration of the intricacies of irony. Highly reflexive and surprisingly objective, the national character encapsulates an interest in earnestness and truth and a willingness to expose incongruity. The use of irony is a game which to be truly enjoyed by all can only be played in the company of equals and, therefore, the centrality of its role within the hallowed walls of theatre is a compliment to the audience’s sensibility. For they too should self-confidently be able to take pride in being able to laugh at their own idiosyncrasies.

The players in Pantomime sometimes have personal identities, which are completely at odds with the characters portrayed by them on stage. As Jamaica is a small country, this disparity can be capitalised on by the production to great comic effect. In the first LTM Jamaican Pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1941), a senior civil servant found himself inadvertently playing a high-profiled role in a satire of the island’s Governor who was represented by the Giant.

As a more consistent and much-loved aspect of the tradition, the actress Lois Kelly Barrow seemed to have actively enjoyed the contrast between her own social identity and the situational irony associated with the characters that she

played on stage. Away from the Pantomime, she was (and continues to be) a very sophisticated and dignified woman, a serious and versatile actress, and a highly trained and accomplished musician who “studied music, speech and drama in England” (Baxter 1970: 274-275). She also taught at a very respectable preparatory school in Kingston and so her role as a teacher cavorting in an outrageous manner on stage in *Music Boy* (LTM 1971) would have been in striking contrast to all that she would otherwise represent.

That this anomaly provided a highlight for the show is expressed by the critic Archie Lindo, who was tickled into an indiscretion of his own by the incongruities of the scene: “In the second act in the “Sport House” scene, and as the “Madam,” Lois Kelly Barrow “had the audience in ‘stitches’. There was a very funny chase scene (I hope the printer’s devil does not type CHASTE scene, as it was very far from that) which was very entertaining and amusing, even if not very original” (Lindo 30/12/71). According to Alex Gradussov “the real pantomime lives” in the “the two characters of Louise Bennett and Ranny Williams (and to a certain extent Lois Kelly-Barrow)” (Gradussov 1970: 50).

Within the satirical framework of the Pantomime, the politicians come in for quite a bashing and the audience, which thoroughly enjoys the use of topicalities, finds it hilarious. In 1969, just six months after Apollo 11’s lunar success, Jamaica’s own spacecraft Maccafath 3 is poised to execute its own moon landing in *Moonshine Anancy*. This epic journey was obviously going to be a high-risk venture as, “The first Maccafath One drop inna pot hole when it was getting a tow down to Bumper Hall for welding. ...Then after that, dem build Maccafath Two, but all the wire dem fuse because power lines did burn out again” (Gloudon 1969: 18). So, the Minister for Space and Other Empty Things announced that “members of the Cabinet had unselfishly decided to let others go ahead of them” and that “five lucky Jamaicans” would be “chosen in a special drawing of the National Lottery. If you can’t make it on earth then

try it in Heaven, the Minister is reported as saying” (*Moonshine Anancy*, Act I, scene 1).

However, it is not just politicians who are fair game: “any type of person or group with a distinctive attitude, especially if they take themselves too seriously, may very well be the butt of humour in Pantomime. School children, parents, bus drivers, people that think they are hoity-toity, higglers, housewives, middle-class women, domestic helpers – everybody is the subject of scrutiny” (Phillips 2002). Insights, considered funny if they encapsulate truth and are presented with panache, do not usually cause offence. Even when people recognise themselves as the butt of the humour, “as long as they can laugh by recognising the truth of what’s being said and playfulness of the delivery, nobody takes the jibe to heart or is seriously offended” (Phillips 2002 interview). Though the perspective is satirical because it is pragmatically ironic, it is a form of satire that is earnestly redemptive. Indeed, it is a matter of national pride for Jamaicans that they are able to laugh at themselves in an affectionate way.

Irony represents self-awareness and provides an opportunity for self-definition. Invective can be direct and highly personal when boundaries have been breached but it can also be the ironic undertone of affection. Abandoned by his followers, Seaside Harry, one-time obeahman and crooked politician in *The Pirate Princess* (Act II, Scene 3), struggles to get somebody to stop and give him a lift from the bus stop. As the motorists that he flags down pass him by, he releases his irritation in invective and we laugh:

Gwan you ole robot yuh. Go bruck stone. (*gesturing angrily at other “passing traffic”*) Gwan yuh ways. Me can import donkey cart too yuh know. Me know how fe get no funds license same like you. (*He sits down, disconsolate*) See here, this Jamaica get tough you know. The people used to be so manageable, but now... One time, a deestant tax payer like me wouldn’t have no trouble fe get a lift, but watch dem now. Just a race past like mad ants a look fe fat. After all I do for them...

SINGS: I don’t know, I don’t know

Why Jamaica people ungrateful so

With his spirits at low ebb he begins to get up and suddenly cries out in pain:

Whoy! Ah nook up in me menticus. Or I wonder if is gas?
...Whoy... You know, I don't believe is gas this time. It must be
me authoritis. Or me psychophantitis.

Rising to his feet despite his aching body, he concludes in the words of a newly released dancehall hit by Michigan & Smiley (1982) about the pathology of sexual diseases. Too afflicted to sing, Seaside Harry moans the lyrics, "Jah lik me wi di dangerous diseases," and the audience laughs sympathetically – sorry for him that he is hurting but knowing that he has brought much of his plight on himself, the pain is his punishment. Satire in the Pantomime presents a moralistic worldview, and provides scope for a redemptive response in the face of hardship.

At the heart of it all, is the dynamic of play: not only 'playfulness' or 'fun' but also 'power play', which relates to the psychological survival of the disempowered. Historically, the expressive medium of the enslaved was the language of disguise. A legacy of this is that twentieth century Jamaicans generally took pride in being able to laugh at their own idiosyncrasies and were quick to scoff at self-deception and stupidity. Ridicule could teach the pretentious that a lack of humility at the expense of others results in embarrassment, at best, or tragic consequences, if necessary, for every action carries the potential for an equal and opposite reaction.

In discussing the question of heroes and national identity, Morris Cargill referred to evidence of "psychological malnutrition" (a lack of confidence in, and knowledge of, self) among Jamaicans that manifests itself in various ways; one of which is that, "We try to pretend that we are ersatz Europeans" (Cargill, n.d.). It is Lois Kelly Barrow who mischievously caricatured this tendency as she wrote and performed one of the most memorable scenes in LTM Pantomime history in which a social-climbing seamstress attempts to transform a higgler, Queenie, into a lady for a day.

A love of parody and the active enjoyment of the incongruity between style and subject led to an element of burlesque, which was expressed in the way the behaviour of the masters was aped: dancing the quadrille, quoting/misquoting Shakespeare and the Bible, and reciting extensive (and sometimes incomprehensible) tracts of poetry from the canon. Within folk culture, such behaviour was also expressed in grandiloquent speech at tea meetings where the sound of the words and fluency of speech mattered much more than the meaning. Jamaica Talk therefore becomes a language of disguise. It is the dissembler, who deliberately pretends to be less intelligent than he really is who eventually triumphs over the braggart and the bully.

The Pirate Princess (LTM 1981) has become a standard point of reference for discussions of Pantomime in the Gloudon era. For the first time in LTM Pantomime history “every ticket was sold, every house was sold till the end of January, before we opened!” remembered Leonie Forbes (Forbes & MockYen 2000), its leading actress. This was followed by a record-breaking run of 120 performances. In Act I, as the pirate Captain Rackham, aka ‘Calico Jack,’ rather rashly decides to shift his sphere of operations to the Caribbean, his First Mate (Mary Read) a woman in disguise, sounds a note of caution, saying, “Haven’t you heard about Jamaicans? No one can predict what they will do.” The words of warning prove to be none too true as the story develops, but even at first contact, it is the people of the island who set the agenda, through a small but very important detail in the manner of their response.

Captain Rackham’s pirate ship drops anchor near Port Royal, and he repeatedly tries to attract the attention of the ‘natives’ by shouting to them. “Ahoy there,” he calls out from the deck through cupped hands in a grand nautical manner, over and over again. No response. Eventually, he loses patience, stamps his foot and shouts, “Me sey, ‘AHOY’!” Then, comes the reply. Of course, the audience recognises at once the rural Jamaican characteristic of rarely giving an immediate answer when a question is asked for the first time, and the mindset that it represents: namely, a direct answer

should only be given when the motive *behind* the question has been understood. Little does Captain Rackham realise, therefore that this minor introductory detail is but a hint of the Socratic irony (see Abrams 1971: 80) to which he will in due course fall victim. As the story unfolds, we see that the 'native' dissembler, Seaside Harry who deliberately pretends to be less intelligent than he really is, eventually triumphs over the foreign braggart and bully. This is how Anancy 'played fool to catch wise'.

In an example of dramatic irony, Seaside Harry who has been deposed as leader by the other villagers, chances upon Calico Jack disguised as a woman. Of course the audience realises the true identity of the 'woman' but anxiously waits to see if he will. Harry doesn't but provides considerable satisfaction to the spectators in his sotto voce concluding remarks, "Ku pon her face, it tough not a Common Entrance!"

In *The Pirate Princess* the notion of operational disguise, i.e. gaining access to the space of the other by adopting their dress and behaviour, plays quite a significant part in the dramatic package. The two disguised female pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, long to express their femininity and Leonie Forbes, a starring actress, in the role of the First Mate, speaks like a foreigner in her RADA trained voice, but looks and behaves like an islander and so straddles both contexts in an intertextualised way, much to the satisfaction of the audience.

Even the scriptwriter plays a clever game with the Pantomime form. The role of the dame which had fallen by the bye is brought back onto the Jamaican stage through the back door in a game of hide and seek: Calico Jack, the pirate on the run 'legitimately' and cleverly disguises himself as a woman in order to manoeuvre safely within Seaside Harry's domain. It is indeed a brave thing in homophobic Jamaica for a bearded man to walk about the street in women's clothes!

But this production pushes the boundaries even further in terms of challenging social norms, when Bobby Ghisays the director plays with the idea of performative disguise by making the actors Brian Heap (white English) and Oliver Samuels (black Jamaican) alternate the roles of Calico Jack (the foreign pirate) and Seaside Harry (the local Anancy figure). Both actors were sufficiently comfortable with 'the other' to portray their alterego with style and so pull off the challenge to preconceived norms. Space is thereby created within the Pantomime production to reflect analytically on exploitative behaviour whether at home or abroad and recognise that it transcends simple categorisation according to skin colour or cultural agenda and anchors itself in the universal human condition of anti-social selfishness.

Faced with "the crazy fabric of human nature" (Dyson 1966: 223), irony is an outlook on life, a world view which provides a way of avoiding an accommodation with the grotesque as an acceptable response to the enigma of the events that happen to us, the absurdity of tragic suffering.

Jamaicans are serious people who can become very serious about serious things – education, economics, religion, history, politics, respect. Major truth is always a serious matter and often couched in the tragic terms of the consequences felt by those who have not discerned it. The Warner is a frequent figure on the Pantomime stage and often speaks in the voice of the Bible though the quotations are rarely verbatim. In *Moonshine Anancy* (LTM 1969), the Warner tries to predict disaster at every turn because she thinks that the venture is "flying in the face of the Mighty" and she points out "not everyone that sayeth Moon, Moon, shall see lunar rock." The Biblical allusion – "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21) – would be as familiar as a proverb to the audience and would lend the weight of scripture to the Warner's point-of-view. Yet the fallacy of comparing 'heaven' (the essence of the sublime) to what is essentially 'rockstone' (the most ordinary-looking of all matter) would tickle the audience's sense of humour in its appropriateness and, by creating

objective distance, would open out the possibility that the authority of the spiritually inspired figure could be questioned.

As the anthropologist Martha Beckwith (1929: 200) noted, in her study of the folk culture of 1920s rural Jamaica, "Many a proverb conceals a veiled threat." Generally weighty matters are usually declared in the budget debate, a sermon, a phone call to a talkshow host, a letter to the editor, or even in the lyrics to a song (mento or reggae), but if time is short, a proverb has to suffice. "Play wid puppy, puppy lik yu mout," i.e. familiarity breeds contempt, says Mary Read the First Mate to Captain Rackham when he fraternises with his crew and then finds that they do not grant him the respect that he thinks he is owed.

But also, in Jamaica many a serious thing is said in jest. Rex Nettleford described the philosophy that undergirded Louise Bennett's poetic voice in these terms: "Humour becomes as it were the expression of a people's will to live" (Nettleford 1966: 24). Miss Lou would have used the proverb, '*kin teet' kubba heart bu'n*' (which means 'a lot of heartache can be covered by a smile') to express the same idea. The language of laughter has many nuances: appreciation, derision, affirmation, self-recognition, pride, sudden understanding, detachment, painful recognition, acceptance, grief, empathy, and embarrassment, even one-upmanship and revenge. So, just because somebody is laughing doesn't mean that they are not being serious. As people will often say, "I laugh because if I don't laugh, I will cry." To laugh still allows the possibility of hope but to cry inconsolably would be an expression of utter despair, which is too difficult to handle.

The Pantomime is a place for comedy where laughter can give vent to feelings often forged by frustration. Storytelling is used to deliver important truths gently as part of a process of awareness, rather than as an urgent wake-up call. The manner of delivery, based on the distillation of life experience by the teller, engages a process which dwells in the realm of immanence - inner imaginative power - and no where more so than in the theatre where the action is lived out in the present and unfolds in front of the audience. Kamau

Brathwaite talks about *total expression* as an aspect of nation language that arises out of having nothing: “Reading is an isolated, individualistic expression. The oral tradition on the other hand demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides. And this *total expression* comes about because people ... had to rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines. They had to depend on *immanence*, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves” (Brathwaite 1984: 18-19).

Generally, wisdom is greatly prized and passed on through the integration of quotations from the Bible and Shakespeare in everyday speech. But there is creativity and freedom in the order of play, and no text is so sacrosanct that it is spared adaptation to new contexts in which it might acquire new meanings. The historical narrative is reshaped to suit the exigencies of the moment as in *Miss Annie* (LTM 2002). Being proud and comfortable enough with ‘beautiful Jamaica’ to play with the natural and manmade features is also part of the game. Zazamaica – whose beauty is recreated time after time in the set, the lighting and the backdrop – can nostalgically be “the Land of my Dreams” (as sung in *Queenie’s Daughter*) but it can also be the very mundane ‘Jangah Bay’ (*Jangah Rock* 1996) defined exclusively by its crayfish/*jangah* where the survival of the community depends on a village rejecting traditional insularity (acting as a cover for selfishness) in order to embrace the mutual respect inherent in a modern need to preserve ecological harmony.

Storytelling is what the LTM Pantomime is basically about. There is always a message, but each step in the unravelling and explanation of the main point needs to be given time and space, elements which in return should be handled stylishly. The attitude which underlies this exchange is: If you are willing to give me the space to map out my thoughts, then I in turn have a responsibility

to make it as enjoyable an exercise for you as possible. It is all a matter of mutual respect.

Though one should never underestimate the importance of a good plot in any theatrical production, within the Jamaican context, the storyline itself is almost secondary to the telling, a fact which eludes many a critic who has berated the doyenne of all Pantomime writers, Barbara Gloudon, for the weakness of her plots. It is the process, the manner of reporting the details of the matter, which allows the listener to enter into the story and extract meaning at several levels. In the context of circuitous delivery, the point for the individual listener might be discerned at any of the several stages of the narrative journey and does not necessarily need to be summarised in the climax of arrival, which in accordance with the more orthodox dramatic pattern, might be realised in the denouement. Theatrically, it is important for the audience to leave the theatre on a high note but that could take the form of high-spirited celebration just as meaningfully as a clever twist in the plot or the sudden realization of a major truth being unfolded.

The packaging of a folk story traditionally involves every tool at the artist's disposal: "It is in story-telling that the folk best exercise their powers of artistic production. Dance, song, and dramatic impersonation here find free scope" (Beckwith 1929: 214-215). According to the LTM President, Henry Fowler, this mixture of multiple imaginative elements – drama, music, dance and design – is an essential characteristic of the Jamaican Pantomime, the art "where all arts meet, where all talent is welcomed and encouraged and where, at the centre of our capital city, the Ward Theatre becomes annually the traditional unifying and inspiring meeting place for all people throughout Jamaica" (Little Theatre Movement 1988: 12).

Drama, more than any other creative genre, "has the potential to activate all channels of the human senses" (Pfister: 1988: 7) because it presents a repertoire of codes and channels designed to engage with human sensory perception. Within the context of Jamaican culture, performance has the

potential to be the ultimate creative act outside of the phenomenon of giving birth to a child. This study sees the public's engagement with each Pantomime production as well as the reality of a 64 year-old tradition, as the unfolding of a holistic, multidimensional performative map which signposts, to all involved, the topography of the culture.

Empathetic emotion is controlled by nuance (tone, volume and intertextuality) and timing (rhythm, pace, gesture). In life as in Pantomime, the poetry of experience needs the element of song. Kamau Brathwaite points out that the poetic culture espoused by nation language "exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would *think* of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning" (Brathwaite 1984: 17).

This observation is consolidated by the observations of Beckwith on the narrative power of song within traditional folk culture: "I do not know that poetry is ever attempted in Jamaica without the accompaniment of music" (Beckwith 1929: 210). She refers to the haunting melody of "a call, lament, command, which shows incremental variation in accordance with the dramatic progress of the story"; the sense of "awe of the supernatural" as the song finds place in the action "as an instrument of magic...before whose tragic compulsion human volition is helpless" or as the tragic voice of "the forces of the supernatural world"; its use as "a romantic element...to evoke aid from some member of the family group or from a lover"; and it can also be a device used "to prolong the tension in the execution of some retributive fate" (ibid. 215-216).

The practice of delivering the teaching element of the production unobtrusively through the lyrics of the songs is a technique, which was employed with considerable expertise by Louise Bennett and truly mastered by Barbara Gloudon. Using succinct Gloudon lyrics matched to a revival tune by Grub Cooper, the University Singers remind their audience in the

Pantomime segment of their annual concert, that you cannot hear the sound of one hand clapping:

One han caan clap
Say, yuh haffi have two
One han fi me
and annodder one fi yuh
Tell it to the world,
And dat is a fact,
That one han alone caan [*cannot*] clap.
(University Singers 1997).

Jamaica Talk is as much a question of rhetoric and attitude as of language choice. Within the “metaphor of mimicry” (Cooper 1993: 120) which the Pantomime stage represents, the use of Jamaica Talk is the articulation of a social construct for the audience’s perusal, amusement and, ultimate edification. That is why there was so much agitation-cum-excitement when the authority of the LTM was harnessed to exploit “our general contrariness in language” (Reckord 9/02/06) through Barbara Gloudon’s clever social commentary *Trash* (LTM 1985). This Pantomime played with the literal and colloquial meanings of the title, ‘garbage’ on the one hand and ‘ready to hit the town’ on the other. Gloudon was able to duel dangerously with the gap between the denotation and connotation of words and produce a warning from the poor that they were poised to take over Ready Heights, the domain of the more wealthy. The efficacy of this process in subverting the status quo was very disconcerting for some members of the audience.

In Pantomime, Jamaica Talk, is an essential part of the ritual of the theatrical experience. The use of: a) code switching, which incorporates both the character and worldview of the different voice, to shift perspective; b) extravagant intertextuality, which allows the members of the audience to participate attentively and to show off the diversity of their of awareness – ‘catching the joke’; c) social accountability of the empowered to the general public – so that pretentiousness is kept in check; d) the message of the production – the value of having and voicing an opinion; e) a heightened

awareness of the figurative wealth of the folk culture, especially the value of proverbs and riddles; f) expressions of the metaphor of mimicry like parody, invective, rhythm and song – all play an important part.

Pantomime is the place where metaphor provides shape to conversation and style is the vocabulary: “All activity requires some embellishment, some panache. This comes out in styles of walking, driving cars and buses, sports. It is not so much the fact of scoring a goal or a basket, or a boundary, but how the performer executes the play. ... In one worldview, there is the constant postponement of gratification, within a future orientation, a striving for ‘more and more’, ‘breaking records’... In another world view, gratification is immediate and should be part of every activity and every stage of it” (Alleyne 1984: 8).

So, Jamaica Talk is as much a question of style as of language. Austerity and the challenge of self-sufficiency within an export-based economy have created a Caribbean mindset in which the culture teaches people to think on their feet, to recycle fragments and to make do. This entails a constant disposition towards inventiveness as the speaker plays with words, structures and concepts, within the context of contrapuntal conversation that is as dynamic as the ebb and flow of the sea. The in between spaces matter greatly because in the measured pause is found that rhythm which is so essentially connected with meaning. Nonetheless and paradoxically, there is no such thing as a gap ... because any unguarded moment represents a window of opportunity for somebody else quick-witted enough to exploit that advantage at the expense of the hesitant.

The LTM Pantomime at its best is expected to talk sweetly, play skilfully from the heart and (mind)/mine the gap between tears and laughter. As the language of the National Pantomime, Jamaica Talk, in all its variety, is metaphorical in style, ironic in purpose and a defining aspect of this indigenised art form.

CHAPTER 8

I' WUT I': THE DYNAMIC OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE

On December 26, 2000 at 6pm the voice of Barbara Gloudon, the Chairperson of the Little Theatre Movement, welcomed the audience at the Ward Theatre in downtown Kingston to the opening night of *Jack and the Macca Tree*, the LTM's 60th Anniversary Pantomime. The house stood up and sang the first verse of the National Anthem, "Eternal Father, bless our land..."

Then at 6:03pm, the musicians took over as drums introduced the overture, alone at first but, in time, joined by shakers with the trumpet and piano eventually talking to each other above the beat in a polyrhythmic call and answer sequence. The songs in this Pantomime would include 'Under the Coconut Tree', 'Balanceo', 'Evening Time', 'Man Piyaba', 'Carry mi Ackee' and other familiar folk and popular melodies along with tunes and lyrics written specifically for the production.

The curtain came up to 'Balanceo', a market day song. The set was lovely - a beautifully painted backdrop, and props on stage that complemented the country market event about to take place. The audience clapped the empty stage and then continued clapping to the rhythm of the music. With just enough of a pause for the patrons to register their response, singers and dancers with baskets on their heads flowed on to the stage in vibrantly coloured costumes.

The traditional drumming sequence with which the show was opened was reminiscent of the music for *Drumscore* (1979) a dance choreographed by Rex Nettleford for the National Dance Theatre Company, which presents the concept of creation being drummed into existence, celebrating "the great truth

that no people can ever be totally uprooted or deprived of their heritage” (Nettleford 1985: 141).

The whole scene was bright, happy, and dynamic... but the market-people were troubled. Their lives were lived helplessly in the shadow of the Giant. “Mi fraid of him so till,” one of the vendors explained, and the imminent arrival of the Giant’s Wife who “soon ... come a market” had everybody troubled. Miss Daisy, an older woman dressed in bandana and calico, who was a herbalist and one of the local leaders, shared the trepidation of the others.

At this point there was a mild distraction from the clanking of hinged seats in ‘the gods’ - the cheapest seats in the house - as the first batch of late-comers caused others to stand in order to let them squeeze along various rows to their numbered places. In Jamaica, the National Pantomime always starts on time, but that doesn’t mean that the audience, in its entirety, always manages to arrive on time.

Traditionally, theatre is often understood to be a “social contract put into place, usually by the exchange of money for a ticket which promises a seat in which to watch an action unfold” (Susan Bennett 1997: 204). However, the National Pantomime of Jamaica like many other “non-traditional theatre events” retains “the general terms of that contract only to question them” (ibid.) at least in the sense that the audience insists on being a participant in the event rather than merely a spectator. This chapter attempts to study the cultural phenomenon as performer and audience prompt each other into an agreed understanding of the island context as it is mirrored by the stage enactment.

However, an effective system for methodically annotating audience response in the highly interactive Jamaican context has yet to be devised, so this question of audience response theory also identifies a specific challenge for further research on the Jamaican Pantomime and its relationship to other forms of popular theatre.

Without specific footage beyond personal observation of the Pantomime audience in action, this framework has therefore taken as a given that the phenomenon of the National Pantomime is merely *an* aspect of a much greater cultural experience which is evident in the wider society. In the theatre, the members of the audience have to feel like performers too, and if that does not happen in an evening at the Pantomime, then the show has not fully realized its potential.

There is an epic quality to the storytelling ability that is second nature to many Jamaicans. The greatest drama and the greatest joy can be exacted from the most ordinary elements in life. A simple example of this is encapsulated in the cricket scene captured by the comedic talent of Pantomime veteran Charles Hyatt and the illustrator Eric Johns, which correlates the unpredictability of cricket with the equally sudden code switching capacity of the commentator as the sweetness of a moment suddenly engulfs him. At the close of day, “in the



Figure 34: Seen by Charles Hyatt, scene by Eric Johns, *Life in Jamaica* (1984: 15).

dying minutes of brilliant tropical sunshine,” the atmospheric drone from the press box, presenting radio coverage at the grounds, across the country and

even internationally, suddenly crackles with vigour when the tired commentator is suddenly startled by a moment of decisive action as the long-defended wicket falls and the batsman is dismissed.

