

THE REAL CALYPSO, VOLUME 2

RECORDED IN TRINIDAD IN THE 1930'S AND 1940'S

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RF 4

OUT THE FIRE

CALYPSO SONGS OF SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND LOVE TROUBLES

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY SAMUEL CHARTERS



PHOTO BY SAMUEL CHARTERS

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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7. **Out The Fire** The Lion - accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

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OF SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND LOVE TROUBLES**

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Send Your Children to the Orphan Home

THE REAL CALYPSO, VOLUME 2

CALYPSO SONGS
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The West African griot - the singer and story teller who entertained kings and recited the histories of families and great events - has had many vigorous descendants in the New World. Each of the African societies that developed in the slave areas of North and South America produced its own singer and narrator. In the United States first the southern songster and then later the blues singer took over the role, and in places like the Bahamas it was the "rhymer" who was the new society's epic chanter. Of all the griots' inheritors the most colorful and the most explicitly political is the calypsonian of Trinidad.

The political openness of the calypsonian is perhaps the factor that relates him most closely to the griot; since the African singer, as an entertainer for kings, was expected to deal with the kind of subjects that powerful men in the society were interested in. The blues singer, on the other hand, was from the fringes of a suppressed group at the lowest level of American society, and he was forced limit his song material to himself and his own difficulties in love and sex. The women singers of the period were also forced to circumscribe their material and they had as little chance to sing about larger issues as the men. The blues recordings themselves could be misleading; since the blues recording industry was so closely controlled by white business interests, but subsequent field recording by people looking for signs of a larger tradition have failed to find more than fragmentary traces of the kind of

openly engaged commentary that was characteristic of the griot and certainly continues in the singing of the calypsonians.

I don't want to suggest by this that what the calypso singers did in Trinidad was specifically critical of the society they lived in. This kind of direct confrontation came a generation later, with the reggae singers of Jamaica, who also descend from the griot tradition, but who have filtered it through a more sophisticated political consciousness and the emotional vibrancy of the belief in the Rastafari faith. But if the calypsonians didn't confront the society they found in Trinidad they certainly regarded it as all material for their songs, and they created a musical form that has managed to survive for nearly fifty years and has also, in an essential way, proved to be impossible to imitate. American pop artists have occasionally been successful with a few calypso songs, but they haven't created songs or any new way of presenting the songs - they have never become calypsonians.

It isn't fair to describe the calypso singers, however, without emphasising that their music is colorful and exuberant and richly expressive and often hilariously funny. The texts are sometimes complex and based on historical records or local traditions - but they can just as often be based on a neighborhood street fight or a fire in a barroom. There is the same dead pan earnestness to the lyrics, whether they're singing about the coming Coronation of Edward VI or the tap dancing of "Bojangles" Robinson. In their way the ^{singers} were marvelous historians, for the great events of the day instantly became songs, and they didn't hesitate to explain what has happening at the same time as they were reporting it. They were skilled at rhyme, and had the ability to make almost any phrase bend to the rhythm of the accompaniment. In calypso today there is still this same skill and enthusiasm in presentation, but there is considerably less political awareness.

These recordings were selected from the hundreds of songs recorded in Trinidad in the 1930s. Perhaps one or two of them were done in New York while the singers were appearing on tour, but the recordings for the most part are the "real" calypso - the singers of Trinidad creating their own songs for the people of their neighborhoods. When the company doing the sessions brought the masters back to the United States they didn't hesitate to put the songs together in any way they thought might make an entertaining 78 record release. Sometimes it seemed a little haphazard, with different singers on either side of the record and the songs with little relationship to each other, but it also seems to reflect the raffish mood of the singing. This group of songs has been selected to show the kind of social commentary that was vital to the calypso expression, from the earnest patriotism of "Reign Of The Georges" and "Poppy Day" to the serious advice of "Send Your Children To The Orphan Home."

One other aspect of these recordings that has to be mentioned is the style of the musical backgrounds. One of the main ports of call in the Caribbean is New Orleans, and the orchestras accompanying the songs often play with an overlay of the New Orleans jazz style, especially in the acid toned trumpet playing and the virtuoso clarinet work. The instrumental "Sally You Not Ashamed?" could have been recorded in one of the taxi dance halls on Canal Street. Unlike the blues the calypso songs never developed one fixed form; so the musical arrangements are as varied as the texts and the subjects.

- Al. Reign Of The Georges (Philip Garcia)
The Executor
accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

The abdication of Edward VIII (The Caresser's song "Edward the VIII" was included on RBF 13, The Real Calypso) in 1936 to marry the American divorcee Wallis Simpson stirred the imagination of the whole world, and Trinidad was no exception. This song is filled

with excitement over the Coronation of his younger brother, and in the tradition of the most skilled African griots praises the new king by describing the feats of his ancestors.

