HAPPY MEMORIES OF A TRUE GUYANESE CHRISTMAS!

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM THE GUYANA CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK, INC.
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Enjoy the Christmas Season

As we close the door on Leap Year 2012, we hope the next Leap Year - 2016 - would be one of good tidings and great joy.

What a bittersweet year it has been - a year when some of us had our dreams fulfilled, but the creek did rise, in the form of superstorm Sandy, and wash away countless homes and businesses. As some sought higher ground, their children were swept from their arms. How devastating, and while we continue to grapple with such loss and try to cope with the efforts of rebuilding and restoring, the earth stood still, momentarily, on Friday, December 14. On that dreadful day, the world watched the unfolding of the unspeakable tragedy of the Elementary School Massacre in Newtown, Connecticut. Twenty innocent lives were snuffed out without a chance to blossom and bloom and take their rightful place in the world. The six teachers who gave their lives so that their students could live, must now be hailed as martyrs for that noble profession of Teaching. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who suffered any form of loss in both tragedies. We must now take the lessons learnt from 2012 to propel us forward into 2013.

Out of these tragedies has arisen a strong sense of community and bonding. As resilient people, we must seize this opportunity to ensure that we bounce back stronger in our global village. We must link our hands and our minds as “Aal bady, Waan bady.”

How prophetic was GCA’s 2011 Theme “Aal bady, Waan bady” – which reminded us of our common humanity. As we segue to 2012, we continue to nurture and promote our cultural heritage, as reflected at our just concluded highly successful 10th Annual Symposium featuring the theme “Masquerade Lives” in Georgetown, Guyana, under the distinguished patronage of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport.

The Board of the Guyana Cultural Association and the Symposium committee took a quantum leap with the outside the box decision to take our “Masquerade Lives” Symposium to the “cradle of Masquerade revolution” our homeland Guyana.

Our entire year has been one of promoting our cultural heritage, as we utilized the multi-media platform of Facebook, On-line Magazine, Guyana Folk Magazine, Video Documentary, Blogging and Focus on Folk radio production to bolster our year round activities including our Summer Camp, Literary Hang, Awards Ceremony, Kwe Kwe and Family Fun Day. Never before has so much been achieved with so few. But it tells us, like the little grain of mustard seed, through an idea once conceived and properly executed we can achieve. And WE DID ACHIEVE.

And we achieved, in spite of immense personal challenges by all members. With our heads held high and our hearts and hands locked together, the Guyana Cultural Association is on a cultural heritage journey that will make us proud both at home and abroad. Our journey will also contribute to giving our young people in the diaspora a sense of self-worth and belonging.

Enjoy the Christmas Season and don’t forget to taste some good Rum Cake from Claire Ann.

Ave Brewster-Haynes
December Editor.
Mural "Masquerade Lives"
Georgetown, Guyana
I recently participated in the Guyana Cultural Association’s Symposium, Masquerade Lives, in our homeland. It was a classic example of the transnational connections and cultural retentions about which I often lament. The principal objective of the organizers of this unprecedented event is to resuscitate the art form. The range of topics discussed by panels of international experts in Caribbean and Guyanese folklore, history and culture, and the engagement of elders, inheritors and other enthusiasts, unequivocally articulated a passionate ownership of their craft and place in the cultural history of Guyana.

Following opening remarks by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, the stage was set for a serious discussion, dissecting past practices, and illuminating ways to breathe new life into what appears to be a critically wounded traditional custom. Themes varied from the origin of Masquerade to the involvement of the youth; the financial and personal challenges of the performer; the role of women; the fear factor and masks; regional differences; symbols and their social significance; the spiritual dimension of Masquerade; marketability of a Creole identity; rural vs. urban perceptions; embracing cultural identity and social awareness through masquerade; strategies of promotion; respect for, and acknowledgement of the masquerader; class and ethnic issues; the need to resist the temptation to abandon “original” practices; and Masquerade beyond Christmas.

One of the highlights was the “Dray Cyart” caravan to the unveiling ceremony of the Masquerade Mural on the grounds of the National Museum. About 25 local and overseas-based symposium participants mounted two flag-draped, horse-drawn Dray Cyarts at the Umana Yana under the broiling mid-day sun on December 14th. Led by a troop of youthful and elder masqueraders including flouncers, Stilt Dancer, Bam Bam Sally and Bad Cow, we rode down Main Street to the Museum, with feet gangling at the side and flanked by police outriders. Some yielding motorists fretted, while others gave an accommodating smile. Perhaps they understood what we were trying to do. Downtown had a festive buzz – “Masquerade Band comin’.

Onlookers from business establishments along the way waved approvingly, and a few gyrated to the beat of the drums. News correspondents trotted along, interviewing riders in this historic, native masquerade caravan. Sweating profusely, I opened my umbrella to get some relief from the tropical sun. I was a “small boy” the last time I jumped on a Donkey Cyart and I wasn’t going to miss this nostalgic opportunity for anything. I intermittently exchanged glances with a GCA official, who was holding on for dear life, not only for safety, but as if to symbolically secure her fate in this fleeting moment of invigorating a cherished art form.