At moments like these, despite the reporter's social status, educational background and consummate professionalism, prosaic Standard English bows out to be replaced without a moment's hesitation by the summative, emotional power of Patwa: "Rass him bowl 'im!!!" This intensity of perception, on top of an enormous cultural reservoir of myths and historical events both major and minor, old wives tales and proverbs, anecdotes and folk stories as well as an extensive range of accounts from the library of the Bible, means that story is the lifeblood of the Jamaican people.

As true for the theatre as it is for the cricket commentator, the guiding principle in the development of the Jamaican Pantomime form was a growing acceptance that local reality had to be expressed in local idiom in order to connect with the local audience. This commitment to topicality was in itself a crossroad experience for a society, which scorned the folk culture of the majority in favour of British grammar-school-type enlightenment for the educated few.

A little snippet from Olive Senior's story "Ballad" – part of the *Summer Lightning* collection which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1987 – explains some of the narrative influences as well as the tensions inherent in sharing truths about one's own experience with others in the context of formal education:

"Teacher ask me to write composition about The Most Unforgettable Character I Ever Meet and I write three page about Miss Rilla and Teacher tear it up and say that Miss Rilla not fit person to write composition about and right away I feel bad the same way I feel the day Miss Rilla go and die on me.

When Miss Rilla die I wish I could make up a Ballad for her like they do for famous people in the old days. Dont ask me why only when we sing ballad song in school I get sad and think of

Miss Rilla. But I cant sing or play guitar and nobody make music round here since that Blue Boy gone away and beside this whole thing too deep and wide for a little thing like a Ballad. So I will just tell you the story of Miss Rilla and Poppa D, Blue Boy and me though is really about Miss Rilla. And when we come to the sad part we can have something like a chorus because they have that in all the ballad song they sing but I dont think about the chorus yet.” (Senior 1986: 100).

An elegy, a tribute to the loss of somebody very special, the expression of a subject “too deep and wide for a little thing like a Ballad” is destroyed by Teacher who does not consider the story of Miss Rilla to be a sufficiently worthy subject for composition. The tragedy of the child’s loss is compounded in the rejection of her community’s experience as being invalid. So the story will be shared only with those prepared to listen sympathetically because they too respect this most unforgettable character. The young narrator adds, “And when we come to the sad part we can have something like a chorus” because within the performative space the group will laugh together at the good times just as they will sing the sad part together in keeping with the ritual.

The treatment of Miss Rilla’s story exemplifies a tension that has operated at the heart of the National Pantomime tradition: the challenge of how to get Teacher, who has been taught better, to truly appreciate the validity of the community’s experience so that it too can be passed on in writing. Nettleford’s explanation of the ballad-form as it relates to the poetry of Louise Bennett, provides a useful explanation for the type of tribute that the child-narrator would have liked to have penned: “Miss Bennett went to the basics and grasped the fact that she lived in an oral tradition where people talked and listened, cross-talked and reported and possess, almost to a fault, a high propensity for words – “bad” words, new words, archaic words, “big”, long and sonorous words. The Bible, the Sankey hymnal, the folksong and the memory gems form the background to these propensities” (Nettleford 1966: 11).

The poet/playwright Vera Bell began her review of the first truly Jamaican LTM Pantomime of 1949 with the observation: “It’s good to see a real Jamaican Pantomime – I am enjoying this!” said one person to me during the first interval of *Bluebeard and Brer ‘Nancy* on Saturday night” (Bell ?/01/50). The review ended with the complement, “No one should miss this show – As my friend said after the last act, “I feel really satisfied – this is the best show I have seen in a long time” (ibid.).

Louise Bennett has spent her life explaining Jamaica to Jamaicans. Her lifelong celebration of the Jamaican language “in her multiple roles as entertainer, as a valid literary figure and as a documenter of aspects of Jamaican life, thought and feeling” (Nettleford 1966: 10) is an act of courage, which has endeared her to compatriots both at home and abroad. In *Jamaica Labrish*, she uses the poem “I’ Wut I” (Bennett 1966: 35) to illustrate the dynamic which underlies the transition of a developing Ward Theatre audience from spectator to participant. The poem highlights the response of ‘ordinary’ people to theatre and its

ten verses will be used in this chapter to plot the course of engagement when the people of the yard buy tickets for a special show.

❶

Newspaper print big fotograph,
An write up big sinting,
Bout foreign genkleman dah-come
A Ward Theatre fe sing.

To many theatregoers in Kingston, even in the 1960s and certainly in the 1940s, the presence of a visiting artiste from abroad would have been synonymous with quality and sophistication. For those who were intrigued by the paradox of the high-profiled “big fotograph” of the black singer Todd Duncan (see Figure 35) in the *Gleaner*, the size of the write-up and the label “foreign genkleman” would intriguingly have suggested the possibility of something unique: a cultural or dramatic opportunity which should not be missed.

In the poem, the residents of a Kingston “yard” decide that they want to go to hear Todd Duncan sing because they feel that somehow it is important and

worth the trouble. At the outset, it is established that the price of the tickets represents a significant sacrifice that has to be justified by the entertainment value of the event: “Dey sey mus mek we go an raise / De jooce ef it no nice!” One way or another the downtown residents were going to have ‘the Devil of a time’ at the

❷

All de people eena fe me yard
Start quarrel bout de price,
Dey sey mus mek we go an raise
De jooce ef it no nice!

theatre because if the show did not live up to their expectations, they would hijack the proceedings with their spirited protest.

As with the concert, the LTM Pantomime would initially have played to a middle and upper class audience of people who felt quite at home in such a formal context as the Ward Theatre. In 1947, the LTM’s *Cinderella* played to capacity audiences during its record-breaking run of twelve performances. However, as the LTM Pantomime began to change course “to reflect the realities of its own Jamaica” (Nettleford 1993a: 5) the audience profile also changed completely and the Pantomime audience for *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981) – which broke the 100-performance mark – at the Ward Theatre covered the entire cross-section of Jamaican society: “rich and poor, young and old, from country and from town, of every colour, class and creed” (Fowler 1981).

As increased audience support for the evolving Pantomime formula meant that the season could become longer and longer, the LTM had the perspicacity to harness the interactive nature of Jamaican culture so that at the end of the show every social group present would have had the chance to feel that the performance had been “wut i” – worth the cost of the ticket and the effort of going. This need to engage the audience as a collaborator in the retelling of the story meant that the Pantomime model would move away from the rigours of the school composition, high culture mould in order to engage with those “deep and wide” (Senior 1986: 100) feelings expressed in popular culture and associated with important subjects relevant to the lives of ordinary people.

The evolution of Pantomime therefore became an erratic dialogue between performer and audience shaped by interjection, applause and laughter.

In the grand setting of their own famous, city centre Theatre, the Kingstonians of the yard felt compelled to establish their presence as a group – “We full one row o’ seat” – as in terms of audience profile they represented a recognisable minority. Dressed in their Sunday best and deeply engaged in the sense of occasion,

③
We buy we ticket go inside,
We full one row o’ seat
We tun an twis, we puff an blow
We frowns an suck we teet.

they were determined to show from the moment that they sat down that they would be a fiercely critical presence for they were almost certain that they were not going to enjoy the concert.

Not for them, the restraint and decorum characteristic of the more refined middle-class who would have been schooled in that politely quiet appreciation of spectacle which is still characteristic of an English theatre audience. Even at the price of feeling like social misfits in this traditionally bourgeois environment, the people of the yard go to the theatre to exercise their political right to be there and to comment on what they had paid to see. In fact the group from the yard who shared a tightly defined common identity, saw themselves as potential ‘other’ in the theatre situation and were prepared to engage in their own improvisational “rhythm-flux” (Benítez Rojo 1996: 20) response that would, if needed, shift the locus of the performance from the soloist to themselves. Their performance had already begun as they shifted noisily and uncomfortably in their seats: “We tun an twis, we puff an blow / “We frowns an suck we teet.”

It was Ranny Williams who first realised that for some reason the successful show in Jamaica has to include the performance that the audience also gives on the evening. In the Bennett poem, however, the yardies appear bold but feel uncomfortable, and so they begin to shuffle in their seats reminding themselves and each other of their agreed plan of action. With their sighing

and gasping, pouting and frowning, and kissing of teeth it would have been clear to other members of the audience that here was an ‘outa-order’ element in their midst already providing a prelude of what was to come. The signals had already been given in the language of *kiss-teeth*: “the shortest and most complete form of monologue, often used to great effect in public display” and which is so “common in Jamaica, where people appear to hold long conversations with themselves in public about something that upsets them” (Patrick & Figueroa 2001: 57-58).

This sector of the Ward Theatre’s audience has already decided that if they do not have the good time for which they have paid good money, they will express their displeasure right there and then in the theatre “an gwan bad fe we money” as they demanded a refund. Unbeknown to them, they were in fact articulating the tough

①
We say ef a noh good sinting
An ef de man sing funny
We was gwine kick up big ruption
An gwan bad fe we money.

reality of theatre, summarised by Peter Brook in the souvenir programme for the opening of the Little Theatre building: “a performance stands or falls – in performance” (Brook 1961). On the other hand, they were also trying to prepare themselves psychologically for the disappointment of the American Duncan not being able to measure up to Jamaican expectations. Had the singer embarrassed the people of the yard by singing “funny” (funny ‘peculiar’ not funny ‘ha ha’) the full row would have endeavoured to distract the rest of the audience from remembering his failure by providing a “ruption” big enough to disassociate the yardies from any ineptitude on stage.

If the folk were to be represented – no matter how tangentially – on the Ward’s stage, the performance was to be good enough to be memorable. Indeed the reputation of the LTM Pantomime was built on the ability to provide a “good sinting” for every audience through talent, commitment and discipline and Jamaica’s two greatest stars led by example. Ranny Williams used his Chaplinesque sense of humour and superb sense of timing to slowly

and skilfully stutter his way into his listener's heart, while Louise Bennett achieved the same aim through humour and the transformational power of folk wisdom but her main tool was the universal language of music. As Greta Fowler put it: “Ranny who never fails to make us laugh and Louise who illuminates and lifts each scene. We are lucky that they have stayed with us” (Fowler 14/12/75).

In the Todd Duncan concert, many members of the middle-class audience would have known of the singer’s Broadway success as the first Porgy hand-picked by Gershwin for the role, his show business career in film and opera and maybe even his work as Professor of Voice at Howard University. It was indeed a great honour to have such a distinguished figure and well-

5

De genkleman come pon de stage
Miss Matty gi out “cho”!
Him bow an plenty people clap
An Tata Joe sey “poh”!

established classical baritone in performance on the Ward’s stage. As Miss



Figure 35: Robert Todd Duncan. Photo from The African American Registry website.

Matty and Tata Joe would not have been party to such background information, they would have to take the performer at face value, and one wonders if their initial intolerance – “cho” and “poh” – was related to the fact that Todd Duncan was African American. Despite the fact that so many others were applauding the entry of “de genkleman” the people of the yard made sure to indicate that they were not so easily impressed – reputation was not enough; they would reserve their accolade for the performance, if merited. Even the term “genkleman” would have been loaded because such a label in such a high-profiled context would usually have been reserved for a white man.

Nevertheless, the idea of civil rights and activism was not new to the soloist himself, for when he made his debut on Broadway in 1935, his own family was not allowed to enter the segregated theatre to hear him sing. The presence of Todd Duncan at the Ward Theatre would have been a symbol of the heights of achievement that the yardie stratum of the community could also be capable of achieving but in order to be accepted by this group Duncan would have to prove himself to be exceptional. The Jamaican audience of the 1940s was in fact part of a historical moment as within 50 years blacks would be singing in opera houses all over America. However, as Todd Duncan in a Voice of America broadcast in 1990 put it, “[I] was the first one to open the door – to let everyone know we could all do it” (Watson 03/03/02).

Music is the heartbeat of the Jamaican people, at home or abroad...and fortunately for all present, Todd Duncan really could sing: “like de sweetes bell / A heaven was a-ring!” Foreigner or not, his reputation as “genkleman” was well

⑥

An den de man open him mout,
An den him start fe sing,
Me feel jus like de sweetes bell
A heaven was a-ring!

deserved because his musical ability gave unlimited joy and satisfaction and fully justified his position as the unifying element at the centre of the performative space. The singer was so good that it precluded any need for a sideshow: “Me se Jane y’eye kin over like / She gawn off eena trance!”

Miss Lou as a poet in performance is always saying, “Keep de riddim, keep de riddim” (Bennett 1983). Travelling with dexterity and lightning speed through the wide-ranging assortment of rhythms that are an integral part of Jamaican life, she is easily able to establish an unparalleled rapport with her audience. She is one of the most articulate exponents of the transformational quality of culture for Jamaicans at home and abroad because she is able to stand back and observe

⑦

Onetime me heart-engine slow dung,
Me teck a side-ways glance,
Me se Jane y’eye kin over like
She gawn off eena trance!

with affectionate objectivity her community's idiosyncrasies. In the poem, the power of the performance had gripped the group with an all-absorbing force depicted by the transfixed look on Jane's face and yet the narrator is able to take advantage of the change in pace in her own emotional response as her beating heart slows down enough for her to swiftly notice the reaction of Jane who is seated beside her.

Jamaicans are very appreciative people when they are pleased. The theatre audience, so capable of sitting on their hands when not satisfied, will clap anything that works extraordinarily well on stage. They will sing and bob in their seats during the finale and clap each performer to the rhythm of the music while moderating the speed of the beats in accordance with the perceived quality of each individual's input. There is also special recognition for stars or favourite characters. They will make appreciative tonal sounds like, 'whoaaaa', nod their heads in a kind of bow to the talented, catcall if the overall performance is very good and demand repeated curtain calls and even a reprise. The very

⑧

An wen de song ketch a de en'
An wen de singer stop,
Long afta me han dun meck noise,
Me heart did still a-clap!

best of performances is acknowledged by a standing ovation and a production has truly surpassed itself when after all this, the audience persists in clapping the empty, curtained stage. Todd Duncan received the highest praise that night at The Ward because even after the clapping had stopped, an element of appreciative delight continued to reverberate in the heartbeat of the balladeer: "Long afta me han dun meck noise, / Me heart did still a-clap!"

At the end of the show, the troublemakers realize the injustice that they had been prepared to inflict on Todd Duncan because they had not believed him capable of being the best. They entered the theatre defiantly as a collective but,

⑨

Wen it over we couldn't look
Pon one anada face,
De whole o' we heng dung we head
An crawl out o' de place.

engulfed by the crowd, they left shamefacedly as individuals empowered by a new perception of the scope of quality and the realisation of how close they had come as a group to destroying an exquisite experience. Repentance is personal and represents a change of mind arising from self-reproach that needs to be handled within the heart of each individual.

The impact of perceiving afresh in retrospect is what gives the theatrical event its educational quality. In the Pantomime, “there is an element of intellectual stimulation but it is not so esoteric or hard to find that you are not sure whether you have been stimulated or not – you don’t have to work too hard to find the message” (Phillips 2002). Keith Amiel, the producer for *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981) articulates what the dramatists expect as an outcome of the show as he writes in the Programme Notes for that production: “Perhaps the recognition of some secret hope or fear may bring a sigh, a nod or a frown. Our intention, however, is that mirth and laughter should prevail. For to learn to recognize a situation and to laugh at what may well have been an incident from our own book of life is to develop a perspective which will not only help to make life bearable but wholly liveable” (Little Theatre Movement 1981: 9).

Having had the chance to reflect on the evening’s events, the group re-engages to share their awestruck observations of the experience that they have shared. Tata Joe, as the oldest member, speaks first and says “Look wha me live fe se!” recognising that life is indeed full of surprises and new possibilities. Both he and Miss Matty had been the most openly critical members of the group at the start of the evening so it is fitting that they lead the process of apology. Jamaicans love words but in revelatory moments a natural loquaciousness gives way to simple acknowledgment of beauty in the encounter with profound truth. As Louise Bennett explains in another context, “Yes, man, an’ we have a way you see to make the word we say sound like wha’ de sintin we a talk bout look like... Boonoonoonous, that

⑩

Pon de way home Tata Joe sey
“Look wha me live fe se!
Matty se “boonoonoonoos vice”
Dora sey “i’ wut i””.

mean you nice, yes” (Bennett 1983). Matty’s kiss-teeth “cho” has been totally rebutted by the magnetism of Todd Duncan’s “boonoonoonoos” voice. So, it is left to Dora, one of the quieter members of the group, to sum up the divine joy and transformational quality of the performance in the simple assertion, “i’ wut i’.”

T S Eliot asserts enigmatically, “The end is where we start from” (Eliot 1959: 47) and this is the concept which undergirds Louise Bennett’s creative talent as she shapes the performance of the people for the people, constantly reminding her audience in her catchphrase, “So we nah fe shame, at all, at all” (Bennett 1983). As a major force in the LTM Pantomime, Louise Bennett was able to fulfil her poetic purpose in signposting the way to an understanding of the Jamaican psyche because she appreciated the importance and validity of the Jamaican language as a fitting vehicle for expressing serious thought and heartfelt feeling. This, too, is a characteristic of Jamaican Pantomime, which takes the language of the stage in all its diversity to capture and enhance an appreciation of authentic Jamaican experience.

The interactive nature of audience response in the National Pantomime is triggered by a variety of cues like proverbs, pop songs, familiar rhymes, advertisements, Biblical (mis)quotations, political slogans and famous quotations. The tendency is for the performer to deliver the beginning of the line – for example, “iffa nuh so it go...” – so that the audience can join in with the remainder – “...den a nearly so it go.” The idea is that the audience should have an incentive to stay alert and charge the performance from the stage with its energy. The response can take the form of sporadic applause, laughter ranging from sniggers and cackles to squeals and belly laughs bordering on hyper-ventilation, tonal interjections like ‘hey hey’ and ‘whoi’, cheering, booing badness, special recognition of stars or favourite characters (like Anancy), finishing words or phrases, singing the next line, adding sound effects, quipping, clapping scenic effects and dancing in the seats.

Rapport is always established through rhythm so when the Prime Minister P J Patterson accompanies his granddaughter and her friends to the Pantomime *Chicken Merry* (LTM 2001) and joins members of the audience invited on stage to participate in the singing of the folk song 'Chi-Chi Bud,' he is able to show his rootedness in Jamaican rural culture by "raising the song and carrying [it] through with great enthusiasm" (Anon. 23/01/02).

Laughter is a serious thing in Jamaica and it is not unusual for an audience to be roaring with laughter while nodding in agreement as some form of sharp criticism is being levelled against unreasonable behaviour. An example of how this type of intense hilarity can moderate the pace of the performance is given in an article written by C. Danielle McNish for the *Jamaica Observer* in which she describes how the poet Marsha Hall "exploded onto the stage" at the Philip Sherlock Centre with her poem "Black the Revolution." According to McNish, Hall's "second piece opened, 'Welcome to Jamaica, home of the Black Prime Minister, with no Black ideas,' but was stopped dead in its tracks by outbursts of laughter from the audience. Even after she gracefully waited for the laughter to die down, Marsha had to urge the audience to let her give them the rest of poem, which was no less engaging and political than the opening" (McNish 23/03/05).

Yet, in the same way that the audience will willingly express its delight, it is also capable of pressing home any lack of connection. The critic Norman Rae describes an example of non-response that met the efforts of a group trying to perform a grim farce at The Barn: "One pitied the cast going through long periods of silent, stony reaction to what was obviously meant to have had 'em rollin' in the aisles" (Rae 04/07/04). There is also the case of the veteran reggae singer Bob Andy whose *a capella* rendition of a song in concert was received so attentively by the audience that "a pin drop would be deafening at this point as the audience listened" (Reid13/03/03) and yet a few moments later his performance nearly went sour "after he decided to diplomatically cast stones at a specific doctrine of the Christian faith - the receiving of eternal life.

One peeved lady in the audience, who seemed to have been enjoying his performance up to the point in question, opined that he should stick to what he does best and not stray” (Reid 13/03/03). Fortunately, he did just that and things “went back to normal, as the audience sang along” (ibid.). At the end of the evening, Tyrone Reid was able to sum up the performance with the words, “it was safe to say that the audience went home satisfied” (ibid.).

The newspaper columnist Jean Lowrie-Chin shows how powerful the lessons of laughter blended with truth can be. Almost thirty years after the last revival of *Queenie's Daughter* (LTM 1973) was staged at the Ward Theatre, she was still using this Pantomime production as a point of reference for reflections on Emancipation and Independence: “How can one ever forget that wonderful Pantomime, *Queenie's Daughter*, when Miss Lou as Queenie emerged from the dressing room in an elaborate girdle and platform shoes? And then her moment of glory, when she took the stage for her daughter's wedding looking every inch a queen. We got the record, learned all the songs and acted out the hilarious parts with Miss Lou and Mass Ran” (Lowrie-Chin 04/08/03). According to Lowrie-Chin, the intellectual depth, sweet laughter and passionate activism of community leaders like the octogenarians Louise Bennett and Archbishop Samuel Carter are qualities, which could help the healing of the nation.

For the Jamaican spectator there can be no passive role or readymade interpretation of the action, to be accepted without comment. The really exciting thing about the impact of accessible theatre in a culture where versioning is a standard norm is that of all the genres drama is the most responsive and versatile bridge between the artist and the critical audience. The text is not sacrosanct because in the unlikely event that the words should be considered inviolate, the manner of their delivery is totally dependent on each performer's interpretation of their meaning and communicative ability.

In a departure from the more traditionally middle-class model of a theatre audience as recipient within the dynamic of performance, the working-class

majority insists on interacting within the theatre in terms not too dissimilar to the way it would interact in any other type of social gathering.

Jamaican Pantomime is about the exploration of behaviour on a national scale in which the performer is given ample room to unravel the nuances of engagement in the company of an audience adept at reading the code of social signposting that is being employed or deciphered. Consequently, the audience quite naturally and happily becomes a quick-thinking collaborator in the telling of the story.

CHAPTER 9

ANANCYISM: A PHILOSOPHY OF SURVIVAL

The first appearance of Anancy on the public stage came in 1942 in the dramatised folktale *Anancy and the Goat* written by journalist A.E.T. Henry and produced by Randolph Williams. The play was performed at Edelweiss (pronounced by Jamaicans as 'Eloise') Park in Cross Roads with Ranny in the lead role. From then, Ranny Williams became the living embodiment of the Anancy figure for the general public.

At various times the LTM Pantomime tried to change course in carefully calculated ways as it strove for greater identification with the (wo)man-on-the-street. Some worked and some didn't but when the quintessentially Jamaican hero Anancy pitted his wit against the British stalwart Bluebeard for the ninth LTM Pantomime, he proved to be an immediate hit. This pioneering step was enhanced by the LTM's ability to present "characters of a typically Jamaican dimension" (Gradussov 1970: 49) in the prestigious Ward Theatre to an audience that was becoming representative of a much wider cross-section of Jamaican society.

Due to the comedic talent and folkloric expertise of Ranny, the spider-man on stage at the Ward was presented as the heroic embodiment of folk culture and folk tradition. Ivy Baxter felt that his personification of Anancy – "complete with tail coat, top hat and spider's web" (Baxter 1970: 271) – had in fact been Ranny's most important contribution to the tradition of the National Pantomime. Ranny greatly influenced "the modern, urban, popular perception" of Anancy as "a comparatively benevolent figure free from malice in all his actions, despite the wicked things he does" (Bell 1983).

Decade after decade, continually though not continuously from *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (LTM 1949) to *Anansi Web* (LTM 1998), the figure of Anancy/Anansi has had a titular role in the Little Theatre Movement's National Pantomime paradigm. Even in the years when he disappeared from Pantomime in name – as happened between 1982 and 1993 – Anancy's presence never left the stage as his persona found expression in the role of the trickster/*ginal* who shape-shifted with the changing times through the role of pirate, conman, politician, obeahman, record producer, businessman, hustler and don.

Noel Vaz introduced Anancy in a stellar role to the LTM Pantomime stage in 1949 by interweaving elements of both British and local folk culture into the innovative production, *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy*. This Jamaicanised version of the Bluebeard story was developed with the help of Louise Bennett in the context of a UCWI summer school held at Knox College. Set in the Great House, Bluebeard needed an adversary. So Anancy, who could be all things to all people, was given the challenge:

Me can be anything me want. Me can be
a dog and bite me enemy. Me can be puss
and tief. Me can be a johncrow. Me can
be your enemy but me can be your frien.
Me can be dis, me can be dat. Me can be
coachman of course, for me is Anancy.
(*Bluebeard and Brer Anancy*, Act I, Scene 2)

The coachman Anancy triumphs in the end over the *busha* through the use of obeah as Bluebeard is transformed into a creature under the spiderman's control.



Figure 36:
Ranny Williams as Anancy
in the National Pantomime.
Section of a photograph
from Shirley Maynier
Burke (1981: 11).