(Calypso songs usually have complicated texts and the singers enunciate quickly; so it's sometimes hard to hear just what they're singing. In all of the songs there are words and phrases that have proved to be too difficult to decipher.)

Record it and let it be known, that George the VI he must sit
on the throne.

Repeat.
Dealing with the English chronology
What wonderful and stirring events I see!
Refrain. So make preparations every day for the coming Coronation!

When Sophia the Electress of Hanover
Was elected to be the queen of Britannia,
She having died before Queen Anne the throne
Was given to George her elder son.
And at the age of 44 George the II
Received the imperial crown of Great Britain.
Ref.

I am sure you have read or you have heard
Of the marvelous reign of George the III.
In his reign we had the French Revolution
And the wars with Wellington and Napoleon.
But () George's mentality
And was given to fits of insanity.
Ref.

Now the most noble I believe and that I will maintain
Was in George the IV's illustrious reign,
When the steam railway was constructed
And a new era was inaugurated,
by George.
England's son that is to genius born
The pages of history must adorn.
Ref.

Friends it is needless for me to extenuate.
We all know that George the V he was great,
And the mantle of inspiration
Has fallen on his son who is the hero of Jutland.
His honor and integrity
Must be written in the pages of history.
So make preparations every day for the coming Coronation!

2. Good Will Flyers
Raymond Quevedo (Atilla)
accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

This song commemorates the visit to Trinidad of two American missionaries, Dr. Forsythe and Anderson. The final verse ends the performance on a note of Christian brotherhood.

I hope you people in this Colony
 Will benefit from the visit accordingly.
 Put all your old troubles upon the shelf
 And learn to love your neighbor as you love yourself.
 Let every man be recognized by you
 Not only as a friend but as a brother too.
 Ref. For they are beyond comparison,
 I mean Dr. Forsythe and Anerson.

The violin pizzicato in the accompaniment was unusual and the label of the record was different from other releases in that the singer's real name was used instead of the more colorful names they all adopted for their performances.

3. The Million Dollar Pair Of Feet (T. Lynch)
 Wilmoth Houdini
 and his Royal Calypso Orchestra

Bill Robinson, the great black dancer, singer, and actor had been performing for - as Houdini says - thirty-seven years when this tribute was sung for him, but he had spent much of the time in obscure vaudeville theatres. In the late 1930s the dancing craze of the Hollywood musical films brought some celebrity status to many black show business veterans, and "Bojangles" was especially successful, thanks to his appearances in films like "The Littlest Rebel" where he danced with Shirley Temple.

Glory to his name,
 Glory to his long years' reign!
 The only man that's walking the street
 With a pair of million dollar feet.
 And I hope everybody will understand
 He works with his feet and not his hands.
 Ref. And on the stage and the movie screen
 Bojangles the tap dancer reigns supreme.

This is what many people don't know,
 He started his career thirty-seven years ago.
 He's the best tap dancer in the world today,
 For no one can ape him in any way.
 From the day he left Virginia his home
 He created a dance routine all his own.
 Ref.

I am sure someday we will hear
 This tap dancing king is a millionaire.
 No one should begrudge him in any way
 As he climbs to fame and fortune today.
 He's a credit to the black race,
 It is hard to predict who will take his place.
 On the stage and the movie screen
 Bojangles the tap dancer reigns supreme.

4. Theodore (Rufus Callender)
 The Caresser
 accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

If there were women singing calypso in Trinidad in the 1930s they were kept in a very subordinate role by the men singers. "Theodore" is a woman's song, but it is sung without any obvious embarrassment by The Caresser. It is a simple complaint - a woman accusing another woman named Theodore of trying to steal her man, after she's been kind enough to invite Theodore into her home. The performance is loose and swinging, and there is an interesting reference to black magic, the Obeah man that Theodore has consulted. Following his advice Theodore has "burnt down herbs" and buried clothes in a cemetery, but as the other woman says, "I now see that was your dirty plan," and the refrain ends each verse with the advice,

So you better look for your own
 And leave my old man alone.

5. Send Your Children To The Orphan Home
 The Lion
 accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

The idea behind The Lion's song - that the best thing for poor mothers to do is place their children in an Orphan's Home - is so surprising that at first it's difficult to believe he is not being ironic, but it is obviously a sincere statement about the difficulties of the time. The theme in many calypso songs emphasises a friendly relationship with the authorities, and The Lion doesn't hesitate to suggest that the authorities could do a much better job with a child than a couple who are no longer together.