In 1954, the LTM introduced the first Anancy cycle of Pantomimes (1954-57) to consolidate the folk hero's presence in the tradition. To do this Greta Fowler brought Anancy back into the LTM show as a leading figure in her script for *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (1954). Other Pantomimes in this sequence were: *Anancy and Pandora* (1955, written by Louise Bennett), *Anancy and Beeny Bud* (1956, written by Louise Bennett), and *Busha Bluebeard* (a 1957 revival of the 1949 original *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* written by Louise Bennett & Noel Vaz).

The demise of the Federation project and a re-evaluation of national identity in the immediate post-Independence period presented other new challenges for the LTM Pantomime's role as mirror to island life. An equally serious blow for the LTM team was the death of the comic genius, Lee Gordon. As Henry Fowler explained in a 1996 interview, Gordon's death meant, "topicalities no longer were quite [*as*] important in the way they had been. So, we had to get the Jamaican element more definitely into it" (Fowler 1996). To compensate for Gordon's loss, a second Anancy cycle triggered by *Anancy and Pandora* (a 1967 revival of the 1955 Louise Bennett script), was instituted. Other Pantomimes in this sequence were: *Anancy and Doumbey* (1968, written by Sonia & Don Mills), *Moonshine Anancy* (1969, Barbara Gloudon's first LTM Pantomime), and *Rockstone Anancy* (1970, written by Sylvia Wynter & Alex Gradussov).

Everybody in Jamaica knows Anancy. He is a survivor who likes his food, his sleep and his independence. He is a wordsmith and a master of disguise who uses metamorphosis as an essential tool in the pursuit of his goals. Anancy is a performer. A talented musician; he sings and dances well in addition to playing the fiddle, and he has even had some experience as a promoter in the music business. His sense of timing is perfect and when the going gets too rough, he can be depended on to bail out of the situation just in time to ensure his own survival. Although capable of extraordinary, sustained effort in his own interests, he will only be the willing employee of someone else as a last

resort or out of desperation. Though he is at times violent and even frightening in the folktales, the spiderman at the Ward Theatre becomes the heroic embodiment of folk culture and folk tradition. The Jamaican audience sees him as a lovable rascal, even though he is also greedy, selfish and cunning. *Moonshine Anancy* (LTM 1969) suggests that he is the soul of the nation.

His way of thinking, Anancyism, is a pattern of behaviour, which involves being able to find the loophole in every situation so that the apparently disempowered individual manages to come out on top. As Carlos de la Motta of Kingston, Jamaica explained in conversation, Anancyism is significantly more than a pattern of 'anti-social' behaviour; it is also a philosophy of resilience, which enables an individual to laugh in the midst of adversity and thereby survive. Like the trickster - his more universal counterpart - laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Anancy does. Consequently, in the Pantomime, the feeble spiderman becomes an unlikely symbol of resistance as people learn to employ the creativity of his approach in manoeuvring through the challenges of disempowerment. This cultural pattern encourages people to meet hardship with humour and becomes part of a system for avoiding bitterness. Anancyism is, therefore, a guide to surviving adversity.

As in Pantomime, the long-established Anancy Story is partly spoken and partly sung. This form of folk entertainment is described in the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy & LePage 1980: 10) as a beast fable or fairy tale or both, which always has a moral. It also usually follows the "One, two, three; A, B, C" pattern, described by Derek Walcott, "which comes out of an oral tradition that still exists in the Caribbean, of saying, *Once upon a time*" (Walcott 1986: 14). The body of this chapter therefore imitates the three-pronged framework of the traditional Anancy story, in presenting: a) the character's context and dilemma; then b) the description of his problem-solving strategy; and finally c) the assessed consequences of his action.

A. Once upon a time Anancy ...

“Long, long ago, when all the people who are big now were little” (Pollard 1985: 30), Anancy travelled in the hold of a slave ship to the West Indies. His new life would be a harsh one, but, as we all know, “Anancy cunny sah” and so he survived. He learnt to thread the moonlight with stories, squatting, as Kamau Brathwaite described it, “on the tips of our language” (Brathwaite 1968: 25):

black burr of conundrums
eye corner of ghosts, ancient his-
tories

and diligently spinning “silver skin webs of sound” (ibid.) which tell of lessons learnt, experience gained, triumphs won and memories retained, so that generation after generation can learn from him and convert wisdom into common sense.

Anancy has had a glorious past. Mervyn Morris explains: “In Ashanti, Anansi Krokoko, the great Spider, is the symbol of wisdom, and in anthropological language he is known as the Trickster Deity. Through his ruses, he sometimes even outsmarts the Supreme Being” (Morris 1979: ix). But life in Jamaica has always been a day-by-day struggle lived in the moment because of the unpredictability of tomorrow. So hunger, of every type, makes pressing demands for immediate gratification and Anancy has become *croomoochin* and mean in his greedy desire to keep all the reward of his labours, and even that of others, for himself. To the delight of the 1954 Pantomime crowd he boasts, “Some have and some have not, but Anancy him find out always how to get” (*Anancy and the Magic Mirror*, Act I, Scene 2). Though his tongue-tied lisp, *bongo* talk and self-centred stratagems are good for a laugh during the show, part of the sidesplitting humour is that he dares to do what he should not – he contravenes the accepted cultural norms. For in Pantomime, Anancy’s ‘trickify’ behaviour is paradoxically to be repudiated even while relished and

he is never to be taken seriously as a legitimate point of reference for establishing social values.

Information from the *Daily Gleaner* May 7, 1967 quoted in Richard Allsop explains the connection between the term 'Anancyism' and guile: "You know, of course, that Anancy, that beloved spider, is the inventor of the freeness mentality. Nowhere in the vast literature on Anancyism is there an instance of Anancy paying for anything. Ananciologists have justified this attitude to life by arguing that Anancy is a small creature who ... has to employ his wits to protect himself against much larger predators and competitors" (Allsop 1996: 30).

An article by Sylvia Wynter (1970) for the *Jamaica Journal*, analyses the Jonkonnu tradition as folk dance and presents a challenging exploration of the emotional complexity arising out of that tragic ambivalence in Caribbean societies, which sought to conceal African heritage (symbolic of cultural inferiority) behind a curtain of silence. Wynter, the defiant academic and co-author of *Rockstone Anancy* (LTM 1970) challenges the reluctance with which West Indians have embraced their folklore as a subject for serious study while acknowledging this ambivalent attitude of people towards the figure of Anancy, partly because of his African ancestry and also because his behaviour can easily be interpreted as morally questionable.

In the 1970 Pantomime script, subtitled "a morality play," the co-writers Sylvia Wynter & Alex Gradussov presented a very serious exploration of the issue of Anancyism and its consequences for Jamaican social development. Paulette Bell summarised the concerns of that Pantomime's plot in these terms: "The scope of *Rockstone Anancy* covers the entire history of Anansi in Jamaica, tracing his roots to Africa and his original divine status, thence to the period of slavery when he functioned as a strategy of survival and ends up in modern Jamaica, with Anansi as an anachronism which no longer serves a useful purpose. The play suggests means of tackling the problem in its various manifestations. These include all levels of society; civil servants, business

people, students, rural folk, in fact all are infected. The cure is dramatised as a process of death, purgatory and rebirth” (Bell 1983: 12).

This debate over the figure of Anancy was still raging at the start of the twenty-first century. In fact, it suddenly gained a new place in public consciousness in March 2001, when the Head of Mico College's Youth Counselling Centre suggested to a conference of Caribbean teachers that Anancy should be banned. Her words, as reported in the *Gleaner* were, “Many of our people hold on to Anancy as a hero. If you want to be a ginnal and out-smart people this is what he represents. We should ban him” (Roxborough 18/03/01). According to the *Gleaner* report, “several educators thumped their tables and nodded in agreement” (ibid.).

In a letter to the Editor, Oren O. Cousins contributed to the ensuing *Gleaner* debate with a record of his ‘interview ‘ with “our noble but lately unfairly misunderstood and obscure folk-hero” Anancy:

NEWS REPORTER: I hear, Mr Spiderman Anancy, that some teachers are demanding that you be banned. What have you to say?

ANANCY: All I have to say is let dem talk! Ha' which o' dis Anancy dey want fi ban? For fi mi days done! Mi retire since television an' nintendo an' cellular phone an DJ an' Superman an' Batman an' Pink Panta an' condom come in. What about that mouse on TV who is always playin' nasty tricks on that cat an' that cat that is always playing nasty tricks on that dog? They plannin' to ban dem too? Y'u ever see me, Anancy, or any of my relatives on TV yet? Nowadays, instead of plannin' tricks, I watch CVM an' TVJ an' Cable. (Cousins 05/06/01).

Wynter points out that, “When folk becomes consciously folk, ‘its insoluble core’ disappears. It becomes ‘folksy’ and parodies itself. The jester dances on, but the gods are gone” (Wynter 1970: 48). It is clear that in order for Anancy to be saved from becoming a folksy cut-out, a grotesque cultural artefact, or even an animated cartoon on cable TV, his ability to provide creative empowerment as a cultural guerrilla has to be rediscovered and affirmed by the people to whom he belongs.

Anancy is a paradox. Anancy is the cause and the consequence. He is a hero and yet he is a thief, a schemer, a conman, a manipulator, a womaniser, a mocker, a treacherous friend. He is also a reader, a thinker, a storyteller, a creator. In fact, he is the reason why things are as they are – “the Prime Cause why pig mout long, why rat live ina hole” (Morris 1979: ix). Rejecting Anancy means rejecting self along the lines of V S Naipaul's (Naipaul 1969: 29) stinging dismissal of West Indian history as nothing. Paulette Bell explains, “Anancy has become a metaphor used to describe the Jamaican experience ... Little wonder then that he provides such potential for Jamaican theatre” (Bell 1983: 2).

Anancy's main dilemma is the loss of his pedigree. The lyrics for the Dexter/Gloudon song ‘Fi Wi Ancestors’ written for the LTM Pantomime *Mandeya* (1991), sum up his New World story while presenting his indomitable fighting spirit:

Mi ancestor dem was king and queen,
An dem did come from way cross de sea,
But smaddy tief dem pedigree.
Yes, tief dem pedigree:

Dem put dem in a chain
Wuk dem very hard,
Try fi bruk dem down
Try fi tek away dem yard -
Ay, yai, yai, yai, yai,
Dem rob dem of dem name
And dem history,
Try fi mek dem shame,
Seh dem neva free -
Ay, yai, yai, yai, yai.

...
But deep in de soil, dere was a seed,
Hiding beneath a stubborn weed
An di water from ancestor yeye
Mek di seed bruk out an grow up high.

...
Dat tree is da sign
Telling all a we
Dat we people cyant

Lose dere pedigree
Ay, yai, yai, yai,
ay, yai, yai, yai, yai, yai - Ay.

This excerpt from the song was transcribed from a lecture/performance by Brian Heap on 'The Language of Pantomime Songs' recorded at UWI, Mona (see Heap 1999). In a 2003 interview with Andrene Brown for the *Gleaner*, Barbara Gloudon chooses "We ancestors them were kings and queens" as the one song that she would wish to pass on to someone special for, "It tells of who we are and where we are coming from" (Brown 2003).

Gloudon's *Anansi Come Back* (LTM 1993) heralded Anansi's return to a starring role in Pantomime after an absence of several years. The Pantomime Company carefully researched the part from a variety of contemporary and historical sources and made the conscious decision to change the spelling of his name to *Anansi* in an "attempt to more closely bind the traditional Jamaican spelling of Anancy with its African counterpart" (Heap 1993: 3).

B. So Anancy studied ... and laughed

Anancy, only a spider, is at a disadvantage in the fierce competition for survival that characterises his jungle environment. Not even the threat of serious punishment is a deterrent to Anancy's scheming. He is bold – *rockstone!* – and he is fearless, characteristics more befitting a lion or a tiger than a spider. By playing psychological games on his associates (friend or foe), he staves off a potential sense of inferiority by constantly asserting his mastery of a situation through one-upmanship. Despite a keen awareness of his foe's physical superiority, he knows that, if he just *tinks* hard enough, he can usually depend on his wits for an effective solution. His favourite time is Christmas at the Grand-Market because it is full of opportunities for *freeniss*. Although a versatile and impulsive opportunist who plays for high stakes as a matter of course, he is a strategist who studies his context carefully: "All dat time him wasa study him head an keep him yeye dem an him aise open fi

ketch all de news an see ef him can work him brains pon anybody” (Louise Bennett 1979: 55).

His daily ambition is to be the unofficial chief who eats the juiciest morsels and marries the prettiest lady. He is accustomed to being anti-establishment: he managed to steal the credit away from Tiger for the jungle stories, and though now physically enfeebled, he is the product of a warrior culture, which vigorously resisted enslavement. Mervyn Alleyne provides some background to his activities as a cultural guerrilla in the past:

From the very inception of the slave society therefore, religion and rebellion became associated in the symbiotic relationship. It is generally agreed, and the evidence is quite compelling, that slaves from the Gold Coast area, the Akan people known in Jamaica in the early period as Coromantees (with several other variant spellings), were the chief instigators of rebellion. The rebellion of 1760 was, according to Gardner (1873: p.132), led by Coromantees and was “aided by the mysterious terrors of Obeah”. ... We shall see later that this association between revolt and religion remained important throughout Jamaican history. Thus Coromantees provided both political and religious leadership in slave society. The fact that their folk hero Anansi was also adopted by slaves throughout the Caribbean suggests that there was a whole series of factors favouring the retention of Akan religious forms. (Alleyne 1988: 83).

Anancy, the magician, is able to fool his victims through sleight of hand, but he is also capable of being a spiritual force. When in a fix, he will create an escape route by fair means or foul; this can involve being aided by *gizun* or ‘the mysterious terrors of Obeah.’ Absorbed in the comedy of his antics, a Pantomime audience can forget about this, the more sinister and less easily understood, side of Anancy's being. Nonetheless, the theatre becomes uncomfortably hushed when the magic of technical wizardry in the use of stage lighting and unsettling sound effects combines with his incantations in unknown tongues and emphatic posturing to send a chill down the spines of the many children present and to make the adults feel uneasy at best. As Cassidy and LePage point out, quoting Monk Lewis, “It seems to be an indispensable requisite for a Nancy-story, that it should contain a witch or a

duppy, or in short some marvellous personage or other” (Cassidy & LePage 1980: 10). The Pantomime audience looks forward to these transformation scenes, but goes eerily quiet while they run their course. Just as “Akan religion in its conservative version is still practised by Maroons even today” (Alleyne 1988: 84), there is many an upper middle-class BMW to be seen parked outside a balmyard in Jamaica.

The ability to laugh in the midst of adversity is intrinsic to the Jamaican worldview. Not in the *face* of difficulty as a form of evasion but in the *midst* of it as a form of endurance. Sometimes this is done to such an extent that people complain to each other, ‘yuh tek serious tings mek joke’. This coping mechanism is pithily illustrated by Noel Dexter’s lyrics in *Sipplesilver* (LTM 1984):

Me nah wuk so me nuh mek money fi rack mi brains wah fi buy
Me nuh wuk so me nuh have money fi complain dat prices high,
You who have nuff money, fret when de dollar fall,
but we who have no money, don’t worry bout dat at all.

This song becomes an extreme example of looking on the bright side of things as it manages to equate unemployment with peace of mind. The ironic gap between this perspective and lived reality would have the audience in stitches as it responded with a mixture of admiration and distress at this level of psychological resilience.

‘Kya, kya, kya, kya,’ laughs Anancy, crowing, as he triumphs again and again over adversity by using his wits. This aspect of self-actualisation is another facet of Anancyism. Laughter gives the individual time to think and room to develop a strategy for coping with the situation. As Charlie Chaplin observed in his autobiography, the spirit of ridicule is an attitude of defiance, often stimulated by tragedy (see Chaplin 1964: 299). And so, Pantomime because it involves so much laughter, allows an audience to look at really serious things and face them because it provides a safe vehicle for expressing a potential reaction to their painful and tragic consequences.

Despite Anancy's loss of divine status in the plantation context, he will, nonetheless, always seek to rise to the occasion. He is the spider who always has a web to spin. This is what the philosophy of Anancyism in its most creative and redemptive sense is all about - a citizenry strengthened by its ability to endure and rise above hardship without becoming embittered. Miss Lou's Aunty Roachy (Bennett n.d.) says, "Heavy hamper load make jackass-back strong". Folk wisdom has an answer to hardship: resilience. Humour is an extremely powerful didactic tool and to this end the Pantomime writers have employed their creative vision year upon year.

C. An from dat day till today . . . Is Anancy meck it.

It is essential for Anancy to be somebody especially within a West Indian context where according to Naipaul, "Power was recognized, but dignity was allowed to no one. Every person of eminence was held to be crooked and contemptible. We lived in a society which denied itself heroes" (Naipaul 1969: 43). Rex Nettleford comments on the tragedy of living in a postcolonial society which continues to deny itself heroes and where the 'Giants' gain their status on the basis of material power and control of others rather than moral rectitude and visionary leadership: "the new ruling classes become the most uncritical perpetrators of the old values and simply make the new regime nothing more than the old imperial order with a darker skin" (Nettleford 1985: 24). It is interesting that in the millennial Pantomime, *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000), the Giant (the unidentified controller of resources) is as much an Anancy figure in the negative sense of the term as the Giant's Wife (the scrounger), Charlie Croomoochin (the obvious trickster) and most of all, his wife Mary Croomoochin (the sycophant who unashamedly betrays her own folk values out of greed).

Kamau Brathwaite suggests a redemptive – though seemingly anarchic – solution to the equation of *ontological* worth with *material* possessions for a

people robbed of name and history. It is the philosophy of creatively existing on, and building, *nothing*.

for we have achieved nothing
work
who have not built
dream
who have forgotten all
dance
and dare to remember

... all the tribes of Ashanti dreaming the dream
of Tutu, Anokye and the Golden Stool, built
in Heaven for our nation by the work
of lightning and the brilliant adze: and now nothing

nothing
nothing

so let me sing
nothing
now

(Brathwaite 1967: 13)

Brathwaite's desire to think against the grain in exploring a deeper reality is developed and explained in more practical terms through the philosophical concept of *smadditizin* proposed by Charles W. Mills. The term *smadditizin* has no equivalent in English but, as Mills explains, it derives from the word "somebody" (*smaddy*) and revolves around "the struggle to have one's personhood recognized in a world where, primarily because of race, it is denied. . . . It is ultimately, a struggle over who is and who is not to be counted as fully human" (Mills 1997: 55).

Although Brathwaite defiantly voices the challenge which is a job for a new set of heroes – i.e. the end of a community's exile from self through creativity – and Mills suggests an accompanying philosophical framework, it is the resilience of humour which allows the culturally bereaved to grapple repeatedly with the dilemma of self-negation. Louise Bennett's version of an Anancy story tells how the whole world was accidentally put on an equal

footing: "...an de calabash bruck up in minces an de common-sense dem scatter out ina de breeze all ovah de worl an everybody get a lickie bit a common-sense. Is Anancy mek it" (Bennett 1979: 67).

In *Anansi Web* (LTM 1998) Barbara Gloudon used the metaphor of the web to link Jamaica's cultural past with the world's electronic future. Mama Sky (the old-time shop owner) contests Anansi's claim that his web of intrigue is the only web in the world and with the help of others she creates a new web which challenges the balance of power in Anansi Land. So there is an international dimension to the power of Anansi's web but he must learn how to maximise its use for social development rather than personal gain. The moral, "always an indispensable part of a Nancy-story" (Cassidy & LePage 1980: 10), is the concept of progress through 'Love and Unity', the song that closes the show as a reprise.

As Onyame, one of the African gods, in *Rockstone Anancy*, points out, "Except we return the creator half to the trickster Anancy half, his trickery which kept the Jonkonnu alive when they were slaves will destroy Jonkonnu now that you are a free nation" (quoted by Bell 1983: 13). In today's Jamaica the challenge is for Anancy to decide which role he wants to embrace. The choice is between being *either* the celebrity who lives for self *or* the hero who acts to redeem society.

For over 60 years the LTM has spun a web of identity, of working out with its audiences the nuances of the character of the Jamaican people. Acknowledging the resilience of humour which allows the culturally bereaved to grapple repeatedly with the dilemma of self-negation, Pantomime has developed the art of singing "nothing now" (Brathwaite 1967: 13). In so doing it has played an invaluable role in the national struggle to end a community's exile from self through creativity. Alex Gradussov sums up the purpose of the people's favourite character, Anancy: "He is the living manifestation that the outside world, the white world, the commercial world,

the oppressive world has not been able to overpower the folk culture and the folk tradition” (Gradussov 1970: 48).

It is important for Anancy to have style. His way of doing things is an inherent expression and affirmation of his individuality. Edwin Todd described the personal style – authority/insouciance/jerkiness/grace/nonchalance – of policemen directing traffic on the streets of Kingston in 1965, “... all trying to be original” (Broome et al 1965: 2). This is the same creative flourish that the storyteller Charles Hyatt attributes to the pickaxe diggers who were part of the daytime street theatre in his recollections of his schooldays – “Most of the theatre was on the streets when me was a boy” (Hyatt 1989: 61-62). The LTM carried much of this into the culturally hallowed ground of the proscenium arch.

The Vaz production of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* was particularly exciting because the director harnessed the full range of highly charged Jamaican artistic talent that he had at his disposal from across the island. The creatures in the garden of weeds danced to the choreography of the creative dance pioneer Ivy Baxter. The Jamaican composer Barbara Ferland who had known Noel Vaz since childhood, wrote original music for twelve songs, as well as contributing the lyrics for five while the English lyricist Orford St John applied his pen to the rest. Ferland’s opening number, ‘Evening Time’ (with lyrics by Louise Bennett) has since acquired the status in the minds of the public of a traditional folksong as few Jamaicans realise that it was written specifically for Pantomime. Gloria Escoffery of Brown’s Town, little-understood creative genius, painted the set and Stella Shaw from Mandeville designed the masks. As the director Noel Vaz recalled in an interview: “we were able to link up local music, the dance and designs by Stella Shaw who was really fantastic. She was a bit weird herself, so she was right in line for designing weird costumes” (Vaz 2000).

In acknowledgment of its radical approach, the political architect of the New Jamaica, Norman Manley, paid tribute to the slightly awestruck Noel Vaz

backstage after the show with these words, "So, I see you are trying some new things" (Vaz 2000). So successful was this 1949 production that it was repackaged as *Busha Bluebeard* for the 1957 LTM Pantomime season and then taken to Trinidad in 1958 as "the major item in the Jamaican contribution" (Sibley 26/12/65) to the first Caribbean Festival of Arts.

Anancy, the spider-man hero of the folk tales has often been used as a metaphor for all the undesirable aspects of the Jamaican national character. Like his counterparts among the citizenry, he too is a product of his social context. As the writer John Hearne explained in the *Daily Gleaner* of July 12, 1984, the paradox of a slave society was that it "inevitably takes its values from the slaves" with the following consequences: "Lying becomes a moral obligation. Sabotage of productive work becomes a courageous act. Mistrust of authority becomes a political and moral imperative. Mockery of every institution becomes a revolutionary creative act. Deceit, robbery, even murder, become the badges of honour worn by the best slaves. In the end, even the master begins to accept these dreadful aberrations of the social contract as the normal pattern" (quoted in Nettleford 1993b: 13).

The Anancyism of the past remains an obstacle to development in the present because it represents a fundamentally self-centred and therefore anti-social attitude. The difficulty in terms of challenging the stereotype of the trickster figure is the complexity of the audience's response to all that he symbolises. In Pantomime, Anancy even when he is a *ginal* "cannot be wholly discredited" as John Figueroa pointed out in his newspaper review of the Pantomime *Anancy and Doumbey* (LTM 1968), for "Jamaica is a mixed place" if not "a mixed up place" where one should be prepared to expect the unexpected:

For all that is presented in our situation is bound to be mixed; and in our situation, hard saying though it is, only the mixed is likely to be appreciated by the general. Jamaica, for instance, must be the only place in the world in which a concert would present on one and the same programme (as a famous concert did some

years ago) the incomparable clarinet playing of the world famous Draper, and the unspeakable hamming, by ‘opportunity knocks’ Vere Johns, of a tear jerker from Bell’s elocution book. Yet one would have missed Draper, if one had not heard Johns. (Figueroa 04/01/69).

In Jamaican Pantomime, as in politics (see Figure 37), the trickster – not the ‘principled boy’ – is perceived to be the real hero which leads the university-based critic to add, somewhat disparagingly, “Of course, in all this, there is the problem of the audience, and of the mixed situation in which we find ourselves: the audience admires Anancy almost totally. So that they don’t really laugh at him, but rather enjoy his particular brand of skulduggery” (Figueroa 04/01/69).

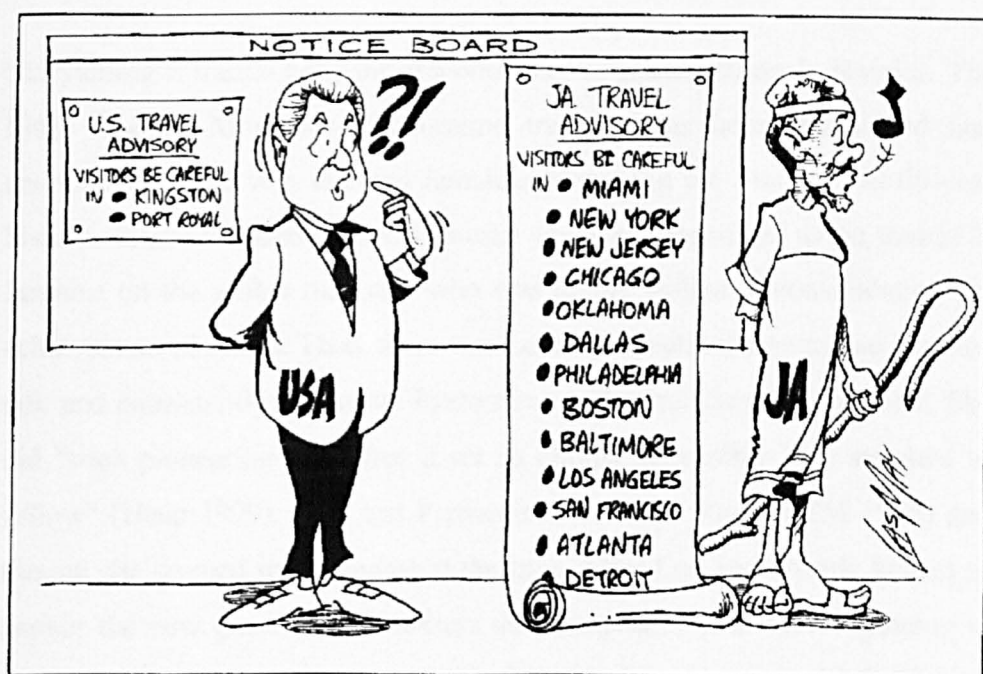


Figure 37: Las May cartoon, *Weekly Gleaner UK*, September 12, 1995.

A traditional strength of the LTM Pantomime has been its ability to use comedy as a discourse of empowerment by skilfully mixing it with the challenges of topicality and relevance alongside the values of tradition and folk wisdom. The lesson for the show's anti-hero as well as for the audience is that self-fulfilment is to be found in social responsibility.

Jack Mandora ...

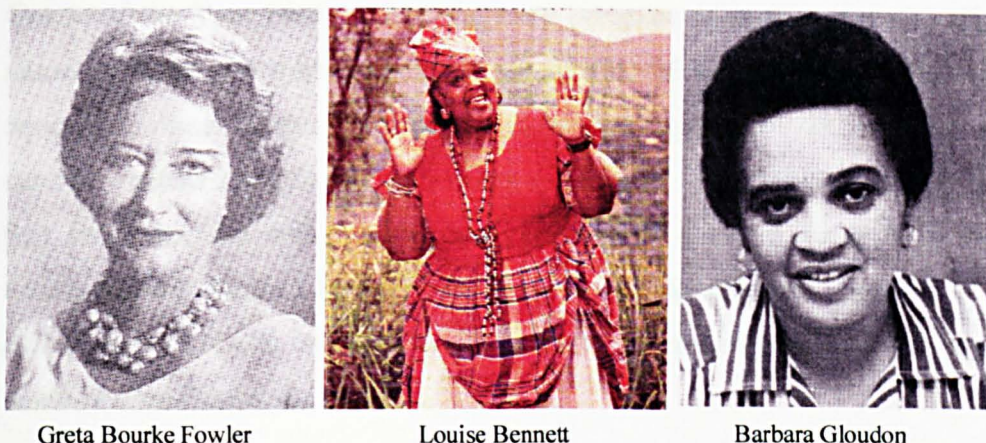


Figure 38: Greta Fowler, Louise Bennett, Barbara Gloudon: The three most influential pacesetters of the LTM Pantomime tradition.

Storytelling is traditionally the responsibility of grandmothers in Jamaica. The Little Theatre Movement Pantomime tradition has been maintained and anchored by three very talented Jamaican women in the course of its 60-year history. It was founded by Greta Bourke who was determined to put theatre in Jamaica on the global map and who was highly skilled at consolidating the achievement of others. Then, there was Louise Bennett who promoted Jamaica talk and consistently interwove Pantomime with rural Jamaican folklore. She did “such pioneering work that it set an almost impossibly high standard to follow” (Heap 1999). Her last Pantomime was *The Witch* (LTM 1975) and though she seemed irreplaceable at the time, Miss Lou had already helped to anchor the new generation of writers and composers who were beginning to emerge in Pantomime. The baton of building and nurturing the Little Theatre Movement’s legacy and the responsibility for preserving the National Pantomime tradition was passed on from Greta Fowler to Barbara Gloudon towards the end of the 1970s.

“Jack Mandora me no choose none” is the traditional way of ending an Anancy story and it means that the teller has done the job of passing on the story in a version that is faithful to the essence of the story as s/he originally heard it. It is interesting, then, that when Anansi Come(s) Back to the Ward in

1993, after many years away in 'Foreign', *Jenny* Mandora is tipped to be the Queen of the Yam Festival. Just the mere presence of a character with this name on stage is a quiet celebration of the role of women in guarding the country's cultural history. Jack might still be climbing trees in the twenty-first century - albeit a *macca tree* rather than a *beanstalk* - but there is the promise that Jack Mandora will not be 'guarding heaven's door' on his own in the future. Bourke, Bennett and Gloudon have already spearheaded - each in her own unique style - an important contribution to the challenge of articulating a much-needed Caribbean aesthetic.

Storytelling is the cornerstone of Caribbean culture and there is yet so much to be told that the utterance itself – a West Indian perception of West Indian realities – is an Adamic act of naming and as such, a creatively empowering exercise. Merle Hodge presented a case for changing the world through writing stories to the first Conference of Caribbean Women Writers at the end of the 1980s. She explained that, in adult life, she began writing in protest against her education and its assumptions: 'that I and my world were nothing and that to rescue ourselves from nothingness, we had best seek admission to the world of *their* storybook' (Hodge 1990: 202).

The continued presence of the Anancy story in the Pantomime is, as Miss Lou reiterates, a reminder to the storytellers beyond the theatre, and these days, especially in the schools, to keep passing on the rich oral heritage of the forefathers and mothers to the next generation: "So every night wen de ole oman dem a put dem gran-pickney to bed, Anancy come an show up himself pon de wall or de ceilin so dat de ole oman dem can memba fi talk bout him. Sometimes wen de ole oman dem sleepy Anancy tie up dem face wid him rope an wake dem up, meck dem talk bout him. So dem tell dem pickney Anancy story, de pickney dem tell smaddy else, dat smaddy else tell an tell, so till me an all dah tell Anancy story. Is Anancy meck it" (Bennett 19979: 2).

Jack Mandora, me noh choose none.

CHAPTER 10

PANTOMIME AND POLITICS

An anonymous aphorism asserts, “It is easier to understand a nation by listening to its music than by learning its language” (Auden & Kronenberger 1970: 293). Music is the heartbeat of the Jamaican people at home or abroad and as F G Cassidy points out “the singing is an important part” of a proper Anancy story, “And when the singing is either forgotten or left out, the value of that story is reduced” (Pollard 1983: 14).

During its long history, the diversity of sound within the musical repertoire of the National Pantomime has successively embraced the full range of Jamaican musical styles, namely, mento, 'blues' music, ska, rocksteady, rude-boy music, reggae, dub, rockers, ragga and dancehall, as well as swing, jitterbug, jazz, merengue, calypso, country and western, rock and roll, soul, hip-hop, soca and gospel - a further and more international aspect of the local pop music scene. There is indeed much scope for a production-by-production analysis of the vocabulary of musical rhythm and style as it has been expressed on the LTM Pantomime stage. That is, however, another project for another time.

This analysis will focus more broadly on the role of musical culture in reflecting political philosophy and shaping national discourse as Jamaica explored the challenge of independence. As Rex Nettleford explained in his study of identity, race and protest in Jamaica *Mirror Mirror*, “Notions of national identity centred for a long time on the fight for self-government and the liberation of the island of Jamaica from metropolitan overlordship by way of transfer of power in the shape of progressive control of inherited political institutions by the native population” (Nettleford 1970: 10-11).

Sadly, as the twentieth century matured, the inherent self-destructive mindset of slave society found new expression in continuous economic crisis, political tribalism, corruption and uncontrollable aggression. In the post-Independence period, the struggle for supremacy between 'haves' and 'have nots' continued except that the holder of the whip became 'boss', 'don', 'president' and as the 1983 Pantomime put it 'ginneral' (which is a play on the word *ginal* referring to "a person who is so cunning as to be dangerous" (Allsopp 2003: 255).



Figure 39: The ginneral from the cover of the LTM Programme Notes for *Ginneral B* (1983).

The madness of extreme violence in times of political pressure is a behavioural pattern deeply entrenched in the country's history. All of the national heroes were caught up in a struggle for freedom from subjugation to the great house, the local Assembly or Westminster. As a generation, the leaders who saw the island through to nationhood as an independent country would have been the grandchildren of those who lived through the Morant Bay Rebellion and its accompanying judicial atrocities in 1865. In turn, their grandchildren would be the pacesetters at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

These children, as excited eight- to ten-year-olds would have literally and figuratively stood at the feet of Toots and the Maytals in 1966 when the rocksteady hit 'What a Bam Bam' won the first National Festival Song Competition (see Figure 11). Toots Hibbert an early reggae artist with his group the Maytals drew on the inspiration of everyday life in the ghetto and the influences of gospel, country and western and blues to create "music that tells a good story, music you can relate to, music you can make sense of"

(Toots, in O'Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 42). In the 1970s, these boys would become the nation's teenagers and then by the end of the century the next generation of leaders in the country.

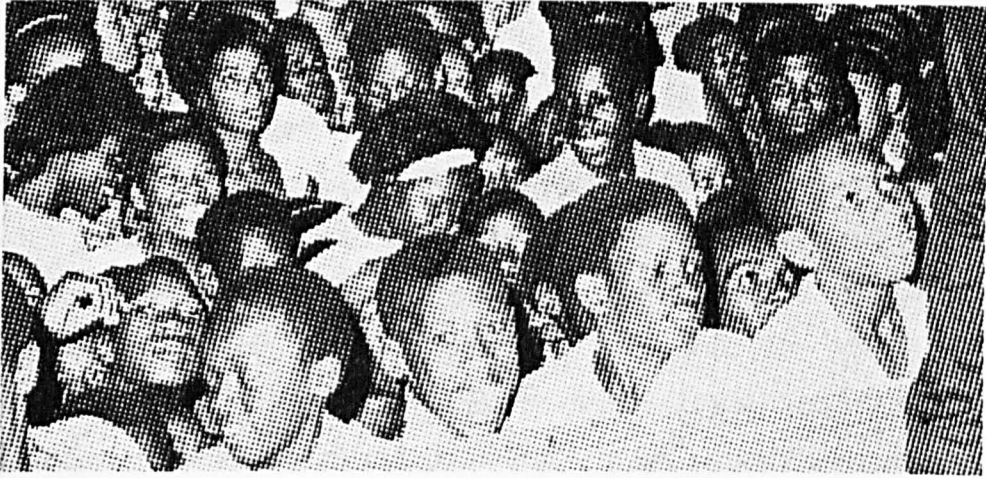


Figure 40: Close-up of the children, at the foot of the stage, in the crowd for the first National Festival Song Competition in 1966. Section of photograph in Figure 11.

By 1975, a young reggae singer Roman Stewart, brother of Festival Song winner Tinga Stewart and Festival Song wannabe himself, produced a hit with 'Natty Sing Hit Songs' about a youth from the ghetto who believed "I'll be a better man with money in my hand." His response to success would be to change his style, to get a big car and pretty girls, to come on strong and mash up the town. Elements of this attitude were portrayed in the retelling of the Three-Finger Jack story in the Pantomime *Mansong* (LTM 1980), when the values of the gun-wielding, opportunist and would-be murderer Sam Power are summed up by the song he sings in Act II Scene 7 as he steals the treasure from its rightful owners. Sam declares that once suited and shod like "a rich Backra gentleman," he will buy "a house an property" and "a carriage fe ride in society" for "Wid dis yah loot / A will be looking cute" (Dwyer 1980: 48). Nevertheless, of greater concern and so true to life, is the attitude of superiority based on the servitude of others which financial success means to him. As part of the second verse he sings,

Wid dis yah loot
Gwine feget de grassroot
Gwine have all de girls dem fe scratch me head
An wid gole spoon come feed me in bed
For now dat me rich
An now dat me free
Haffe live in style
Dat you mus agree

Music *is* politics in Jamaica. *Churchical* and *heartical ridims* accompanied independence, like a political underground in the ghettos and the slums, and when politicians floundered, the sound of the drums swelled to provide a mass medium for the voices of the common people. During the 1962-1966 period, the emerging music of The Wailers competed with The Mytals and numberless other vocal groups to break into the mainstream of popular music, as rocksteady slowed the rhythm down in a style that reflected the outlook of the younger musicians who were driving new developments. As Dick Hebdige explains, "Early ska was choppy, uptempo dance music. And it was partly influenced by the non-religious Rasta music - the light heartical ridims. As the years went by, many younger reggae musicians and singers took up the religious ideals of the Rastafarian cult. Their music became heavier, slower and more serious. And from that time on, the influence of the churchical ridims of Rastafarian drumming began to be heard in reggae music" (Hebdige 1987: 58).

Eventually raw roots reggae combined with polished studio sound would create a superstar, Bob Marley. In promoting reggae for an international market, Chris Blackwell recognised the value of preserving the form's uncompromising message in the music of Bob Marley and the Wailers but packaging it with such technical quality that it would appeal to the mainstream rock audience in Britain. So as Dick Hebdige observes, *Catch A Fire* the first Bob Marley and the Wailers album produced under the Island label in 1973, provided the best of both worlds for the consumer, "a product which was at one and the same time "polished" and "gritty"" (Hebdige 1987: 79)

The arts, and especially literature, led the way in providing a vocabulary of landscape for the Caribbean. Goethe's surprising maxim, "Personally, I would like to renounce speech altogether and, like organic nature, communicate everything I have to say in sketches" (Auden & Kronenberger 1970: 290), underscores the power of the image and the emotional impact of performance. The question of "*what* constituted the 'nativeness' of the society...remained in a kind of stable disequilibrium for nearly a generation" before emerging "in all its disruptive dimensions during the sixties" (Nettleford 1970: 11).

The idea of merging the "polished" and the "gritty" had been piloted long before the time of Chris Blackwell's venture with Island Records, in Vera Bell's script for the third LTM Pantomime *Soliday and the Wicked Bird* (1943). Vera Bell was described by Henry Fowler as "a dark Jamaican, and very, very, very much Jamaican in the – totally, in the spirit of the New Jamaica" (Fowler 1996). Her idea of using a Maroon legend as the basis for the third Pantomime script was, therefore, not only technically in keeping with the LTM's advertised (February 28, 1942) intention "to produce a locally written Pantomime" along with the offer "to pay £10 for the most suitable script" based on the adaptation of "any popular fairy tale or folk story," but it was also an early expression of the nationalistic project.

Looking back, such a choice would seem excitingly appropriate, as *Soliday's* traditional Boxing Day opening would have heralded in 1944 – the year in which universal adult suffrage was instituted in Jamaica. A story in the run-up to such a significant political event, and based on the culture of the most African, non-colonialised group in the whole of Jamaican society was indeed radical, but so were the times.

Warren Robinson who was a member of the cast in 1943/44 recalls that this was Louise Bennett's first Pantomime "and they were constantly drawing on her expertise in dialect as they did impromptu additions and alterations to the script to conform with the innocent fun being poked at celebrities of the day, two being Abe Issa, and Bobby Kirkwood, then CEO West Indies Sugar

Company, e.g. ‘Come we go dung a Unity, fe go see duppy run Missa Kirkwood’” (Robinson 2004). In the event, however, the Maroon-based Pantomime experiment proved too unsettling for the audience at the distinguished Ward Theatre of 1943 and *Soliday* was a box-office flop.

Between 1941 and 1948 the LTM Pantomimes had tended to be “fairy tales with a dash of local comedy” (Dawes 1977). This changed in 1949 when director Noel Vaz and writer Louise Bennett collaborated in adapting the story of Bluebeard. The closing number for *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (LTM 1949) reflected the spirit of the broader context of which this Anancy story was a part. The rhythm and the melody of the mento song ‘Rookumbine’ pulled the whole show together in a joyful celebration of Jamaicanness, while the less conspicuous lyrics presented the delights of gossip, wry humour and social dynamics in vignettes of everyday life like, “Gal inna school dis a study fi teacha/ Bway out a road dis a study fi reach har” on the one hand, and on the other, “Engine a run wid fire an coal / But the jackass a tear ‘im big nose ‘ole’” which contrasts the prowess of the jackass and that of the steam train and emphasises the inevitability of progress.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur points out that, “Music creates feelings for us that have no name; it extends our emotional space; it opens in us a region where absolutely new feelings can be shaped” (Ricoeur 1998: 174). So the music has everything to do with receptivity. With respect to the audience’s response to the folksongs arranged by Louise Bennett and Barbara Ferland for that 1949 Pantomime, Vera Bell reflected, “it is hardly necessary to say much, for which Jamaican wouldn’t thrill at the first bar of ‘Hog ina mi coco’ or ‘Rocky Road’” (Bell ?/01/50).

Miss Lou spent a lifetime pointing out the idiosyncrasies and double standards of her compatriots to Jamaican audiences, but she always packaged potentially hurtful truth in goodnatured laughter. Her preferred musical milieu was mento, which was “a topical song genre of protest, ridicule and gossip...in the African musical tradition of satire and social criticism” (Jones 1988: 16).

This form was, therefore, well suited to contribute musically to the re-discovery of folkloric Jamaica, which began to emerge in the Pantomimes of the 1950s and 60s, especially with the more consistent appearance of Anancy on stage that this period firmly established.

In the second half of the 1950s, as was the case for *Anancy and Beeny Bud* (LTM 1956), “the music for the show was anchored around Jamaican folk-tunes to which special words had been set” and it was very important that “the swingy songs composed for the production had that already-heard air” (Rae 31/12/56). But at grassroots level in Kingston, mento - associated in the minds of the city youth with the backwardness of life in rural Jamaica - was already losing the popularity that it enjoyed in the 1940s.

Simon Jones quotes Verena Reckord to explain: “Ska emerged out of the melting-pot of creole forms and retentions that existed in the ghettos and slums of Kingston in the late 1950s. Since many early ska musicians hailed from ...[the] ghettos, it was not surprising that such forms were strongly reflected in ska, in its rhythmic echoes of kumina, burru and mento, and its call-and-response vocal and instrumental passages drawn from revival music” (Jones 1988: 19).

In 1959, the LTM Pantomime *Jamaica Way* (1959) made a significant breakthrough in terms of musical style because much of its original music was written by the trombonist, percussionist and bandleader Carlos Malcolm who was also the production’s Musical Director. Carlos Malcolm and The Afro-Jamaican Rhythms was an uptown band, which included the singer Boris Gardner and drew equally from hard bop and traditional sources to produce “a satisfying mento/jazz/ska hybrid just outside of the ska mainstream” (Barrow & Dalton 1997: 48). Malcolm was at the forefront of new developments in the field of popular music. He helped to develop “The Jamaican Hit Parade” for JBC radio, “wrote incidental music and conducted the tropical music on location for the first James Bond movie, *Dr No*, which was filmed in

Jamaica,” (O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 89). In 1961, he returned to LTM Pantomime as the Musical Director for *Banana Boy*.

The exhilaration of Independence in 1962 brought with it an impetus for popular musicians “to create a distinctively Jamaican sound” (O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998:32). With political encouragement, the Big Bands of uptown soon picked up the ghetto sound from the Minister of Culture and Development Edward Seaga’s West Kingston constituency, and attempted “to make it respectable by softening the bass line and taking the edge off the ska riff.” Byron Lee describes his raw material as “very rough music, a lot of wrong chords and out of tune guitars. Foreigners called it too ethnic. But still ska had this powerful feeling. So I had my band work on getting a feel for it, [by working] with the artists” (quoted by O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 32). In association with other musicians like Jimmy Cliff, Derrick Morgan and Monty Morris, Byron Lee produced the new music’s first live show at the Glass Bucket called “Ska Goes Uptown” in about August 1962. So the ghetto found a place within national consciousness but not in its unrefined form; it was repackaged by the big bands for the ruling elite and a new dance style was deliberately developed to support the musical programme.

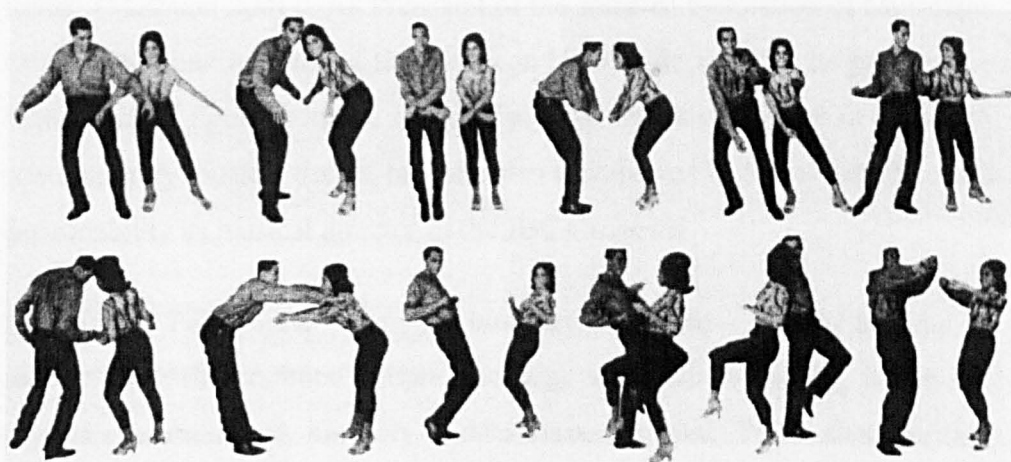


Figure 41: Ska dance moves from Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chin *Reggae Routes* 1998: 36-37.

Millie Small’s ska version of ‘My Boy Lollipop’ enjoyed crossover success in the London charts in 1964 and became an international pop hit (see Barrow & Dalton 1997: 92). Through live shows and the support of radio, the new

sound eventually caught the imagination of middle-class Jamaicans who started buying ska records and learning the dance steps (Figure 41). The exclusively up town nature of the 'Big' Bands, who played in venues patronised only by the upper and upper-middle classes, meant that the use of this type of music in Pantomime would have reflected something special, a sense of being 'grand' Jamaican-style which would be associated with quality especially in terms of the sound production.

Sonny Bradshaw, who wrote the score for *Morgan's Dream of Old Port Royal* (LTM 1965) and was Music Director and arranger for *Moonshine Anancy* (LTM 1969), *Rockstone Anancy* (LTM 1970) and *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972), was one of many who "played important behind-the-scene roles in the fledgling recording industry" (O'Brien Chang & Chen 1998: 16). Bradshaw was also very much a part of the 'Big Band' tradition so as composer for Pantomime his music would have had a certain amount of social kudos even as it was trying to capture the spirit of the times. Bandleader, trumpeter, pianist and player of many other instruments, composer, arranger, show producer, music consultant, columnist and historian, Bradshaw was remembered by Paul Methuen as "a good musician who made up humable tunes" (Methuen 2001). As President of the Jamaica Federation of Musicians (1962-1983) and initiator of the Jamaican Hit Parade in 1959, he presented a high-powered figure from the world of popular music very much in tune with contemporary musical trends, but who also represented technical expertise and dependability as musical director of the JBC Orchestra.

The aim of Pantomime - a major business enterprise - rapidly became to connect with the common people, the large audience-in-waiting, which lay beyond the traditional, minority middle class, patrons. To do this, the box office had to tap the extended pool of the respectable working class and then large groups from the country (the peasantry) and the urban poor (the people of the yard previously mentioned in chapter 8). The music of the productions therefore shifted from the more respectable and folksy rhythms of mento to

embrace ska and rocksteady but then moved on to “Shock-black bubble-doun-beat bouncing / rock-wise tumble-doun sound music” (Markham 1989: 262) – the booming bass of dub as described by Linton Kwesi Johnson. Rhythm transmitted the voice of the people and their feelings were expressed in movement.