Mothers who can't afford to
 Maintain their children as they ought to,
 Mothers who can't afford to
 Maintain their children as they ought to,
 Because the time is so very hard

The children find it so very bad.
 Ref. Before you leave them to roam
 Gladly send them to the Orphan Home.

There are many fathers with such dirty minds
 As would leave their wives and children to pine.
 Although they know that the time is hard
 Still they treat their wives and children so bad.
 And then the mother may be unable
 To see their children be comfortable.
 Ref. Well, etc.

They're in the care of blessed people
 And they would see that your children be comfortable.
 Well to tell you this I forgot,
 That they would be baptized if they are not,
 And they would prepare for first communion
 And then be given confirmation.
 Ref. So, etc.

There is a time for education
 And a time for recreation.
 There is a time when they (cannot choose?)
 And a time that they are taught to work.
 They can be first class musicians
 And men of proper education.
 So before you leave them to roam,
 Gladly throw them in the Orphan Home.

There is a day called visiting day,
 Appointed during every month it's on the first Sunday.
 It is appointed for families and friends
 That's the day you can gladly see your children,
 And you can carry money, eatables or toys
 And give them to your children whether girl or boys.
 So before you leave them to roam,
 Gladly heave them in the Orphan Home.

6. The Gold In Africa

The Tiger
 accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

Haile Selassie, a tribal warrior from the Ethiopian countryside who had himself proclaimed Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, has always been an important figure for Caribbean black society. For many Caribbeans he represented a dream of black freedom; since his country was the only area in Africa that was not included in the European colonial network. For the Rastas of Jamaica he is still the living God, the leader prophesied in the Book of Revelations who will lead the Black Race to liberation in Africa. The invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini's modern Italian Army in 1935 was deplored throughout the world, but the anger and sense of despair was even more intense in the Caribbean, and there were several songs by the calypsonians about the war. The war also seemed to be foreseen in the Bible, and Mussolini was identified with the "... Beast and the kings of the earth gathered together to make war on him that sat on the throne" described in Revelation 19:19.

The gold, the gold, the gold, the gold,
 The gold in Africa Mussolini want from the Emperor.

Abyssinia appealed to the League for peace,
 Mussolini's actions were like a beast.
 A villain, a thief, a highway robber,
 And a shameless dog for a dictator.

He crossed the border and () more
 The Emperor had no intentions for war.
 That man I call a criminal,
 A man destroy churches and hospitals.

(Much of the text is difficult to understand. The term Abyssinia is another name for Ethiopia.

He said expansion he really need,
 He have 45 million head to feed.
 Why he don't ask the Japanese,
 England, France () or Germany.

(verse difficult)

He have diamond, ruby and pearl,
 Platinum, silver, and even gold.
 I don't know why the man making so much fight,
 I now believe he want Haile Selassie's wives.

If he want gold that sad dictator
 try in the (maharra?)
 Venezuela or Canada () or else in America.
 ()

7. Excursion to Grenada (Hubert Raphael Charles)

The Lion
 with Harmony Kings' Orchestra

This is a swinging, hilarious account of an excursion by a group of Trinidadians to the neighboring island of Grenada. It seems that when they got there they sang a local song and caused a small disturbance that soon became almost a riot. Part of the problem, according to The Lion, was that the police who were called " . . . they themselves were young Creoles," and they got involved in the fighting too. The Lion maintained innocently that even if they did sing the song they sang a different version of it. "We did sing a song, but not the one they sing/ But we didn't sing it in a vulgar way." The orchestra then shows how they sang it - not the bad way, which they also sing for comparison. The instrumental section has a strongly jazz influenced solo by the alto saxophone.

Bl. If I Won A Sweepstake (Atilla The Hun)
 Atilla The Hun
 accompanied by Gerald Clark and his Caribbean Serenaders

This is a variant of the old theme of how different someone is treated if they suddenly acquire money - the difference here is that the calypsonian is cynical of the entire society. He also describes his own position as a singer by saying that people would even forget

I've studied analytically the mighty power of money.
rep.

Imagine me winning the Capital Sweeps today,
My life would change up in every way.
For I'd become automatically
A pillar of society.

I have no status you will allow
And society don't know me now.
But when I get a (purse of money?) you'd be surprised
And its power you'd realize.
I'd be invited to go here, there, everywhere,

I'd be dining up at St. Claire's,
And the hypocrites would say that they didn't know
That I used to sing calypso.

So to go to the hotels without a doubt
They'd brutalize me and throw me out.
But when my position has changed financially
They'll have cocktail parties for me.
They'd introduce me to some bigshots I never knew,
Even their wives and daughters too.
And when you'd hear the report eventually
I'd be a member of the aristocracy.