Industrialisation in the sixties, and the continued rural-urban drift in Jamaica of country people looking for work and a better life in the big city, became major factors in the growth of the urban poor. The new state was expected to provide new solutions for the traditionally disempowered. However, as the nation experienced economic difficulties, the swollen ranks of the poor gave rise “to uneasiness and to grave doubts among the black populace as to the capacity of the two-party system and related self-governing institutions to cope with the Jamaican predicament” (Nettleford 1970: 11). Clifton Segree points out that in 1965, efforts were made to try to ban the radio station RJR from playing the rude-boy song ‘Everything Crash’ by The Ethiopians as the lyrics highlighted an increasing sense of disillusionment that went beyond the rebellious youth to the society as a whole: “Look deh now! Everything crash! Fireman strike, waterman strike, down to the policeman too; wah gone bad a mawning, ca'an come good a evening oh...” (see Segree 12/07/99).

As with ska and rocksteady the western Kingston ghetto discovered reggae first. By the 1970s, the impact of what ordinary people – that is, “the blacks who form the numerical majority but who have retained the status of a cultural minority with the added burden of economic deprivation” (Nettleford 1970: 11) – had to say and were prepared to do began to actively shape the country's social perspective.

Reggae hit the town between 1968 and 1974. Tunes took on “a new rough quality” and rhythmically the electric bass moved into a pivotal position while lyrically “performers addressed their target audience – **the ghetto youth** – as their own kind” (Barrow & Dalton 1997: 53). To sing a hit song became a new route out of the desperate plight of the ghetto, but the path from budding

young singer to superstardom was more of a dream than a reality as the 1973 film *The Harder They Come* (co-scripted by Perry Henzell and Trevor Rhone) so graphically portrayed.

Even so, Jamaican Pantomime always depicts a landscape of hope and in 1971, when the LTM introduced the concept of the reggae industry as a subject fit for the Ward Theatre with Trevor Rhone's script for *Music Boy*, that story had a happy ending. The use of a 45-record as a central symbol on the cover of the Programme Notes highlighted the extent to which popular music was the focus of the show. Boris Gardiner – whose hit 'Elizabethan Reggae' had been No. 14 in the UK pop charts in 1970 – both composed and arranged the music, so the reggae presence would have been a real box office draw. Full of action and excitement, the script depicts the flaws and successes of the Jamaican recording industry and highlights the vulnerability of the young reggae wannabes to the ruthless exploitation of the producers (see Dawes 1977).

The character list includes moneylenders, bailiffs, prisoners, drug-traffickers and police, as well as the proud mother, the victimised youth, and the good people of the yard who are prepared to declare war against the oppressors. With lyrics by Trevor Rhone, David Ogden and Barbara Gloudon, the issues were topical and uncomfortable but the rhythm was sweet. The LTM provided the opportunity for the new beat of the people to sound night after night within the hallowed walls of the Ward Theatre.

Above all else, reggae music was experimental and dynamic and, in acknowledgement of its influence as the voice of the people, a new PNP government under the leadership of Michael Manley rode to victory in the polls of 1972 using Delroy Wilson's 1971 reggae hit 'Better Must Come' as an electoral anthem. Steve Barrow explains that this song's "slow, stop-and-go

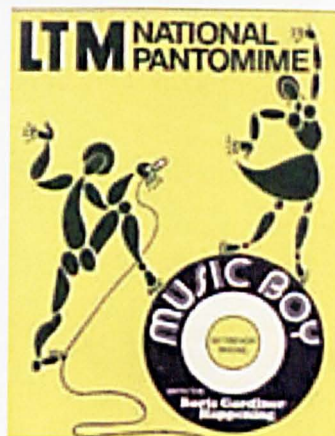
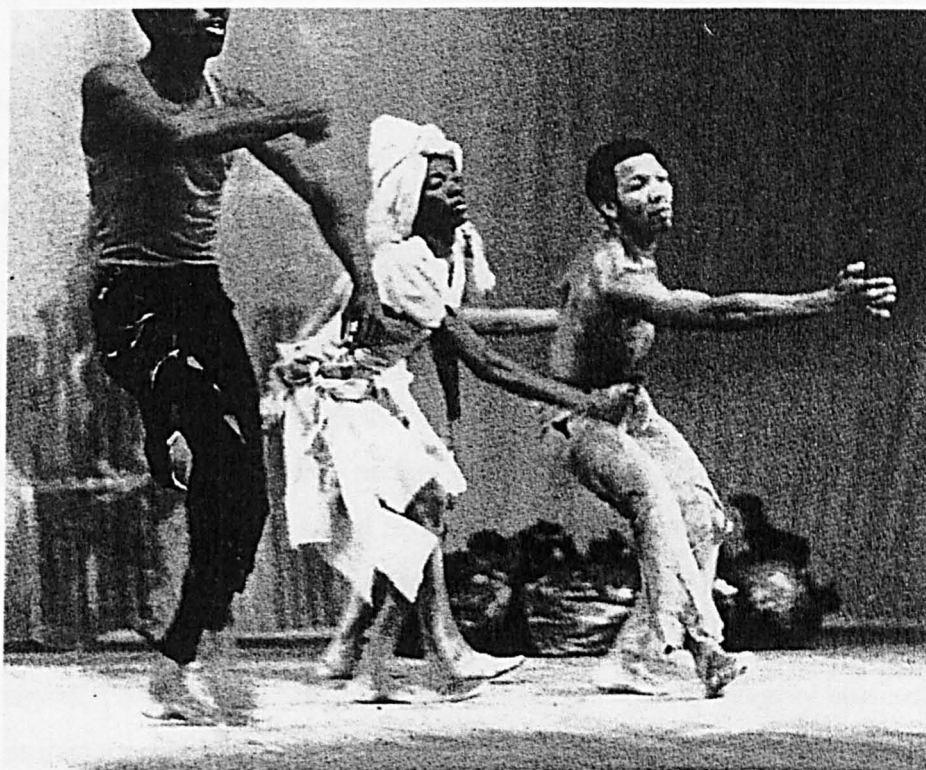


Figure 42: Cover for LTM Programme Notes, *Music Boy* (1971).

rhythm was built to cater for a dance called The John Crow Skank which in turn mirrored perfectly the slow wheeling and abrupt changes of direction displayed by the John Crow bird, omnipresent in Jamaica's skies" (Barrow 1993: 43).

During the summer dance season of 1973, the National Dance Theatre Company had stunned its Little Theatre audience with the premiere of *Street People* in which the ragged protagonists presented their plight to the strains of Desmond Dekker's rude-boy reggae hit 'The Israelites.' This new work by the NDTC's Artistic Director Rex Nettleford featured the poorest of the poor as they woke up to a new day from a night's 'rest' in the city's garbage dump.



Above ... REGGAE TIME — The name of the ballet is "Street People" and it is done to some six classic reggae tunes. The street people are Fitzroy Hunt, Yvonne Ffrench and Jackie Guy. Choreography is by Rex Nettleford. (photo Maria LaYacona)

Figure 43: The NDTC's "Street People" (1973). Photograph from Bari Jonson, "The Entertainers 1973," *Jamaica Journal* 7: 4 (1973: 42).

On reflection, Nettleford's choreographic account seemed to give credence to the unsettlingly prophetic observation made by V S Naipaul's travelogue

when he visited Jamaica in 1961: “Every day I saw the same things - unemployment, ugliness, over-population, race - and every day I heard the same circular arguments. The young intellectuals, whose gifts had been developed to enrich a developing, stable society, talked and talked and became frenzied in their frustration. They were looking for an enemy, and there was none. ... The situation required not a leader but a society which understood itself and had purpose and direction. It was only generating selfishness, cynicism and a self-destructive rage” (Naipaul 1962: 247).

The Pantomime, too, incorporated the presence of the ‘sufferer’ on stage. Apart from the range of humour, which arises from multiple expressions of Anancyism, the intrinsic value of the society’s poorest members was eloquently articulated in movement as Patsy Ricketts, the star of the National Dance Theatre Company, danced the John Crow Skank in a special effects sequence for the 1973 production of *Queenie’s Daughter* (see Figure 48 in Chapter 11).

By incorporating its own allusions to the vulture (*john crow*), to *Street People*, and to island politics, the LTM in Pantomime was merely fulfilling the function of the griot to “wake the town and tell the people” as the 1970 reggae hit by U Roy enjoined the society’s artists to do. Nonetheless, by 1976, political tribalism on the island had given birth to the M-16 wielding gunman and a strategy of fear and the years between 1976 and 1980 were “easily the most chaotic (post-independence) period in Jamaica’s socio-political history” (Wignall 08/05/05). Using a range of history, legend, allegory and social commentary, the LTM used the Pantomime to provide some respite from the political turbulence as other ways of being Jamaican were explored on stage.

Then in 1985, Barbara Gloudon boldly and wittily illustrated the social realities of the aspiring urban poor in the controversial Pantomime script which she called *Trash*. As she acknowledged in the Programme Notes: “Choosing the title took a lot of mad determination. It was especially off-putting to those who don’t know that in the language of today’s Jamaican street

people, *trash* means good, going along with *ready*. So it is true there is a whole lot of garbage around but we know when trash is Trash...even to taking the chance of being accused of having written Trash - at last" (Little Theatre Movement 1985: 5). *Trash* (LTM 1985) picked up elements of the street talk of the time and gave old words new meaning in praise of the worthiness of the ordinary people.

This Pantomime tackled the clash between the cultures of uptown and downtown in the capital city and showed how controversial the language of the people could be as an instrument of social change even in the mid 1980s when Jamaican professional and business interests represented the empowered

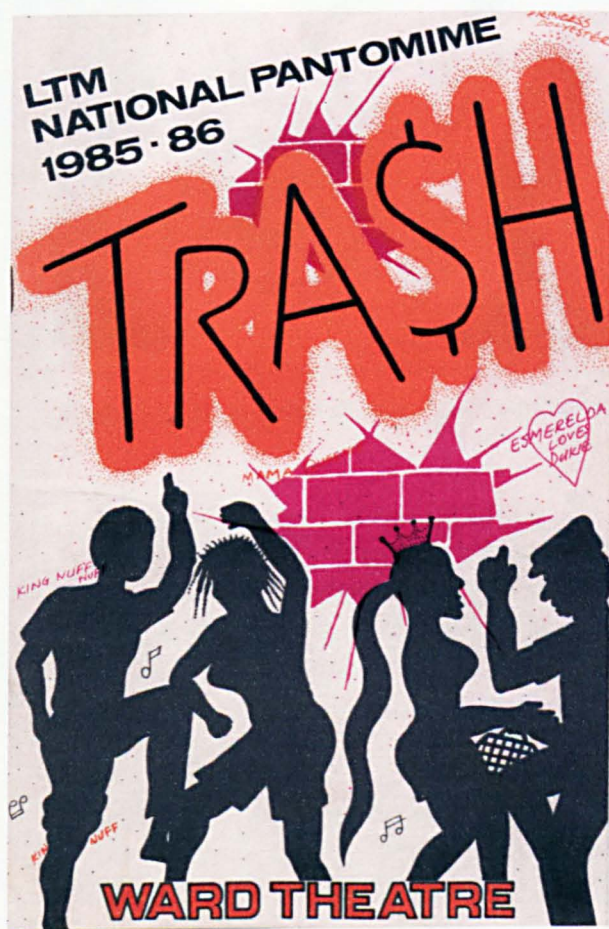


Figure 44: Cover for LTM Programme Notes, *Trash* (1985).

class. As Rex Nettleford pointed out in his reflections on the show: "Oliver Samuels, the talented comedic successor to Ranny Williams, brought to the character of Nuff his impeccable timing and total understanding of the vulgar pis-elegance of the 'just-come'. It was a damning portrayal of the obscenity of sudden and unexpected opulence and it hurt certain spokespersons of the acquisitive middle-strata. The language of the streets, which was used, bothered even more. Yet the people

who speak and create this language for daily communication approved. They loved and understood *Trash*" (Nettleford 1993a: 4).

The strength of character, love of country and resilient optimism, which characterise Gloudon's work are expressed in her lyrics for the song 'Better Beta Come' from that production:

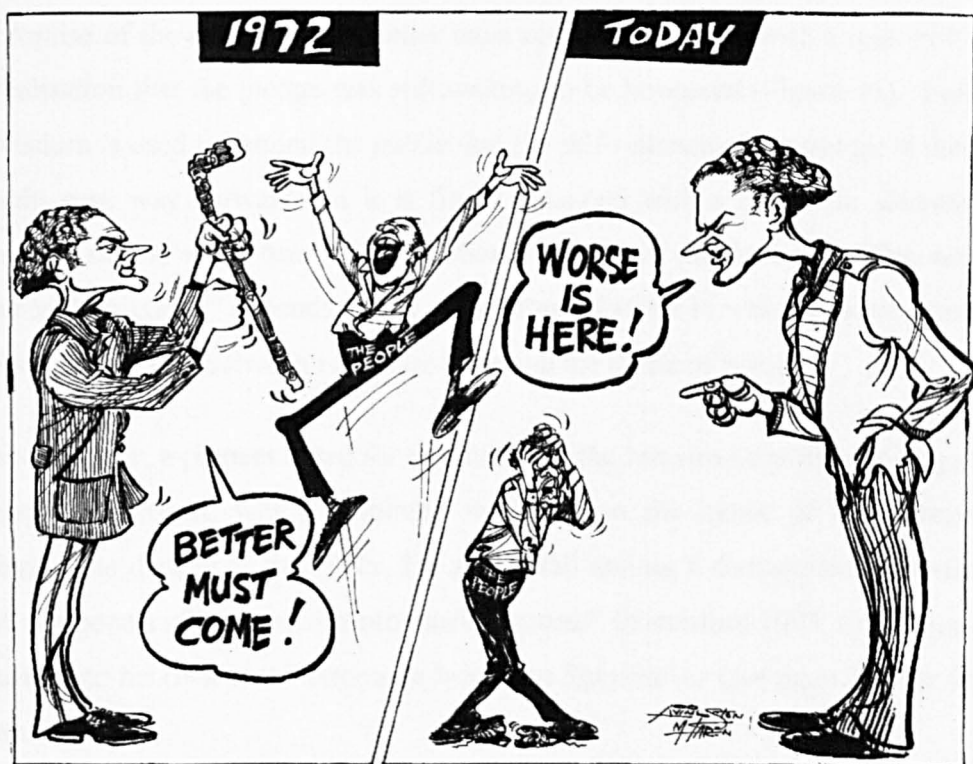


Figure 45: Livingston McLaren. *Selected Editorial Cartoons* (1979).

De more we wuk, de less de money
 De time so hard, we no tink it funny cause
 Taxes dem a ring we dry and prices just a reach de sky.
 Water falling from we eye, better beta come.
 We seh, better beta come.

...
 All de same,
 We really know,
 Is only we can make it grow.
 By the sweat of fi wi brow, we will haffi show dem how:
 Tun yuh han, and mek fashion,
 Ban yuh belly, cut we ration,
 Stan pon crooked, and cut straight.
 Murmur not and meekly wait, better beta come,
 We seh, better beta come.

Folk wisdom is used to remind the public that self-reliance of the people is their only sure way forward.

This ballad is a social lament which pivots around memories of the political promise of the early 1970s, “Better must come” juxtaposed with a mid-1980s realisation that the pledge was still waiting to be honoured (Figure 45). Folk wisdom is used to remind the public that the self-reliance of the people is their only sure way forward but it is finely balanced with a prophetic element, hinged on the word *beta*. The emotional impact of the final line, “We seh, better beta come,” depends totally on the tone of voice in which it is sung and walks a fine line between prophetic hope and the threat of revolt.

Noel Dexter, a pioneer noted for excellence in the Jamaican tradition of staged choral renditions, was a dominant influence on the music of Pantomime during the decade of the 1980s. He stood “tall among a distinguished line-up of composers of integrated panto musical scores” (Nettleford 1993: 6) and also came into his own as a Pantomime lyricist in *Sipplesilver* (see page 250 for an example).

In 1987, Dexter provided the music and some of the lyrics for *King Root* the first LTM Pantomime script written by the successful playwright Balfour Anderson, then National Drama Co-ordinator for the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission. The actor Michael Nicholson, so at ease with the movement vocabulary of the urban young, stole the show in the title role of King Root. With the support of his gang: Cow Itch, Burr-burr, Deadly Nightshade and Macca, this disreputable Ananyesque figure disturbs the tranquillity of the little village of Baramboola before he is unmasked as a son and has to “take his medicine.”

The music for this Pantomime held all the elements of the production together as it applied the notion that “in a sense reggae combines all the previous forms of Jamaican popular music – the ska riff on top of a slowed down rocksteady bass line with a dash of mento influence” (O’Brien Chang & Chen

1998: 43) in a subtext that made the show relevant to all age groups in the audience. As Nettleford noted, “rich musical arrangements by Desmond Jones, formerly of Chalice” were matched with “the return of a Mapletoft-type orchestra under the leadership of Jack Willacy” (Nettleford 1993a: 6). In so doing, the production celebrated the memory of Mapletoft Poulle the composer who produced original music for the first version of *Queenie’s Daughter* (LTM 1963) and whose name (as adapter-arranger and leader of the orchestra) had been synonymous with Pantomime music in the halcyon years between 1955 and 1966.

However, in the final decade of the twentieth century, Pantomime faced the danger of being supplanted by the ever-increasing popularity of the ‘roots’ play, the ribald antics of which were inspired by dancehall music. Balfour Anderson became a leading roots playwright and in an informative conversation with the *Gleaner’s* entertainment journalist Howard Campbell he gave his explanation for the changing tastes of theatre audiences: “There was a time when people looked to the theatre for information and education; entertainment was secondary... Now that trend has shifted” (Campbell 26/12/95). He also added, “We are filling a void to ease the tension” (ibid.). In times of severe economic hardship, Jamaicans were voting with their feet and choosing to soothe their woes by laughing at plays which presented slapstick humour, sexual escapades and the humorous side of life in the ghetto, as opposed to those plays which tackled the serious social issues of the time.

This hedonistic trend set the traditional theatrical community reeling because its fundamental appeal to base instincts seemed at odds with longstanding notions of the theatre as a regenerative agent characterised by aesthetic value, disciplined artistry and a sense of good order. In his article Campbell posed the question “Is Jamaican theatre on the decline?” His answer identified an ironic element in the critical response to the roots play community: some continued to lambaste the productions but others began to “compare their work to that of the pioneering Little Theatre Movement, which is largely

credited with transforming the face of Jamaican theatre from an upper class event to an arena dominated by the average man" (Campbell 26/12/95).

In an article for the *Gleaner* Clifton Segree pointed out, that even at the end of the century the message from the people was to be found in their music and it would bode well for the politicians to start listening, thinking and taking urgent action. He warned, "If they think that the songs of the latter part of the 1960s and 1970s were revolutionary, they should really, really listen to some of the songs that are being listened to by the young people at dancehall sessions and bashments" (Segree 12/07/99). Controversially, the LTM once again opened its cultural doors a little wider to accommodate the developing interests of the urban folk and in 1999, the Pantomime Company made space on the national stage for dancehall, alongside hip-hop and gospel as it tried to deal, in the Pantomime *Bugsie, Millennium Bug*, with a virus "farrin" to both the theatrical and the computer networks of the country.

The development of the people's music in reggae would establish Jamaica's 20th century credentials on the world's cultural stage but by the close of 2004 both the international success of dancehall and the violence of its lyrics prompted the journalist Jean Lowrie-Chin to say: "The chickens have come home to roost - now the internet says we are wholesale producers of 'murder music', not reggae music" (Lowrie-Chin 15/11/04). The dancehall phenomenon merely mirrored a social, political and cultural brutality that had become endemic to society.

Politics in Jamaica is as much about governing within the shores of the island as it is about achieving the goal of placing Jamaica in a central position on the worldmap. By fair means or foul, this West Indian island frequently manages to grab the spotlight in international affairs, whether the issue be high-achieving academic expotees or badly-behaved yardies, Bob Marley becoming a western pop song icon with 'One Love' or Willard White infiltrating the metropole's operatic elite. Reflecting at the end of the 1960s, on the cultural environment of which she was a product, Ivy Baxter

prophesied that “the Jamaican theater when ultimately developed, will be a cultural entity in which not only will the actors be trained in the understanding and appreciation of world theater and performance and production skill in the theater craft, but the content of the plays provided by Jamaican playwrights will have something significant to say to a world audience as well as to the Jamaican audience” (Baxter 1970: 285).

The National Anthem alludes to the Bible (Proverbs 29: 18) and prays, “give us vision lest we perish.” In a speech entitled “National culture and the artist” delivered on 20 January 1939, Norman Washington Manley recognised the value of that creative insight which could help the politician to extract the national ethos from the collective experience of the people. He said, “National culture is national consciousness reflected in the painting of pictures of our own mountains and our own womenfolk, in building those houses that are most suitable for us to live in, in writing plays of our adventures and poetry of our wisdom, finding ourselves in the wrestle with our own problems” (Nettleford 1971: 108).

The Little Theatre Movement has been a consistently valuable participant and even catalyst in the realm of cultural politics in the New Jamaica. In the current climate of social crisis the consequences of abandoning the dialogue between the Arts and political development in Jamaica would be as dire as the situation described by Linton Kwesi Johnson in “Five Nights of Bleeding”:

the rhythm just bubbling and back firing,
raging and rising, when suddenly the music cut:
steel blade drinking blood in darkness.
it's war amongst the rebels;
madness, madness, war.

(Markham 1989: 265)

Now more than ever, in the light of this culture of violence, it is imperative that the LTM Pantomime remains a key player in the national discourse.

Jamaica's long night of the soul has lasted a generation (30 years) but eventually in August 2004, a sense that better could actually be coming began to be reflected in thinking coming out of the traditional middle class. Jean Lowrie-Chin, columnist for the *Jamaica Observer*, comments on this hint of hopefulness in a mixture of whimsy and lyrical anticipation: "Over the past months, from the seeming cacophony of national chatter, I have picked out Emancipation's voice singing a less mournful song. She is supported by a strong orchestra: a squeaky-clean electoral system, a purposeful private sector that will no longer allow its investment environment to be eroded, a probing press, a resolute security force, a recovering economy and, best of all, a promising slate of political candidates in both of our major political parties" (Lowrie-Chin 03/08/04). Maybe she should think about producing a script for *Pantomime*.

CHAPTER 11

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DANCE

The core concept of this chapter is the contribution of the LTM to the development of movement as a refined and resilient protection system for ancestral memory. The staged celebration of activity in the cane-piece or the ballroom, on board the banana boat or pirate ship, by the rustic riverside or within the inner-city slum, has captured a delight in the island's patterns of movement which lends itself to self-definition in the context of performance. It could even be argued that the quality of the inbuilt dance component within the context of any LTM Pantomime production is decisive in measuring the level of audience satisfaction. As Wycliffe Bennett concluded when speaking of the professionalism of *Banana Boy* (LTM 1961): "It is the dance that makes musicals move" (Bennett 05/08/62).

The choice of Hazel Johnston – "famous and beloved" (Fowler 14/12/75) dance teacher in Kingston – to choreograph and design the costumes for the LTM's first attempt at a Jamaican Pantomime in 1941, was as symbolically significant an act as was the decision to make Carl Abrahams the designer for the set (see Chapter 6). She was the daughter of Charles E Johnston, "one of the first colored Jamaicans to have a share in the shipping interest associated with the [banana export] trade" (Baxter 1970: 288). As was normal for the period, she went to England to study ballet and teaching methods. Returning to Jamaica in 1937 as a fully qualified teacher, she tried to start her own dance school but had trouble finding a hall to rent and had to use a friend's drawing room: "at that time it was very difficult for a colored person to enter preserves formerly held by the white world. ... Later she constructed her own studio, the first teacher of dance in Jamaica to do so" (Baxter 1970: 289). Recognizing the spontaneity and the natural aptitude for dance of the Jamaican

people, Hazel Johnston could discern that there was an indigenous movement pattern wrapped in the folk culture of the people but found it elusive because of the detachment of her class from such 'roots'. Nonetheless, she strove to apply her training in the European ballet tradition in analysing the elements of technique, which could be used to formulate a local style. This enterprise was cut short by her untimely death in 1944 but Johnson's insight into the validity of Jamaican movement patterns would come to fruition in the work of her student Ivy Baxter, who also became the driving force behind the development of a dance theatre style in the LTM Pantomime and in the formation of her own amateur dance company.

Baxter describes the challenge ahead of her when she started her life's work in the mid-1940s: "When I began, I asked of many people and was told that there were no Jamaican dances, no, not one, just a little "shay shay" and "bram" on a Saturday night. ... I had not seen Pocomania, which is now the most viewed of all the branches of religious dance. I had seen quadrille once or twice" (Baxter 1970: 297). Baxter actively pursued the development of a Jamaican dance vocabulary by observing folk forms and the way people moved in the pursuit of work and everyday activity. Sensitivity to the importance of rhythm, texture and colour, and a deep personal relationship with her island environment, were all combined with the desire to acquire as broad an understanding of dance technique as possible and specific training in dance education.

During the 1950s, Ivy Baxter took over from Anatoly Soohih (who worked in the Russian ballet tradition) as the main creative influence on the choreography of the LTM Pantomime. She was the listed choreographer for *Aladdin* (1952) and *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (1954); she shared responsibility for the dance in *Anancy and Pandora* (1955); and she had already influenced *Busha Bluebeard* (1957), which was a revival of *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (1949). In this seminal production, she provided proof of the exciting possibilities of Jamaican creative dance as early as 1949. She

choreographed and performed in the ‘Dance of the Weird Creatures’ (Figure 46) which was, as she recalled, “one of the most effective ever done in this type of show” (Baxter 1970: 262). Vaz described Baxter’s contribution to the Garden of Weeds fantasy scene in *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* as “an outstanding and valid piece of imaginative work which literally burst on to the scene through a back cave entrance” (cited in Nettleford 24/01/88).

The Ivy Baxter Dance Group had its first recital at the university’s Extra Mural centre on Brentford Road in Kingston in 1950. The last number in the show was “one long ballet with Jamaican flavour, called *Passing Parade* ... [which] reflected one day in the life of the policeman who directed traffic ...



Figure 46: Ivy Baxter, Spirit of the Weed in *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (1949). Picture from Rex Nettleford, “Staging the Pantomime,” *Sunday Gleaner*, January 17, 1988.

from morning until evening, and also reproduced the frenzied dream of the tired “Corpie” (ibid.). By the 1970s, Baxter’s place as a pioneer in the development of Caribbean dance was assured because she successfully managed to root the Jamaican experience in a dance theatre form, which in turn became a wellspring for the celebration of a Jamaican vocabulary of movement both at home and abroad during the second half of the twentieth century.

Returning, after a successful international debut at the Caribbean Arts Festival in Puerto Rico in 1952, “the Baxter Dance Group gave its first show at the Ward Theatre. The Jamaican folk ballet had its beginning for local audiences” (Baxter 1970: 304). Rex Nettleford joined the

Baxter Group in 1952 “performing the Limbo as a solo in its first Ward Theatre showing” (Baxter 1970: 311). Eddy Thomas, who had seen Baxter at work as he danced in the chorus of the 1952 Pantomime *Aladdin*, also asked to join her Group.

In 1954, she was also responsible for the first major expression of Jamaican dance theatre, *Creations in Dance*, which ran for five nights to full houses at the Ward Theatre and was considered by Cynthia Wilmot to be “the most interesting show of the year” (cited in Baxter 1970: 306). Success at the Ward provided new opportunities for the dance company: it attracted many new members and she “was able to rent a studio on the Caledonia Crescent on the lower floor of the center used on Sundays for silent worship by the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Jamaica. It was from this place of contrasts in sound and silence that new dances were created for pantomimes, for the military tattoo celebrating the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second, and for the Bandwagon shows” (Baxter 1970: 305).

Beryl McBurnie, the Trinidadian pioneering “arranger of folk dances” (Baxter 1970: 316), had assisted Baxter by giving her quite a bit of Caribbean material before The Ivy Baxter Dance Group was formed. However, when Beryl McBurnie’s Little Carib Theatre Company from Trinidad visited Jamaica in 1956, Lavinia Williams (herself a significant influence on the development of Jamaican dance through summer schools hosted by the university) expressed the opinion that Baxter’s achievement in dance had surpassed that of her mentor.

What made the difference was that Ivy Baxter began to improvise. Realising the limitations of her source material, which consisted “largely of folk songs and rhythms” (Baxter & Morrison 1958), she used this merely as a starting point for her own creative endeavours. Her choreography was a creative mixture of visionary insight and expediency. To use her words she ‘played around’ with the folk forms instead of merely copying them. Consequently, according to Cynthia Wilmot’s *Pepperpot* review in 1954, “by utilizing folk

themes, and hammering this raw material into shape on the anvil of theatricalism, she managed to create something new and vital in the theatrical world” (cited in Baxter 1970: 306).

Eddy Thomas became a key player in the *Creations in Dance* show at the Ward Theatre in 1954. Not only was he a powerful dance performer, but also he was able to use his own musicality to assist Baxter in the development of new works. As Ivy Baxter put it, “The talents of Eddy Thomas lay in musical composition and art design long before he learned dance and choreography. Thomas played by ear and was a natural composer in the requirements of creative dance, which, ideally, requires music composed at the same time as the dance is created” (Baxter 1970: 305).

As a consequence of seeing Eddy Thomas perform with the Baxter Group, Greta Fowler, scriptwriter for *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (LTM 1954) “wrote a leading part” (Fowler 1968: 3) to harness his dance talent within the context of that Pantomime. Choreographed by Baxter, Thomas played the part of Dummy, the mute dancing friend of the Princess Alamanda and it is said that, in Zazamaica, the kingdom of Wood and Water, “when Dummy danced it made the princess so happy that her eyes shone like ackee seeds” (Anon. 07/12/54). From the critical response in the *Gleaner* and subsequent reminiscences by fellow performers (like Charles Hyatt) of Thomas’s dancing prowess in that production, it would seem that the audience’s eyes shone as brightly.

Ivy Baxter was also seriously committed to her professional role as a dance educator. In the development of her ideas, she inspired an ensemble of young dancers of such extraordinary quality that many of them would become pivotal figures in the world of dance both at home and abroad. Individuals who were at one time part of the Baxter fold include: Clive Thompson (probably Jamaica’s most famous dancer), Garth Fagan (choreographer for *The Lion King*), Eddy Thomas and Rex Nettleford (key figures, in tandem, in the development of the Pantomime, and co-founders of the National Dance

Theatre Company of Jamaica in 1962), Alma (Hylton) MockYen (actress, radio broadcaster, teacher and founder of her own dance company), Ronan Critchlow (Baxter lead dancer turned NDTC founding member and master drummer); Joyce Campbell (Dance Officer for the Social Development Commission), Monica McGowan, and Audley Butler – all founding members of the National Dance Theatre Company.

In 1956, Eyrick Darby who had recently returned after being on summer scholarship to Jacob's Pillow, Ted Shawn's university of the dance in Massachusetts, was invited to choreograph for the LTM Pantomime. He "had been a dancer and a choreographer at the Tower Isle hotel on the north coast for many years" (Baxter 1970: 307) and was considered by Baxter to be a man of "great choreographic and dance talent" (ibid.). Darby had also been the choreographer for the second major show by the Baxter Group. Apart from solo work, he was given responsibility for the ensemble dance in *Anancy and Beeny Bud* (LTM 1956) a Pantomime that "was completely Jamaican in theme" says Baxter. She added, "and this tradition was consolidated by *Jamaica Way*, *Quashie Lady*, and *Queenie's Daughter*" (Baxter 1970: 263-264).

By 1958, Eddy Thomas was training the dancers, designing the costumes, helping to write music and lyrics as well as being the choreographer for the LTM Pantomime. The production was Ranny Williams's script *Quashie Lady* (LTM 1958). His efforts paid off for the leading theatre critic identified the "costumes and general stage movement" (Milner 03/01/59) as being highlights of the show. Despite having his own Dance Workshop, Eddy Thomas continued to be a close associate of Ivy Baxter in the development of creative dance in Jamaica until he and Clive Thompson went on scholarship to New York in 1960 as the first Jamaicans to study at the Martha Graham School. Before going, he wrote the music for and helped to mount the Baxter Group's Tenth Anniversary Show, *Once Upon a Seaweed* in June 1960.

Rex Nettleford, who would become a pivotal influence in the Jamaican dance world, also participated as a dancer in the chorus for *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* (LTM 1954) before leaving the island to take up a Rhodes scholarship to study politics at Oxford. Back home in 1959, he returned to the LTM fold as a leading figure. How this all happened is recounted in the Programme Notes for *Sipplesilver* (LTM 1984) under the title, "Choreography: Trends in Pantomime." (This extract is from a much longer article on staging the Pantomime written by Rex Nettleford which was published in the *Sunday Gleaner* of January 17, 1988):

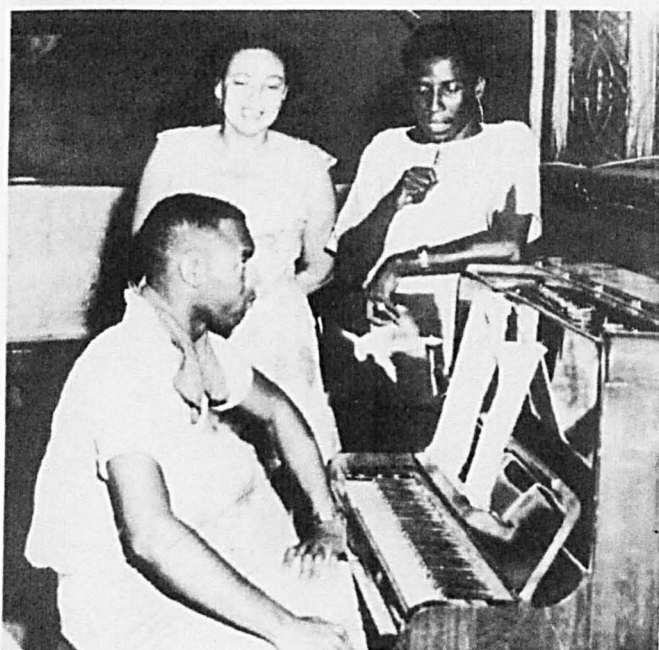
In 1959 Rex Nettleford returned from Oxford with two years of solid experience in dance-creation for musicals and revues in Oxford, at the Edinburgh Festival and at Henley-on-Thames. Henry and Greta Fowler (on holiday in Oxford in the summer of 1959) caught sight of Nettleford and of his choreography in Aristophanes – "The Birds" updated into a rock musical with the music by Dudley Moore (now of movie fame).

Greta then and there pressed Nettleford into service since he was planning to return home in a matter of months. He was to take over the choreography of that year's Pantomime "Jamaica Way" with Eddy Thomas and Glenna Brydon in the young lovers' lead and Robin Midgeley (of the JBC) directing. The young group of dancers (largely from Thomas's Workshop) worked as an integral part of the Pantomime cast.

The dance started to advance the plot rather than appear as set pieces fitted in. In its wake came "Carib Gold" attracting more of Thomas' dancers and ones from the Ivy Baxter Dance Group as well as Yvonne DaCosta and Pansy Hassan from Faye Simpson's. Noelle Hill Chutkan (also from Simpson's) had long been in Pantomimes. Louise Bennett and Nettleford co-directed and Nettleford choreographed. There was much dance – some felt too much. The Guyanese tale (about porkknockers or gold miners) pleased but did not excite audiences.

It was not until 1961 with "Banana Boy" which Nettleford both directed and choreographed that the dance made the musical move, in what was then regarded as the "integrated musical" style. Many of the dancers involved were to form the nucleus of the NDTC – Barbara Requa (then Grant), Pansy Hassan (then Silvera), Yvonne DaCosta, Gertrude Sherwood, Bert Rose, Audley Butler. (Nettleford 1984: 10)

Described in a pre-production press release as an “exciting, dancing and musical romance ... choreographed by Rex Nettleford and Eddie Thomas” (Anon. 09/12/59), *Jamaica Way* lived up to its promise and an unidentified critic observed, it “may well go down in history as the dancing pantomime ... thanks to the teamwork of Eddie Thomas and Rex Nettleford” (Anon. 07/02/60).



Eddy Thomas (seated at piano), Ivy Baxter, and Rex Nettleford, discussing the score for *Once upon a Seaweed*, a musical with book by Alma Mock Yen and music by Thomas. Noel Vaz directed and Baxter and Nettleford choreographed. The picture was taken in 1960, two years before the Company's founding. (*Daily Gleaner*)

Figure 47: Ivy Baxter, Rex Nettleford and Eddy Thomas discuss the score for *Once Upon a Seaweed*, a Jamaican musical by Alma MockYen. Photograph from Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica* (1985: 32)

Once Upon a Seaweed (Baxter Group 1960) was a very well-received Jamaican musical with book and lyrics by Alma MockYen, music by Eddy Thomas and choreography by Ivy Baxter and Alma MockYen. Rex Nettleford assisted the director Noel Vaz. In reviewing Nettleford's chronicle *Dance Jamaica* (1985) and with particular reference to the photograph reproduced in Figure 47, Kamau Brathwaite referred to Baxter, Nettleford and Thomas – “the three at the piano” – as “maroons” (Brathwaite 1986: 50; see also Nettleford 1985: 14, 19) in the sense that together they formed a type of cultural resistance that changed the *status quo*. It is not surprising then that when both Baxter and Thomas went abroad to study they left their respective

companies under the supervision of Nettleford for the two years of their absence. At that point, Ivy Baxter's direct involvement with the LTM Pantomime ceased but her work with The Ivy Baxter Dance Group continued.

Carib Gold (LTM 1960) was the first Pantomime that was choreographed solely by Rex Nettleford who was also co-director with Louise Bennett. He had at his disposal a wide range of talent consisting of dancers from the teams that had traditionally presented rival styles of dance in previous Pantomime productions: "the Eddie Thomas Troupe, Ivy Baxter's Group, and the Fay Simpson and Madame Soohih Schools" (Barrett 08/11/60). *Carib Gold* presented an added challenge for the choreographer because with neither Eddy Thomas nor Clive Thompson, the production was "marked by the absence of a definite lead dancer" (Barrett 08/11/60). Nonetheless, Nettleford used this as an opportunity to innovate and compensated by "introducing a series of small group moves" (Barrett 08/11/60).

The centrality of Nettleford's contribution and the idea of new strategies for the dance, constituted a selling point for the production and a steep learning curve for him. As he put it, "Our pantomime, *Carib Gold*, didn't quite succeed" (Nettleford in Edgecombe 1996) but it paved the way for the success that would follow: "... the next year, *Banana Boy* was a real breakthrough. It made a lot of money. I directed and choreographed it and the entire musical score was composed locally by Carlos Malcolm. The thing just took off; it provided a vehicle for all the major dancers, from whatever studio, modern, folk, whatever, to come together. And I was convinced that there was something there" (ibid.). It is important to note that many of the NDTC's founding members came from that group of dancers and so too did a number of choreographers for other Pantomimes in the future.

By the end of 1963, "the matrix for dance on a national level [*had*] been made" (Baxter 1970: 313). When Eddy Thomas returned to Jamaica in 1962, he and Rex Nettleford co-ordinated the dance show *Roots and Rhythms*, which was mounted by the government in August of that year as part of the

Independence celebrations. He also applied his newly acquired Broadway experience to good effect as choreographer for *Finian's Rainbow* (LTM 1962), and towards the end of the year, his training in the Graham technique proved to be an invaluable asset for the newly formed National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC) which emerged alongside the Baxter Group, the Eddy Thomas Dance Workshop and the Alma MockYen company of dancers in Harbour View. Within five years, the NDTC, co-founded by Rex Nettleford and Eddy Thomas in 1962, became the leading dance company in Jamaica.

According to the Programme for *Sipplesilver*, "Between 1962 and 1970, dance figured much and choreography in Pantomimes gained increased popularity. Nettleford acted as an in-house consultant choreographer to the LTM [and] Greta Fowler, as President of LTM sat on the NDTC Management Committee" (Little Theatre Movement 1984: 10). Eddy Thomas then continued as a designer for Pantomime until 1964 but then his involvement ceased. Rex Nettleford, who was choreographer in 1964, directed *Morgan's Dream* (with choreography by Neville Black) in 1965. In the 1966 revival of *Queenie's Daughter*, Sheila Barnett resumed responsibility for the choreography she had done for the 1963 original and then she handed back responsibility for the dance in the 1967 and 1968 productions to Nettleford.

Dancers from the national dance company were to be a mainstay for the LTM Pantomime chorus for at least two decades and in turn, the NDTC's tradition of dedication and vision in dance found further scope for experimentation and training as dance practitioners built a wider audience for creative dance within the LTM Pantomime context.

In 1967 Eddy Thomas left the NDTC "to concentrate fully on his own school, the Eddy Thomas Dance Workshop, leaving Rex Nettleford as the sole director.... [and] the facilities of the Eddy Thomas Dance Workshop, where many Company members had taught and which had served as a primary source of new recruits, were no longer available" (Nettleford 1985: 69) to the Nettleford-led enterprise. So, in 1970 the Jamaica School of Dance (under the

direction of Sheila Barnett and Barbara Requa) was formed to provide the training necessary for joining the NDTC. Most members of the NDTC would have at that time done at least one – and in many cases more than one – Pantomime. It was also paid work, so for those having hard times, it was a source of income, but above all, the Pantomime season was considered to be a unique opportunity for a dancer in training because of the endurance that it required. Sandra Phillips, reminisces on her experience as a dancer in *Twelve Million Dollar Man* (LTM 1977) at a time when she was a member of the School of Dance Workshop and supporting dancer for the NDTC:

It was a very testing time because you had to be at the theatre by 6 pm for an 8 o'clock show on the weekdays, and you would not leave the theatre until about 11 pm. ... The dancers' role is to enhance the performance, to lift it, to create excitement – physical excitement, to make the people say 'Wow!' – and that has to be done night after night. It teaches you that the performance comes first and anything else is secondary. You danced whether you were sick or healthy. There were no excuses in those days (Phillips 2002).

She then compared that to the 2002 NDTC season in which she had been invited to be a guest performer and she noted with a wry smile that from time to time some dancers were not available to perform “because they were feeling a little fluey” (ibid.).

The Pantomime unapologetically had stars with their own dressing rooms, which distinguished them from the chorus in a very stratified hierarchy. Nonetheless the dancers existed as a strand that operated as a technical team outside this framework: they had their own ‘Dancers’ dressing room. As performers they were meant to be faceless but once on stage the dance-work was a source of considerable excitement for the audience. As Sandra Phillips explains, their job was to become almost a mobile part of the set: “Being a dancer in Pantomime means that you are the character of whatever scene you are trying to enhance at the time. You are like a chameleon. But Jamaica is such a small society and the dancers are so well known individually by the theatre community, that even though technically you are faceless, you are

recognized for who you are” (Phillips 2002). In this way the Pantomime stage proved to be a very good way of building up an audience for the NDTC’s season of dance which would start in July each year: “A lot of converts to dance would have come initially from watching Pantomime and would have had their interest piqued by watching choreography or dance that they had seen, in particular by dancers that they had seen and wanted to see again” (Phillips 2002).

With the advent of Barbara Gloudon as a scriptwriter, Thomas returned to high-powered involvement with Pantomime as the director, composer and costume designer for *Moonshine Anancy* (LTM 1969) and then as Artistic Director for her second National Pantomime *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) in which he also designed costumes, choreographed, trained the dancers and composed the music for all 20 songs. In 1973, Thomas was again Artistic Director (which involved sets, costumes and dance) for the triumphant second revival of the much-celebrated LTM classic *Queenie’s Daughter*.

No single individual has personified the LTM’s vision of drama as the art where all arts meet more than Eddy Thomas. At various points across three formative decades of the National Pantomime tradition his multifaceted contribution – as dancer, choreographer, dance trainer, costume designer and musical composer – contributed to some of the LTM’s greatest successes.

Barbara Gloudon took over as Chairman of the LTM from Greta Fowler in 1978. The following year, for what would turn out to be Ranny Williams’s last Pantomime season too, Eddy Thomas made one further brief appearance as artistic consultant, in association with the director Rooney Chambers, for *The Hon All Purpus* (LTM 1979), the dance for which was choreographed by Patsy Ricketts.

By the 1970s and in large part due to the success of the National Dance Theatre Company, the Jamaican dance world had come of age. In terms of designing movement vocabulary, patterns and style for a work, Rex Nettleford

points out that his attitude to dance in Pantomime “shifted significantly in *Dickance for Fippance* (Gloria Lannaman's tribute to 1938)” (Nettleford 1993a: 9). In this Pantomime, he arranged the movement for musical numbers, which were also very contemporary in their feel because Harold Butler (pianist, songwriter, singer and producer of many hit songs in the 1970s and 80s) did the arrangements for Lannaman’s songs. For the first time in the LTM Pantomime, there would be no set dance pieces, but “by emphasizing the staging of musical numbers [*and*] working for the overall movement effect of the entire production” (Nettleford 1984: 10), the ‘choreographer’ developed a new sense of integrated movement. The box office success of *Dickance for Fippance* (LTM 1974), written by Gloria Lannaman, showed how much the public appreciated a Pantomime that was willing to tackle the telling of controversial history through a well-crafted, funny, dynamic and musical story.

Nettleford’s commitment to the distinction between the staging of musical numbers and choreography in the Pantomime was reiterated in articles he wrote for the *Gleaner* in 1988 and the *Jamaica Journal* in 1993. It is not that specific dance items were no longer included. He staged the movement for both Gloudon’s *The Witch* (LTM 1975) and Lannaman’s *Brashana O!* (LTM 1976), and points out that the dance of the cat (by Patsy Ricketts and Joan McLeod) in the former “was a choreographed piece as was the dance of the Rolling Calf” by Michael Binns in the latter (Nettleford 1984:11). In these cases, however, the choreographed dance was part of the special effects, a technique that really garnered praise with the use of the John Crow skank in the third version of *Queenie’s Daughter* (1973), choreography by Eddy Thomas.

The movement of the ghetto was given full rein on the Pantomime stage through the extraordinary versatility and plasticity of the NDTC’s leading female dancer, Patsy Ricketts. As Dermott Hussey explained about the musical beat to which she danced: “The dub now is just the bare bones, the

rhythm played, bass line of course over-emphasised. And it is just naked dance rhythm" (cited in Hebdige 1987: 83). Completely rooted within the austere reality of the poor, her performance was breathtakingly beautiful as skeletal severity was tempered by the smoothness of a body caressing the slow beat of the bass. As the ripple of photographic exposure through a strobe light illustrates (Figure 48), time and cadence are interwoven in patterns so intricate that they imitate the movement of water as it engages with land. This is the form, the pattern, the style which gives meaning – beyond the scope of words – to experience so that doing things "in a certain kind of



Figure 48: Patsy Ricketts performing the 'John Crow Skank' in *Queenie's Daughter* (1973). Photograph by Owen Minott.

way" (Benítez-Rojo) can transcend suffering. Tempo reflects mood and the regularity of the reggae bass riff acts as an emotional anchor, a sense of control even in the midst of social crisis.

Between *Johnny Reggae* in 1978 and *Ginneral B* in 1983, young choreographers of calibre and leading dancers with the NDTC – Jackie Guy, Patsy Ricketts and Tony Wilson – were given a chance to put their own stamp on movement in the Pantomime. From his first Pantomime as choreographer in 1971, Jackie Guy's expertise in "drawing on the new movement vocabulary

of the urban young” (Nettleford 1984: 11) proved to be a welcome addition to the Pantomime experience.

In 1984, Rex Nettleford picked up the reins again as choreographer for *Sipplesilver* and after that the emphasis shifted away from choreography to integrated movement. The Africanization of the LTM Pantomime tradition was particularly emphasised in the 1998 production *Anansi Web* which was specifically a celebration of the Ghanaian origins of Anansi. Consequently, as Greta Fowler did with the dancer in 1954, a drummer was “woven into the plot” (Anon. 16/12/98) and the show opened to the dance beat of Kumina.

Bugsie, Millennium Bug (1999) rather controversially brought dancehall in its authentic form on to the Pantomime stage. Barbara Gloudon revelled in the authenticity of her musical being a very “now show” and incorporated a track from one of the leading exponents of the dancehall sound, the Shocking Vibes Crew. She explained, “We added a little touch of dancehall because it’s the people’s sound. It’s important that we show people that Pantomime is not a static, old people thing” (Anon. 22/12/99). Such a contentious statement would have needed qualification because the lyrics of dancehall were then, very much as they are now, an ambivalent cultural space: it was strictly adult entertainment. The LTM’s promotional interview tried to offset this kind of concern by also mentioning that “hip-hop (Bugsy’s choice of sound) and gospel” (Anon. 22/12/99) were also part of the musical package of the show. In fact, the producers were signalling that the dance might be sensational but the lyrics would not cause undue offence.

Within the context of Jamaican culture, rhythm is a sophisticated and very effective system of communication. Paradoxically, dancehall has its roots firmly planted in the music of Revivalism and the movement of Bruckins, the celebratory performance of 1839 that marked the anniversary of Emancipation.

According to the choreographer, L'Antoinette Stines (who did additional choreography for the LTM's *Mandeya* in 1991): "Bruckins was created because the Africans wanted to celebrate the emancipation of slavery...the whole experience was like the beginning of dancehall" (cited in Walters 02/03/03).