Lawyers, doctors and engineers,
Will declare, 'Now my friend appears.'
Never for a moment I'd be left alone,
Always inviting me to their homes.
I'd be a member of the record society,
(the rest of the text is unfortunately difficult to
understand, but the implication is that he won't be taken in
by his new friends, and the last line is,)
But ()
To think I'd let them borrow money from me.

2. Rate Rate Ray (Lord Invader)
Lord Invader
accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

A song reminiscing about the old songs that were popular in
Trinidad before the coming of calypso. The instrumental section
has a light, spontaneous clarinet solo in the New Orleans style.

3. Sally You Not Ashamed? (Fitz McLean)
Lionel Belasco's Orchestra

If there were any doubts about the relationship between New
Orleans and Trinidad this instrumental piece should make it clear
that as far as Trinidad was concerned New Orleans was part of the
Caribbean. The trumpet player has the tone and the phrasing of
a Kid Shots Madison or a Dee Dee Pierce, and the clarinet duet
moves in and out of the beat in a way that would have made Big Eye
Louis Nelson or other New Orleans musicians of the 1920's feel
proud. The rhythm is a straightforward 4/4 beat, with little

syncopation, and the melody itself sounds like a close variant of the
old New Orleans favorite "Eh Las Bas."

4. Oh Lil' Lil' Gal (William Ted Lewis)
Harmony Kings Orchestra
Vocal Chorus by William Ted Lewis and Harmony Kings' Boys

Despite the elaborate harmonies and the sophisticated background
this is in the form of the old call and response songs that were
so important in the formation of the early blues. It is a complaint
song - complaining about a woman - and the singers take turns
describing what she's done to him and the chorus answers,

Oh Lil' Lil' Gal, you too old to be so bold

5. Hell Yard And George Street Conflict
The Tiger
accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

A song describing a local street fight that mentions Mussolini
and Haile Selassie and generally complains that all the fighting
wasn't over anything important.

The passing of the bottle, the passing of the stones,
George Street was a battle zone.

6. Poppy Day (Philip Garcia)
Lord Executor
with Cyril Monroe String Orchestra

The text of Lord Executor's song sounds naive almost forty-
five years after he recorded it, but this was before World War 2,
and before the cold war that followed it. For men like Executor,
who still lived in a British colony and identified themselves with
the colonial empire, these emotions were part of the everyday
reality. Part of the reality was also the fact that men from
Trinidad had been part of the BEF in France, bringing this small,
isolated island into contact with Europe and the other colonies.

I don't know how you take it, but I know
 In Flanders Field the poppies grow.
 I don't know how you take it, but I know
 In Flanders field the poppies grow.
 Oh what a wonderful sight it is to see
 The poppies growing abundantly
 Upon the graves of the brave who fought for victory
 And conquered Germany.

Never yet in human memory,
 Both in sacred and political history,
 Has such a mournful ()
 Fallen upon the () of civilization.
 So let us go to the poppies and the field
 To see the men who refused to yield.
 It was German brutality
 But it was Britain's victory
 In this colony.

There is an Indian standing upright
 And you know he faces the light.
 There is a soldier kneeling beside
 A fallen comrade who must have died.
 But the most I am thinking of all
 Is the mother whose tears of sorrow must fall.
 In the memory of Britannia
 It is India
 Forever in this colony.

Whenever the 11th of November draw near
 In every church and chapel we sing the prayer.
 Silence one minute hush make no noise ()
 When the organ roll and the singing starts
 The solemn melody commence to touch your hearts.
 The flowers, the honor and name ()
 Britannia forever more.

In honor of Britain's famous battle cry
 This poppy shall never fade nor die.
 Wear it () in your home
 Or on your bike or your car wherever you roam.
 I myself shall wear it upon my breast
 In memory of those men who have done their best.
 So let it be
 An everlasting memory
 Throughout this colony.

(The poppies he is referring to are small paper flowers made by
 veteran's and sold before Armistice Day in memory of the dead of World
 War I.

7. Out The Fire
 The Lion
 accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders

This is a loose, engaging song about how The Lion was in
 a bar and heard the fire sirens and he ran down to see what was
 going on and heard the fire captain say,
 Out the fire.

At one point he sings a "scat" jazz chorus in the best 1930s
 style, and the high notes on the trumpet make a passable imitation
 of a fire siren.

Samuel Charters

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AND SERVICE CORP., 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C. 10023
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 1/3 RPM

The Real Calypso, Volume 2 SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO THE ORPHAN HOME

Calypso Songs of Social Commentary and Love Troubles
Recorded in Trinidad in the 1930s and 1940s.
Compiled and Annotated by Samuel Charters

Side 1

RF4 A

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accompanied by Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders
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Side 2

RF4 B

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