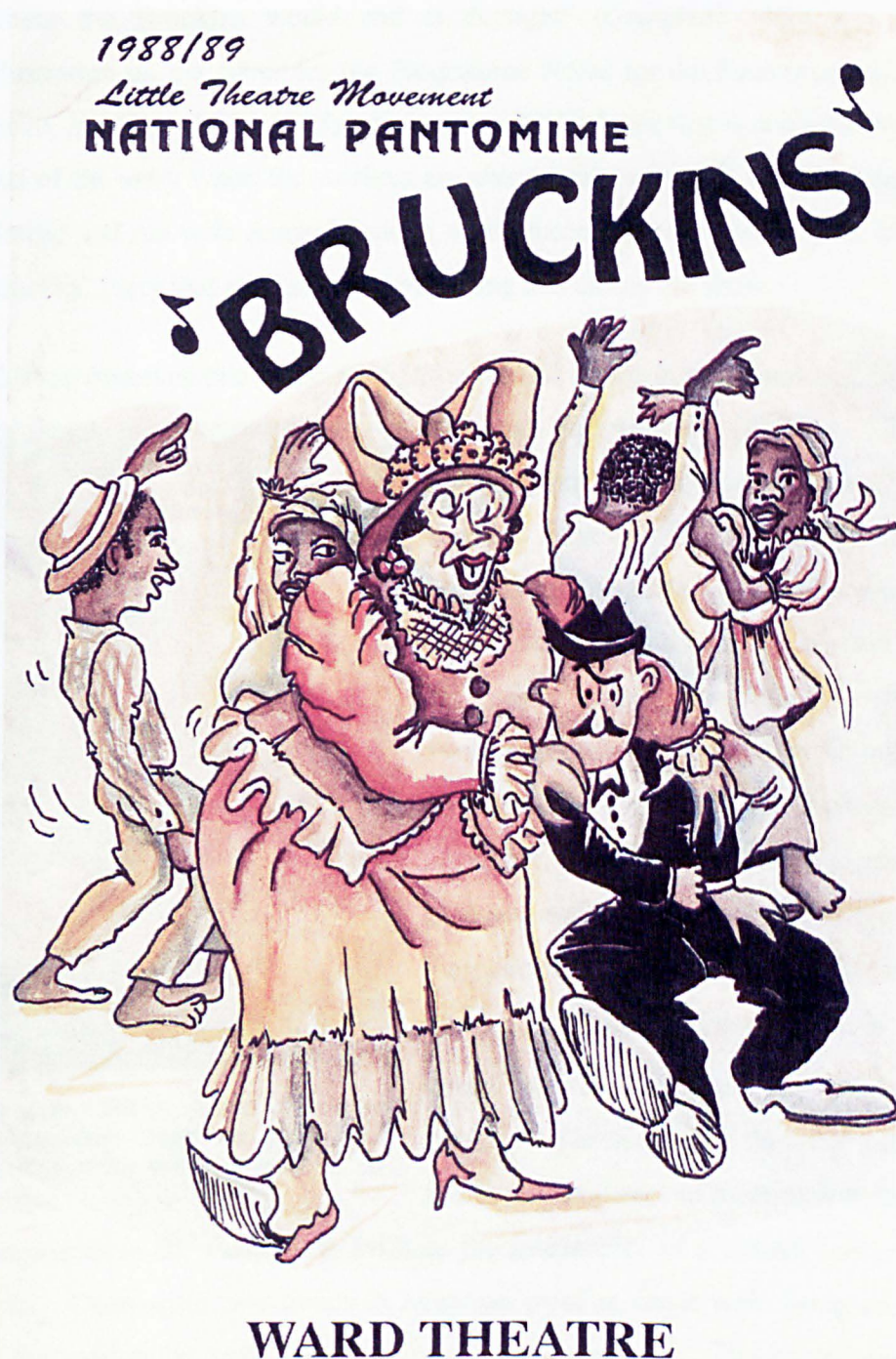


Figure 49: The cover for the Programme Notes for *Bruckins* (LTM 1988) which depicts Squire Hardie and his wife Amanda joining in the bruckins that closes the show even as Queen Victoria literally crashes the party and joins in too.

Memory of ancestors who expressed their joy at being fully free in the post-Emancipation celebratory dance referred to as Bruckin' Party was tapped by the LTM along the way in the 1988 Pantomime which used that traditional dance form as a device for framing the action: "A Bruckin' Party would start at night in one yard, then they would march on the streets to another yard where the Bruckins would end at daylight" (Campbell 2000: 8.) The illustration on the cover for the Programme Notes for the Pantomime of that name, *Bruckins* (LTM 1988), presents a unity in dance that is achieved by the end of the story when the workers are able to celebrate 'full free' and Squire Hardie and his wife Amanda, along with Queen Victoria herself, join in the Bruckin' Party that marks the happy ending and closes the show.

Phillips observes that since 1985, "the role of dance is much reduced in the modern Pantomime" (Phillips 2002),

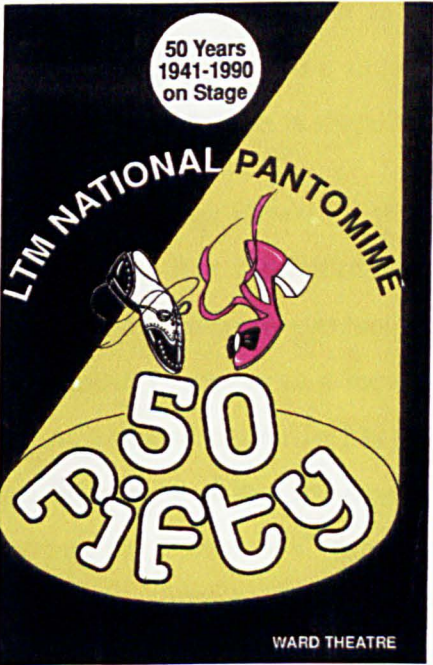


Figure 50: Cover for the Programme Notes for *Fifty Fifty* (LTM 1990) with the spotlight on dance.

which might seem ironic in light of the success achieved in building a large community of dance *aficionados* among the Pantomime audience and beyond. By the time the star-system within Pantomime was abandoned in favour of more collective model of The Pantomime Company, much of the technical expertise in dance was no longer available for the long performance season (as professional dancers had other commitments in the dance world or the entertainment industry). Consequently, the LTM had to tackle the challenge of meeting the dance

component in the Pantomime without the availability of a trained '*corps de ballet*'. Once again new trends in Jamaican creative dance were being driven by the tension between visionary insight and expediency. The choreography had to be able to fit into what the actors and singers could handle, and Rex

Nettleford led the way in helping the Company rise to this challenge. Indeed, the spotlight on dancing shoes on the cover for the Programme for the LTM's fiftieth anniversary production *Fifty Fifty* (1990) highlights the extent to which dance was seen as "one of the most vital ingredients in the Pantomime formula" (Little Theatre Movement 1990:5).

Carmen Tipling, co-scriptwriter for *Bruckins* (LTM 1988) has spoken of Rex Nettleford's extraordinary ability to "make a Pantomime shine" (Tipling 2003) in two sessions added on to the work already done with the cast by the dance captain. She saw this happen for the Tipling & Dwyer script *Bruckins* (LTM 1988) and would have liked him to do the same for *Arawak Gold*, the independent Pantomime produced by Tipling & Dwyer in 1991. Since the mid-1980s although younger choreographers have been given the opportunity to make their contribution to dance in the Pantomime, the talent of Rex Nettleford has remained a singularly consistent influence on how movement, as an integrated force, is shaped within the production.

In 1990, George Howard – a graduate of the Jamaica School of Dance – worked with Rex Nettleford as they arranged and shaded the movement for the LTM's anniversary production *Fifty Fifty*. Howard's involvement with the Pantomime Company as a member of the cast began with *Schoolers* in 1989 and as a trained dancer he has provided fresh insight into the way movement can be integrated into the development of character. By 1992, Howard had become the Company's "dance captain and resident comic" (Little Theatre Movement 1992: 12) and in 1993 he alternated the titular role of Bredda Anansi with Michael Nicholson, a graduate of the Jamaica School of Drama who was in his ninth LTM Pantomime. In the 60th anniversary production, *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000), Howard's talent in blending comedy and movement was employed in a very distinct, surprisingly credible and extremely smooth example of shaded integrated movement as he played the part of Man-Cow with such appealing grace, that this bovine beast won the hearts of the audience and stole the show.

This is what happened at the Little Theatre on the opening night, December 26, 2000: As soon as the Juvenile Leads finished singing the song "Country Life is the Sweetest Life" which celebrated the *jangah* (crayfish), *peeni wali* (fireflies) and sunrise as joys of rural existence, they encountered Jack's cow. The actor's costume was merely a loose garment and the mask of a cow's head and face but this animal was a Man Cow, with attitude, and his ability to express himself through movement captured the audience's attention and vote at once. As Jack talked to him, Man Cow moved his head in such an expressive and seemingly cow-like yet bullish manner that he was immediately endearing. Good sense meant that, with the Giant about, the cow should be returned to the upper pasture where he would be safer, but Jack could make no headway as the Man Cow dug in his feet and said, "Mi nah moo-ve." When eventually the animal had won the day and Jack and Angelina had given up and gone, the Man Cow confided to the audience, who were now connecting totally with him, "Time fi," and he paused just long enough for the audience to pre-empt and join him with the word "mooo-ve."

Man Cow symbolised an attitude that expresses an important aspect of being free. The character's line, "Time fi mooo-ve" means that he is being true to himself, deciding his own fate but at the same time doing the sensible thing not because he **has** to, but because he **wants** to. The legacy of dance is a reminder of the importance of being able to do things "in a certain kind of way" (Benítez-Rojo); as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong sing, "No, no, you can't take that away from me" (Gershwin 1957).

The Pantomime aims to be technicolor poetry in motion. When Sandra Phillips (now retired from the NDTC) was asked to sum up the contribution of dance to the Pantomime, she highlighted two factors: *atmosphere* and *energy*. Speaking in an interview in 2002, she pointed out that there is also a Jamaican vocabulary of movement from which the Pantomime show can draw inspiration, articulated in part by the NDTC but also by dance crazes within popular culture like the Bogle, the Butterfly and the Log On. As Ivy Baxter

put it, "Jamaican theatre and culture in general, must be thought of in terms of a distillation. So much has been put in, so much has evaporated away, and up to the present, some of the ingredients which have been included are not known to the present generation of Jamaicans." (Baxter 1970: 281).

The resilience of dance within the Jamaican framework has traversed the centuries as an expression of resistance, an antidote to despair and at times an expression of devotion. *Baxter's contribution to dance research as well as work by the NDTC, the Jamaica School of Dance, and many other Jamaican dance companies, plus the involvement of teachers committed to the field of folk dance, from Festival award-winning schools in country districts like Clonmel in St Mary, has meant that knowledge which had once appeared as an elusive essence has been recaptured for a new generation.*

CHAPTER 12

BEANSTALK TO MACCA TREE: THE DEVELOPING FORM

The sixtieth anniversary of the LTM National Pantomime was marked at the Ward Theatre, in downtown Kingston, on December 26, 2000 with the opening of a commemorative revisionist version of the first story in *Jack and the Macca Tree*. What might have started as 'a tradition of pantomime in Jamaica' inexorably metamorphosed over time into a very different entity as in order to enjoy the show, the general public had to be able to connect with it. The guiding principle in the development of the Jamaican Pantomime form was a growing acceptance that the local reality had to be expressed in a local idiom in order to connect with the punters. Over the years, therefore, the Pantomime adopted elements, which were tightly intertwined with and reflective of the textures, sounds, colours, behaviours and values of the West Indian world.

Errol Hill's *The Jamaican Stage* shows that the developing English pantomime tradition had long proved its appeal to Jamaican audiences with performances by the Hallam American Company in the eighteenth century and circus performers in the nineteenth. The modern English pantomime was introduced by naval and military officers with *Aladdin* in 1898, with further productions in Port Royal and Kingston to raise money for British soldiers engaged in the Boer War (see Hill 1992:125-126). Amateur players in The Garrison Theatre at Up Park Camp were still putting on English pantomime performances in the middle of the twentieth century (overlapping LTM efforts in the 1940s) and indeed the music for LTM Pantomime up to 1954 was provided by members of the Jamaica Military Band.

With characteristic Jamaican pragmatism, Sandra Phillips sums up the sense of choosing this popular form as part of the Little Theatre project: "...one of

the things that people need to recognise is that the reason why traditions are traditions is because they work. The Pantomime format – going back historically from wherever it began – is a format that worked, it produced pure gold” (Phillips 2002). So the English pantomime model was indeed the starting point for the Little Theatre Movement with *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1941, but it also needs to be said that the beanstalk of that first Pantomime had as much to do with Jamaican (rice and) peas as the beans of the English Jack.

The experimental seed of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (LTM 1941) sprouted with *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* in 1949 to become a sapling, *Anancy and the Magic Mirror* in 1954 and then a tree in 1963 with *Queenie’s Daughter*. The new theatrical variety was finally named “National Pantomime” in 1968 by its creators and its exponential growth continued to be reflected in box office figures.

A record-breaking 21,000 people attended *Anancy and Beeny Bud* in the 1956 season. This became 40,000 for the 1959 production *Jamaica Way* – “the dancing pantomime” and each year the season got longer. The practice of double-casting instituted by Norman Rae, as director of Gloudon’s *Hail Columbus* (LTM 1972) made it possible for the Pantomime to run from Christmas until Ash Wednesday and then, beyond as far into the year as May. In 1974-75, Gloria Lannaman’s *Dickance For Fippance* with the choreography of Rex Nettleford achieved the total integration of movement into the production – as opposed to the use of set dance pieces – and achieved a new box office record but the peak in Pantomime attendance came eventually with Gloudon’s script for *Gimmeral B* in 1983, which ran for 128 performances and sold 89,188 tickets. So the ‘stalk’ of the early days became a well-established local ‘tree’. However, with this success came controversy over the nature of the form and the direction in which the tradition should be developing.

As the debate of what it means to be Jamaican evolved both within the theatre and without, the tradition of the National Pantomime as an indigenous

theatrical entity gradually ensued. Acknowledging that the musical has been “the real heart of the theatre in Jamaica,” Alex Gradussov pointed out that the LTM Pantomime embraced folk culture and developed popular themes, used the “hardcore box office attractions” Lou and Ranny as “the real-value-givers” for a show that was in turn applauded by “real audiences” (Gradussov 1970: 48) made up of a broader cross-section of Jamaican society. But this kind of genuine acceptance of ‘grass roots’ culture only evolved over time as “in years gone by the support was often a sham: white value-oriented or white-washed” (ibid.).

Folk forms played an important part in charting the variable course of the evolving Jamaican tradition. While identifying some of these elements involved in *Jamaica Way* (LTM 1959) Norman Rae as critic felt that being neither pantomime nor musical, this representation of the “crème de la crème” of Jamaican theatre would have been better described as populist “spit and polish”:

...*Jamaica Way* may be considered an outstanding success as a logical development of the forms which have entertained Jamaica for a long, long time. Things like the mock-trials, the variety shows (though its vitality was of a different and more bourgeois kind to the raw, earthy crudity of those), the chalk-talks, the parlour pieces, the opportunity hours. But then the pretensions to good art must be dispensed with – and particularly by those who know better and who, otherwise, can recognise quality when they see it – and the true nature of the cream of the year’s theatrical crop be recognised plainly for what it is. (Rae 10/01/60).

Notions of identity are fraught with complications and unravelled nuance. The intellectuals frequently questioned whether the LTM annual Christmas production could still be called a ‘pantomime’. At various stages it was referred to as a ‘folk opera’, a ‘pantomime musical’, a ‘musical’, a ‘pantomusical’, or ‘a new history in the pantomime format.’ Inez Sibley tried to sum up the situation: “The name Pantomime, we are told, still persists, but what we have now is a Musical, which is evolving into a more mature type of West

Indian play, with a deeper theme, enlivened by laughter, music, colour, rhythm, and dance, and which will undoubtedly be part of the West Indian contribution to the 20th century world culture” (Sibley 26/12/65).

Indeed the fluvial nature of the emergent tradition made categorization difficult, but as far as the Jamaican public was concerned, the show had always been the ‘Pantomime.’ So, while the old name acquired new meaning, the label ‘National Pantomime’ continued to be used to describe this very Jamaican production, which happened annually under the auspices of the LTM.

The concept of an all-Jamaican Panto was finally able to come to fruition in *Bluebeard and Brer Anancy* (LTM 1949) through a mixture of cultural compromise and theatrical professionalism. This production was an extraordinarily significant breakthrough in terms of developing a Jamaican stamp with the introduction of Anancy as a character on stage. However, even with a good run, a show which pushed the boat out too far could provoke a reaction of such a magnitude among the LTM’s financial backers that immediate retrenchment would take place. Consequently, in the same extraordinary way that *Toad of Toad Hall* (LTM 1944) followed on from *Soliday and the Wicked Bird* (LTM 1943), *Alice in Wonderland* (LTM 1950) was chosen as a sequel to the innovative *Anancy and Bluebeard* of 1949, despite its success.

Even though British restraint tried to govern African impulses in the four productions that followed, the presence of Anancy in Pantomime paid dividends at the box office and he resurfaced again as a point of focus in 1954. Greta Fowler returned to Vaz’s formula of merging the Jamaican folk hero with the European folktale and kick-started the ensuing Anancy series (1954-1957) with her script for *Anancy and the Magic Mirror*.

After the disappointment of the demise of the Federation in 1961 on the eve of Independence, the organisers of the LTM Pantomime learnt some lessons

from Broadway with *Finian's Rainbow* (LTM 1962) and then returned to direct cultural engagement with the audience at a local level with an idea inspired by Damon Runyon but expressed in quintessentially Jamaican terms in the much more provocatively reflexive *Queenie's Daughter* (1963, with revivals in 1966 and 1973).

In *Queenie's Daughter*, Madame Serena the representative of haute couture (pronounced *hawti coota* on stage) says to Queenie the higgler, her rediscovered friend from childhood: "Against me better judgement, I will help you" (Act I, Scene 5). This would be a good comment to apply to the zigzagging process of indigenisation that took place on the stage of the Ward Theatre in Pantomime. For decades, the customs and expectations of Europe and Africa tussled with each other with varying degrees of success as different interest groups tried to set the pace for defining the meaning of the concept 'Jamaican'. To this end, but sometimes 'against its better judgement', the LTM succeeded in using Pantomime as a vehicle for mixing choice talent with a common purpose.

The shifting audience profile also brought with it a new set of demands for the performers. Greta Fowler's most singular achievement therefore has to have been the consolidation of Miss Lou and Mas Ran at the heart of the show year upon year upon year. The Principal Boy, traditionally played by a woman, might be "the chief character in the English pantomime – Aladdin, Dick Whittington, Robinson Crusoe, Prince Charming" (Hartnoll 1988: 430) – but in the Jamaican version of the genre, the leading players are Anancy and the Mother figure.

The LTM's short-term objective materialised after twenty years with the opening of the Little Theatre building on Tom Redcam Drive in 1961. The long-term goal, that is providing a nursery for talent and building experimental theatre on the island, was ultimately achieved through the consolidation of the Pantomime project itself. Furthermore, as Kole Omotoso points out, "The

Little Theatre building provided a place ... for the training in theatre arts of many people interested in the arts of the theatre” (Omotoso 1982: 83).

Still maintaining its amateur status, the LTM became the richest theatre company in the country and its ongoing success was built on the perception that its productions were associated with quality. Right into the 1970s, the LTM Pantomime was unquestionably the most prestigious theatrical vehicle for local thespians, and year-on-year box office success underscored its popularity with large audiences over a lengthy season. All this was enhanced by the reputation of the Ward Theatre, which placed an inherent stamp of quality on any production staged there.

Ranny’s Anancy persona was always the flawed hero. Like Chaplin, he recognised that humour “activates our sense of proportion” as it helps us to discern “the subtle discrepancy ... in what appears to be normal behaviour” (Chaplin 1964: 210). The second Anancy series culminated in 1970 with him being portrayed in a negative light as the time of the trickster’s role in national development was passing. However, ‘Mas Ran’ became so closely identified with the role of the trickster-hero that he became indispensable to the Pantomime production. By the end of the 1970s, the inevitable need to pass the baton to the next generation of actors seemed like an impossible challenge until the Anancy-persona found a second and again powerful redefinition as it was reincarnated through the comedic talent of Oliver Samuels. Anancy never left the Pantomime, he just explored the various nuances of his character under a series of aliases, until the public was ready for him to return in name in *Anansi Come Back* (LTM 1993), but by this time Oliver Samuels had stopped performing for the LTM.

By the mid-1980s, the LTM found that it could no longer depend on a number of the well-loved and popular personalities, the stars of Pantomime, who had “left the stage for one reason or another” (Little Theatre Movement 1988: 13). The idea of a Pantomime Company was therefore introduced under the guiding hand of Brian Heap with a series of Pantomime Workshops between

1985-1988 designed to upgrade the skills of the Chorus and to provide the players of supporting roles with the opportunity “to work (and play) together in between one Pantomime and another” (Little Theatre Movement 1988: 13). Although efforts were made “to bring together as many veteran performers as was possible, to share their experiences with their successors” (ibid.), the new philosophy of the LTM was averse to a dependence on stars.

In 1983, while her main rival Gloria Lannaman was distracted by new duties as General Manager of the crisis-riddled Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, Barbara Gloudon shifted the pace of her scriptwriting for Pantomime from a play every three years (1969, 1972, 1975, 1978, 1981) to a Pantomime production every other year as she followed up *Ginneral B* with *Trash* in 1985. The death of Gloria Lannaman (1933-1986) following a heart attack and the disruption of Hurricane Gilbert provided more time than usual for reflection and Gloudon’s script for *Schoolers* (developed from a concept by Owen “Blacka” Ellis and Michael Nicholson) in 1989 resulted in a fresh, topical, entertaining and socially challenging Pantomime production, under the direction of Brian Heap. From that point on, however, the Gloudon stamp on the scripts for LTM Pantomime became an annual event.

Fifty Fifty (LTM 1990), the production written to celebrate the Pantomime tradition’s 50th anniversary, opens as Daddy Bop’s happy tenants at 50 Poinciana Street throw a party to celebrate his fiftieth birthday. Little do they know, however, that his ‘ownership’ of the property is about to be undermined by the return of a high society aspirant and co-owner who has been living in ‘Foreign’.

As the action develops, Daddy Bop tries to maintain control by turning the premises into the Poinciana Street Culchurality (song and dance) Centre, but the plan does not work and chaos reigns in the yard as the abrasive Miss Lady takes over. Such is the crisis that Mother B (Daddy Bop’s now deceased mother who had been co-owner of the property with Miss Lady’s mother) leaves Heaven from time to time to intervene Fairy-Godmother-style by

giving special insight to her grandson John (one of Daddy Bop's three sons). In true Jamaican fashion, the 'grandmother' saves the day, and everything ends happily.

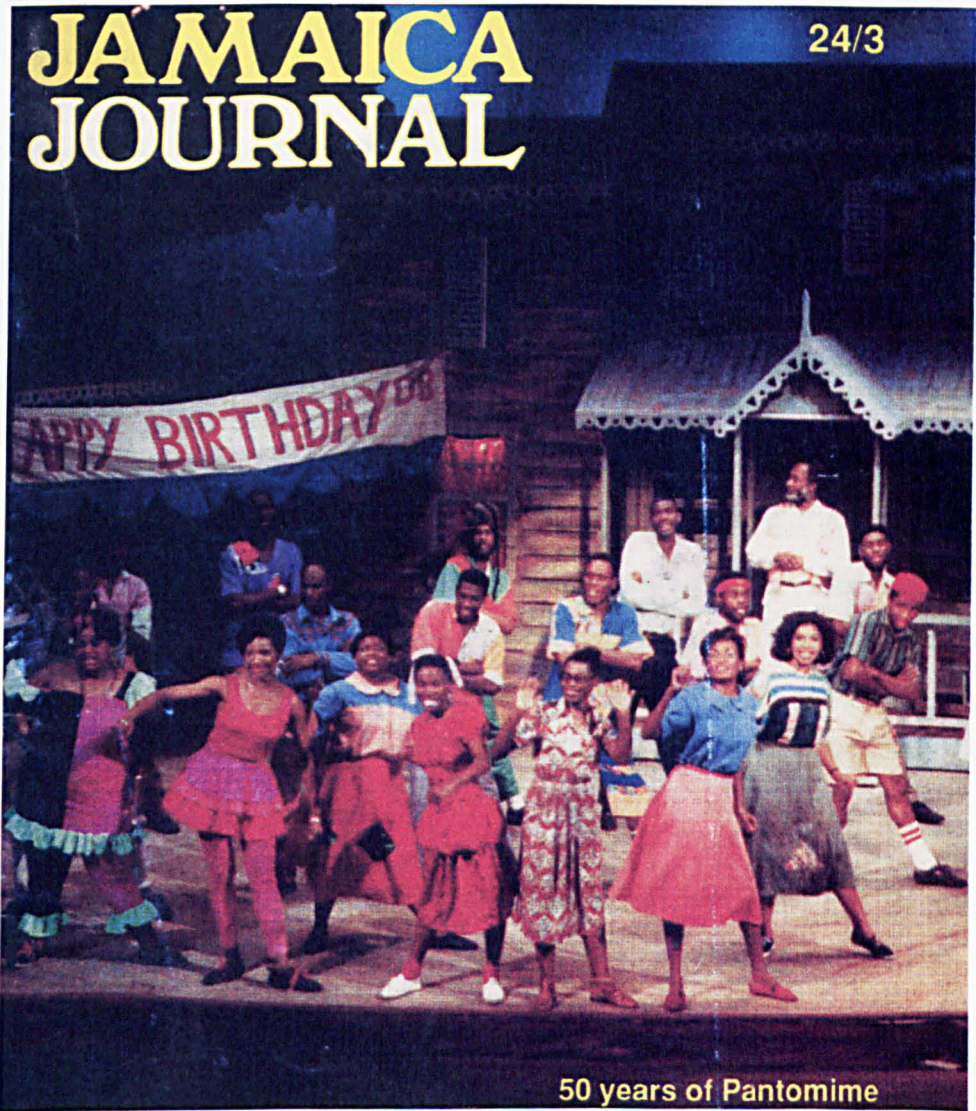


Figure 51: *Fifty Fifty* (LTM 1990) from the front cover of the *Jamaica Journal*, February 1993.

The house at 50 Poinciana Street with its collection of residents, like those of a more respectable Kingston tenement yard, illustrates some of the root causes of the tension-riddled urban context of 1990 Jamaica on the one hand, while in its new role as Culchurality Centre, it acts as an emblem of the LTM's successfully varied theatrical tradition, on the other. *Fifty Fifty* tried to present a summing up on stage of the tradition of National Pantomime that had

become synonymous with the LTM. Members of the new Pantomime Company anchored much of the production, but the two rival factions in the drama were led by stalwarts of the Jamaican stage whose presence harkened back to an earlier phase – and some would say, ‘the good old days’ – of LTM Pantomime.

Karl Binger, who had been a member of the cast of *Jamaica Way* (LTM 1959), played Daddy Bop and Lois Kelly Barrow crossed with him as Miss Lady. News of the return to Pantomime after an absence of fourteen years of Lois Kelly Barrow would have been enough to boost the box office proceedings quite considerably. In a career which has straddled straight roles in repertory theatre, hilarious cavorting in Pantomime, and a cameo role in the film *Meet Joe Black* (Universal, 1998), she was as much a doyenne of Jamaican theatre in general as she was the remaining representative in Jamaica of the original set of Pantomime stars. As Rex Nettleford acknowledged in his article on fifty years of Pantomime history for the *Jamaica Journal*, “Lois Kelly-Barrow (later Miller) introduced a distinctive *persona* in her memorable time with the pantos as did Charles Hyatt before his departure to Britain in the sixties” (Nettleford 1993a: 4).

In the light-hearted *Fifty Fifty*, Barrow once again played the part of Miss Lady the grand dame from abroad with an ordinary Jamaican background, a role that would have reminded the older Pantomime aficionados of Madame Serena’s sidesplitting pretensions in *Queenie’s Daughter* (1963, 1966, 1973). Furthermore, she rotated the role of Miss Lady with Dorothy Cunningham, an LTM stalwart from the 1980s whose performance in *King Root* (LTM 1987) was “quite magnificent” (Nettleford 1993a: 6).

‘Barrow,’ as Miss Lou affectionately calls her, had played a very important role in the shuffling that had to take place between old style ‘colonial’ attitudes and newfangled ‘nationalistic’ innovations as the LTM developed its own style. She used the kudos of her English training in music, speech and

drama to win acceptance for new developments in the form from diehards who still hankered for a good old English Pantomime on the stage at the Ward.

Having facilitated a transition in the past between old and new in terms of what the audience would accept – she led “the team of five astronauts who went aloft” (Fowler 14/12/75) in Barbara Gloudon’s first LTM Pantomime, *Moonshine Anancy* (1969) – Lois Kelly Barrow, as a celebrated representative of those who had gone before, was once again helping to do this by endorsing the work of the new Pantomime Company for the LTM’s 50th anniversary.

With the new philosophy of the Pantomime Company, which became something of a closed shop, and its commitment to the individualisation of the chorus rather than a more traditional dependence on stars, other companies were able to use disillusioned former LTM performers to exploit the Jamaican Pantomime formula with increasing success. So, by the time of *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000), not only had the original British Pantomime format metamorphosed into a distinctly Jamaican art form, but also responsibility for this new form of Caribbean theatre was no longer the sole purview of the Little Theatre Movement.

In 1986, Hortencer Lindsey at the Cultural Training Centre thought that it would be a good idea to match the playwriting skills of Carmen E Tipling, a published Jamaican playwright, with Ted Dwyer’s long-term interest in writing historical plays. The two writers had not worked together before but they made a good team and from that exercise came the musical *Port Royal Ho!* (set and performed in Port Royal) written for performance by the students from the schools at the Cultural Training Centre. Dwyer was able to balance a commitment to historical integrity with poetic licence when necessary and he also provided a musicality, which complemented Tipling’s facility with images and rhyming couplets as she also developed her skills as a lyricist. A further outcome of this partnership was the Pantomime *Bruckins* (LTM 1988) inspired by that combination of “dancing, singing, speechmaking, feasting and

friendly rivalry that originated as an event held to mark the anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves” (Senior 2003: 77).

Encouraged by their success with *Bruckins* (LTM 1988), the Dwyer and Tipling playwriting partnership developed the book and lyrics for a new Pantomime, *Arawak Gold*, written to coincide with the quincennial celebrations of Columbus' voyages to the New World. This script was submitted to the LTM as a candidate for the 1991 Pantomime but it was rejected because the Management Committee felt that it was too similar to Barbara Gloudon's *Hail Columbus* (1972), an LTM Pantomime in which Dwyer had played the part of King Ferdinand but which Tipling had not seen.

Ironically, this decision by the LTM prompted the first significant challenge to its monopoly of the National Pantomime as a theatrical form as Dwyer and Tipling, who believed in their script, decided to produce their Pantomime as an alternative to the LTM version – and, as it turned out, both at home and abroad. A very strong production team was assembled to work with director Eugene Williams, Head of the Theatre Arts Department of the Jamaica School of Drama. As Carmen Tipling attests, Williams as director was a consummate professional, with “an articulate understanding of the Jamaican cultural milieu” and created “a synergistic team out of the members of his cast” so that each contributor brought “their full creative expertise to bear on the production” (Tipling 2004).

One of the finest theatre designers in the Caribbean, the Guyanese actor and director Henry Muttoo designed the set and costumes working with Larry Watson as production manager. Muttoo had already received high praise for his set and costume designs for LTM productions between 1980 and 1983, and was capable of creating so convincing an underwater scene that, according to Carment Tipling, a member of the *Arawak Gold* audience insisted that she had seen the water splash up – an impossibility she knew, but logic didn't lessen the reality of the experience.

Arawak Gold: A New Musical played at the Ward Theatre during April and May 1992 and made a small profit. The executive producer was Carmen E Tipling. The formula was straightforward. With each scene written collaboratively, the writers produced a good story soundly based on an aspect of Jamaican history. As Dwyer put it in the Programme Notes, theirs was “a style which calls for a simple story line, strong characters and subtle humour” (Arawak Gold Productions 1992: 6). The music was composed by the reggae musician Rupert Bent Jnr and the drummer Junior “Bird” Bailie, with the support of an impressive team in the form of Marjorie Whyllie, Paulette Bellamy, Jon Williams and Conroy Cooper (bandleader).

A very strong cast was headed by three longstanding stars of Jamaican theatre: Leonie Forbes (High Priestess Virvinia, the earth mother figure) and the comedian Charles Hyatt (Christopher Columbus) – both veterans of the LTM Pantomime – as well as Munair Zacca, “a founding member of the Barn Theatre and one of Jamaica’s most experienced and distinguished actors” (Arawak Gold Productions 1992: 21), who played the villain Don Diablo. Many of the other members of the cast as well as production personnel had previously been involved with the LTM.

In a spirit of co-operation, Rex Nettleford – known for the ability to completely lift a production even in two movement sessions with a Pantomime cast – was invited to add shine to *Arawak Gold* in rehearsal as he had previously done for *Bruckins* (LTM 1988). He paid a preliminary visit to familiarize himself with the show, openly acknowledged its potential for success but did not contribute. So the producers asked Barry Moncreiffe, the NDTC’s Artistic Co-ordinator and Senior Tutor at the Jamaica School of Dance, to do the movement because Carmen Tipling knew that without the proper integration of the element of movement, Jamaican Pantomime could not be complete.

As it turned out, *Arawak Gold* attracted audiences and received very good reviews even though its run followed on when the official Pantomime

Mandeya (LTM 1991) had completed its season at The Ward Theatre. Furthermore, the Tipling/ Dwyer script was chosen (adapted by Yvonne Brewster for the British context) as Talawa's first Christmas production in its new home at the Cochrane Theatre in London and ran from 9 December 1992 to 16 January 1993.

This was not the first time that Pantomime from Jamaica was being performed in London. A Temba Theatre Company production of Barbara Gloudon's script for *The Pirate Princess* led the way in 1985, and then Yvonne Brewster's 1987 production of *Flash Trash* (an Anglo-Jamaican version of Gloudon's *Trash*) at the Half Moon Theatre in Hackney was voted 'panto of the year'.

But in 1993, the Talawa production, billed as London's only reggae Pantomime, was being directed by Britain's "leading black woman theatre director" at "the new national focus for black theatre" and like Brewster herself, this play seemed to have been self-propelled from the periphery "to the hub-rump of the British Empire" (Reade 30/01/92). To add insult to injury, in May 1993, the same year that the LTM Pantomime went to New York, *Arawak Gold* was put on at the Brooklyn Centre for



Figure 52: The director Yvonne Brewster re-introduces the dame, in place of the earth mother, with Oscar James playing High Priestess Virvinia in her adaptation of *Arawak Gold* for Talawa, London 1992. Picture from poster bill.

three sold-out performances and allegedly stole the LTM's audience because the word went out that the Tipling & Dwyer show was better.

The emergence of *Arawak Gold* (1992) is absolutely essential to the development of the Jamaican Pantomime as a form in its own right, because with its success the genre moved irretrievably beyond the exclusive framework of the LTM. In 1993, at the National Awards for Excellence in Theatre Arts, the LTM received a special award for 52 years of Pantomime productions but *Arawak Gold* won the Actor Boy award in five of the six categories for which it was nominated, namely Best Costume Design, Best Musical, Best New Jamaica Play, Best Director and Best (Overall) Production for 1992. By exercising what seems to have been a monopoly on the writing of scripts, the ‘mother’ company had prompted not only a rebellion but also a *coup*.

As it turned out Carmen Tipling and Ted Dwyer did not produce another Pantomime either for the LTM or independently though they were working on a project when Ted died in October 2003. Nonetheless, they showed that Jamaican audiences were quite happy to savour the delights of Pantomime in its variety and even play one production off against another, if given the chance.

Such an opportunity arose in December 2003 when the new LTM National Pantomime production *Combolo*, now at the Little Theatre, opened as usual on Boxing Day knowing that it would be competing for the attention of the public against another Pantomime production starring the greatest box-office draw in Jamaica, Oliver Samuels. Furthermore, both plays were versions of the same root story – the indigenisation of Columbus after he had ‘discovered’ the delights of Jamaica. Not only was the LTM being challenged yet again over its exclusive rights to the form but also its monopoly of the Jamaican storylines that it had used in the past was being undermined.

Patrick Brown’s seventh annual Jambiz Christmas production *Christopher Cum Buck Us* opened on Boxing Day 2003 and was funny – according to a critic, it was “*emphatically about making people laugh*” (Morris 06/01/04) – but its challenge was having to be mounted from the much smaller theatrical

venue of Centrestage in New Kingston. Nonetheless, the gloves were off as ‘factions’ within the field of Jamaican Pantomime competed openly in an art form that had firmly transcended the monopoly of its genesis in the Little Theatre Movement.

It is ironic that the LTM refused to accept the validity of ‘versioning’ within the Pantomime formula when faced with the *Arawak Gold* option in 1991, yet during the decade that followed, *Reggae Son* (LTM 1992), *Moonsplash* (LTM 1993), and *Schoolers 2* (LTM 1995) were all versions of previous Gloudon scripts, and this revisionist trend continued into the new century with *Jack and the Macca Tree* (LTM 2000), *Chicken Merry* (LTM 2001), *Miss Annie* (LTM 2002) and *Combolo* (LTM 2003).

Box office figures show that the average annual attendance at LTM National Pantomime productions dropped from 69,000 in the 1980s to 50,000 in the 1990s and it was not long before the LTM’s critics began to point out the danger of the National Pantomime becoming “mired in the mud of longevity” (Reckord 28/12/01). It should be remembered, however, that in its beginnings the LTM Pantomime project was a product of youthful aspiration – both in terms of the young participants (many of whom were radicals) and the young context of an emergent nation. By the end of the 20th century, it had become the responsibility of people who were themselves the New Jamaican cultural (and even political) establishment. Inevitably therefore, the radical element would have diminished, as rebels of the past became conservators of a legacy in which they had invested so much. Maybe this explains why there are many who say that LTM Pantomime has lost the sparkle of the old days.

For six decades, within the confines of the Ward Theatre, the LTM shaped a stylized public space for the audience to explore a tension which lies at the heart of Jamaican culture, i.e. the merger of Western and African ideals. In the course of this process, it repeatedly infiltrated territory described in the words of Gloria Escoffery as “the area of daring where primitive and sophisticated meet” (Escoffery 1988: 22). The success of the production

arises from the level of excitement that it is able to stir as it plays with the emotions captured by these incursions. Yet, in 2002 the National Pantomime forsook its symbolic home at the Ward Theatre in the heart of Kingston to go uptown to the smaller and 'safer' Little Theatre.

The Old Guard of Jamaican theatre would now leave the hazards of performance downtown to new pioneering ventures in the field of musical drama. There would be no gap, though, for on Christmas Day 2003, *Bedward* a thought-provoking 'historical musical' by Louise Marriott, stepped into the traditional home of the Jamaican Pantomime and opened at the Ward Theatre. As the *Gleaner* critic Tanya Batson-Savage noted, "Though it is hard to look past the face of ruin which stares from the theatre, if nothing else *Bedward* shows that all is not lost. The production takes place unamplified and the sound is a beautiful testament to the magnificence of the theatre" (Batson-Savage 09/01/04).

Macca, meaning 'prickle,' symbolises the habitat of the trickster, like the briar patch of Brer Rabbit, which is so cunningly used as a refuge. It also refers to harsh reality – "Woi, macca jook me!" – which teaches out of experience and uses the coocomacca stick as a rod of correction. So the context of the macca tree might be uncomfortable but it provides an opportunity for learning.

The LTM project would never have become a tradition without the vision, drive and organisational skills of its co-founder Greta Fowler. As a consequence the Little Theatre Movement of Jamaica has played the role of a griot mediating conflict in the Jamaican context for nearly 65 years through the annual creation of a platform of discourse among equals in Pantomime.

Barbara Gloudon, who inherited the mantle of responsibility for the LTM from Greta Fowler, is an admired radio talk-show host, public speaker, and writer whose popularity is attested to by the rumour that she will be the first female Governor General. Desmond Allen explains, in an article for the *Jamaica Observer*, that the story emerged "some years ago, from out of our

perennially active Jamaican rumour mill.... [and] spread like fire in a canepiece. ...But underlying the claim is a national admiration for a very spiritual woman who has used her vast talent as a journalist and writer to enrich her nation, and her natural humour to bring laughter to her people, through the annual pantomime” (Allen 09/05/04).

Miss Lou uses the vocabulary of laughter to help people to look more closely at themselves and redefine life as they see it. Her humour can sometimes be wicked, especially in the face of pretentiousness behaviour. This thinly disguised elevation of self in order to put others down manifests itself in many areas of Jamaican life, but especially in the behaviour of those who have travelled and as she puts it, “Jamaica people luv fe travel” (Bennett 1983). But she warns her audience about the danger of getting carried away with the new experience and forgetting who they really are. She recalls the occasion during a concert abroad when a Jamaican pianist who should have known better overstepped the mark on stage by asking her, “Miss Lou, can you sing in C?” Quick as a flash she replied in a putdown of her own, “ ‘Me sing in a ribba!”(ibid.) – to the delight of both herself and her audience.

Barbara Gloudon’s *Ginneral B* (LTM 1983), which was about empire building in the fried chicken business, was followed by *Sipplesilver* (LTM 1984) a Pantomime written by a much younger playwright, Pat Cumper. The title of the 1984 production, with its connotations of Max Romeo’s song *War Ina Babylon* – “it sipple out deh”, suggested how easily the basic strength of Jamaicans in a village setting could be undermined by the circus of hedonism and greed. Traditional values were being undermined as the villagers wasted their money without care on the distractions of drinking and gambling provided by a visiting troupe of entertainers. Silver, the Ringleader (in both senses of the word) played by Oliver Samuels (Jamaica’s reigning king of comedy), finally breaks free of the spell of his sinister sidekick the tomcat Tooth, and joins in the fight to rid the village of the danger that he has introduced.

In Pantomime perspective is communicated through humour, metaphor, allusion, harmony and counterpoint. The tensions are good versus evil, education versus ignorance, myalism versus obeah, community welfare versus outside interests, tradition versus technology, Africa versus Europe, rural versus urban, 'sophistication' versus 'primitivism', high society versus low society, and always, disempowered versus empowered. The fundamental debate though is between the principles of *cooperation*, i.e. group effort, solidarity, mutual aid, friendship, reconciliation and trust, on the one hand; and *competition*, i.e. rivalry, jealousy, resentment, distrust, enmity, and confrontation, on the other.

Rhetoric is always supported by rhythm, which harnesses the prosaic, lyrical, moral, musical, physical, and emotional elements of the language of movement. Music is essential and has a vocabulary all of its own. Using patter, song and rhythm, Louise Bennett continually tapped the collective memory of the audience, reaffirming in those present a joyful sense of belonging to a special place. She used light 'heartical rhythms' to convey the heavier, slower and more serious 'churchical' message of the importance of personal dignity and a sense of shared identity. Barbara Gloudon, in turn, has also mastered this medium as a lyricist.

Folk wisdom and redemptive humour are essential ingredients of Jamaican Pantomime. The discomfort of the social message is soothed by the comedy and a characteristic response to hardship summed up in the proverb, 'kin teet kuba heart bun'. Jamaican Pantomime at its best is always pegged to everyday life. As one lead character in *Queenie's Daughter* reminds another, "Facts are facts" so the choice is either to live with them or change them but never to hide from them. Therefore, the theatre through Pantomime tries to provide a forum for a collective consideration of reality, with a view to heightening awareness so that as an outcome of this reasoning some adjustment in people's engagement with each other can be made for mutual benefit. The solution to the crisis created becomes a community project.

The stock characters of the genre are the trickster/obeahman, the earth mother, the corpie (benevolent and slightly fumbling representative of officialdom), an aspiring youth adept with pen or sword, his supportive bride to be, the warner/preacher, the foreign exploiter or corrupt local politician, the sycophantic sidekick, a young fool/rude boy, a wise old man, and a supernatural force usually feminine which is capable of restoring good order. In whatever guise he might appear, Anancy is always the star.

The baddies can be representatives of outside interests trying to exploit the Jamaican situation like deRaddzio in *Queenie's Daughter* (LTM 1973) and the pirate Jack Rackham in *The Pirate Princess* (LTM 1981) but they can also be members of the local community who should know better, like the Revivalist leader behind a drug-trafficking ring, again in *Queenie's Daughter* (LTM 1973), or Anansi in *Anansi Web* (LTM 1998) who is an established business man intent on expanding his commercial territory at any cost to others.

The earth mother, an unofficial community leader in the Pantomime situation, is usually the 'elevated speaker', the social representative of the general public, as forthright as the hardworking, middle class, female civil servant in Las May's *Gleaner* cartoons. Up to 1975, this strong female representative of the ordinary people would have been anchored on stage by actresses like Louise Bennett and Leonie Forbes. In the Gloudon era and especially in the context of the Pantomime Company, the elevated voice became that of the scriptwriter-lyricist and/or general coordinator, who as a radio talkshow host has her finger on the pulse of public opinion.



Figure 53: Voice of the public as portrayed by Las May.

Island philosophy tends to favour the collective exploration of issues at great length in word or thought. Great enjoyment is to be found in the extended process of engaging with nuance before the discussion or argument is summarised in a sententious, and often figurative, conclusion. When this is

harnessed for dramatic purposes, the stage picture “represents reality in a map” while the text provides “a guided tour around the social space” (Harstrup 1992: 19). This is where Louise Bennett and Barbara Gloudon have excelled. Both have been committed to the development of public opinion and creating the opportunity for members of the community to be unofficial social representatives – like the dialect poet in performance, the talk show host on radio or the development of the earth mother figure and Anancy on stage.

In terms of articulating different styles of closure both have been steadfast in “extending the range of possible relationships beyond those of the ‘either-or logic’ of friends and enemies” (James 2003), moving the debate on to the level of the third person ‘we’ and then articulating who belongs to that group as opposed to an oppositional ‘other’. In the nostalgic ‘good old days’ of Pantomime, this used to be

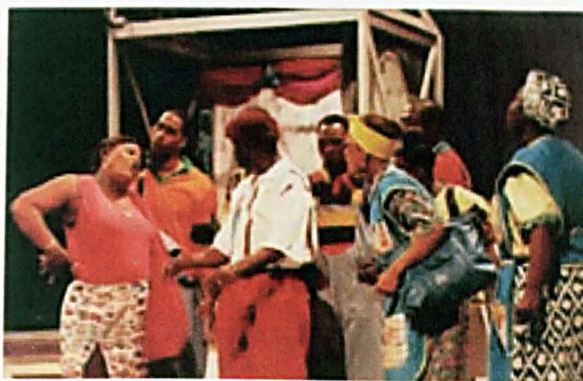


Figure 54: The ‘elevated speaker’ in action in *Baggaraggs* (LTM 1997). Photograph from LTM website.

home versus foreign, but towards the end of the century, the framework had to change with Jamaica’s economic dependence on the Diaspora. With the emphasis summed up in the phrase, “all a we is one,” otherness then had to be defined in new terms – like the ‘drug don’ and ‘deportee’ – who became representatives of people who belonged but who let the side down.

Jamaican Pantomime is a philosophical debate, in a series of sessions, about the realities of everyday life. Pantomime as metaphor depends on the audience to participate in the act of completion by providing the appropriate response in the theatre and with support corroborating the validity of the story (i.e. the cultural reflection) being told. For such an exercise, the starting point has to be an understanding of the rules of engagement and the framework for

assessing the validity of the product. Like Norman Tebitt's 'cricket test' the spectator has to choose the most appropriate viewing vantage point: either from the outside looking in or from the inside looking out.

The individual productions might one-by-one be trying to say 'the format is like this' but the development of the genre through the establishment of an annual tradition involves a much more intimate, and yet surprisingly flexible, imaginative yoking of potentially dissimilar images, like the concepts 'Jamaica' and 'Pantomime.' By applying "the idea of a single work made out of multiple works" (Yetton 1999:26), it is possible to reflect on how the National Pantomime as an entity has explored this crossroads experience in multiple variations across the span of 65 years. In a manner similar to the impressionist Claude Monet's series method of painting, differing compositions lend meaning to each other when displayed collectively and the loss of any individual piece therefore detracts from the integrity of the series. But the tradition has not been mapped in any comprehensive way and so each year's offering has to meet the public's gaze entirely on its own terms while competing in the memory of the audience with shows seen in childhood.

The theatrical discipline that has been built up by the Company principle should be commended but some of the improvisational excitement, which arises when conflicting artists try to find a way of merging divergent perspectives into an integrated entity, needs to be reintegrated into the creative process. It's all about collective individualism. The LTM needs more writers so that the audience can feel the freshness of new ideas, perceive strength in the chorus, enjoy the potential of the 'juniors' and revel in the brilliance of the 'stars'. A sense of excitement that has waned in recent years will return to the LTM Pantomime productions when the Pantomime Company can rise above the economic strictures inherent in mounting such a large-scale production, in order to take chances and experiment again.

Louise Bennett, as performer, proved to be an expert in using rhetorical strategies as an agent for orchestrating agreement especially in terms of

audience response. As a writer and part of the behind-the-scenes development of a production, she excelled at maintaining fidelity to embracing notions of pluralism in a range of different 'styles' and "a respect for radical otherness" (James 2003) – rooted in traditional notions of mutual respect. Like her protégé Barbara Gloudon, she saw herself as a conduit for the voice of the people.

What happens on stage is expected to act as a mirror to the ambitions and concerns of a Jamaican public that wants to be dazzled by excellence but challenged by truth as it watches and participates in the creative experience of its own Pantomime. Whether it is swashbuckling adventure, morality tale, legend or social critique, old stories are recreated anew and shared within the magic of the theatrical moment. Everything lives afresh in the *now* of performance before a live audience. In this way the Little Theatre Movement returns year after year, in the Christmas season of goodwill to present the public with a new version of the national story and what it might mean to be Jamaican.

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