The unveiling ceremony, hosted by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport and the Prime Minister, attracted a diverse group of spectators, briefly distracted from their Christmas shopping. My research interest in public reaction to cultural events led me to become an instant participant-observer, keeping my ears and eyes grounded. One onlooker stated, “Christmas now start fo me, dis is like ol’time”. Another offered, “De days fo masquerade done, Ya’ll only hambugin traffic”. These reactions profoundly sum up the significant crossroad of contemporary masquerade as an indigenous practice, challenged by elements of modernity.

Indeed if masquerade is to be revived, understanding this challenge through the lens of such diametrically opposing views is critical. More importantly as panelists noted, it requires a serious commitment from the government of Guyana to provide support and resources. NGOs and Home town Associations in the Diaspora can also help. The gyaff, rhetoric and accolades must be replaced by sustained action involving those who flounce, not only to entertain, but purveyors of a rich unadulterated culture.

The exalted Dray Cyart journey down Main Street with my compatriots on that sunny day in December would not have been in vain.

Masquerade Lives!

Lear Matthews
BREATHING NEW LIFE
INTO A WOUNDED ART FORM:
Led by a troop of youthful and elder masqueraders including flouncers, Stilt Dancer, Bam Bam Sally and Bad Cow, with feet hanging at the side, we rode down Main Street to the Museum...
My career as an artist in Guyana started at the tender age of 16. I had the opportunity to work as an artist in the printing and graphics industries. My success in life started around Carifesta 1972. By the time I was 18, I sold many paintings door-to-door and later successfully executed a one-man art show at the prestigious Guyana Society and published a very nice collection of poetry embellished with my art by Guyana’s leading literary giants that sold successfully during the festival. None of this would ever have occurred without mentorship from my family, friends and associates.

In 1972, I left the shores of Guyana to expand my career as an artist in America. Though I returned to Guyana numerous times over the years, this year was a poignant reminder of the past forty years since my original departure, just to celebrate “Masquerade Lives”.

Masquerade is one of those celebrations in the firmament of our thoughts, minds and spirits that will always be there. I tramped behind the Masquerade bands through Albouystown, Kitty, Campbellville and La Penitence wherever we were living at the time. It was time to celebrate Masquerade again in the old native land. The time had come to open the doors to welcome in new, fresh talent and to give them an opportunity to experience public exposure as I had by inviting them to paint Masquerade murals.

The students of the E.R. Burrowes School of Art executed two fantastic pieces of art. They possess raw talent waiting to explode on to the public art scene. The only and permanent missing link in this equation is encouragement, a little money to help pay for materials and mentorship. The entire school supported the effort of “Masquerade Lives”. They poured their hearts and souls into painting the masquerade murals, with profound thought, discussion and unified execution over a five day period that I was there, and in the week prior. One mural is a permanent fixture on a newly constructed concrete wall placed on the lawns of the National Museum and the other a display used at the venues to mark the occasion.

E. R. Burrowes School of Art named after the iconic Mr. Burrowes of the original Working People’s Art Group of the 50’s and 60’s, is a part of the Ministry of Culture,
GCA SYMPOSIUM IN GUYANA: “Masquerade Lives” “YESTERDAY, THE ELDERS...TOMORROW, TODAY’S YOUNGSTERS!

STUDENTS OF E.R. BURROWES SCHOOL OF ART

NEW, FRESH TALENT...
POURED THEIR HEARTS AND SOULS INTO PAINTING THE MASQUERADE MURALS
The first ever "Flounce Off" was held on Saturday, December 15, 2012 in the village of Victoria, the first village purchased by freed slaves.

This exhilarating event was organised by The Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sport and The Guyana Cultural Association of New York as part of the “Masquerade Lives” Symposium and was witnessed by several hundred villagers at the Victoria Community Centre.

Four Bands from Regions 2, 4 & 10 "flounced off" for cash prizes sponsored by Golden Brook Cooking Oil/Pomeroon Oil Mills. The Best Band prize was won by "Fire in the Land" with "Joker Is Wild" and "Fire Red" in second & third positions respectively.

"Fire in The Land" also won the Best Over 15 floencer, Stilt Dancer, Mad Cow & Bass Drum while "Torch" won the Best Under 15 Flouncer and Bam Bam Sally. "Joker Is Wild" won Best Kittle.

The Judges were International musician Dave Martins, Andrea Mentore, Guyana Music Teachers Association, Julio Thijs, International Stilt Dancer, Rose October, GCA member & Dance Instructor and Claire Patterson-Monah, Chief Judge & Treasurer, GCA.

Prior to the judging, the bands danced through the village, much to the excitement of the youth, who tried out the masquerade steps of "Lady Go To Market", "Donkey Parade" and "Scottish Highlander".

Guest artistes included Teacher Raghu and his Lusignan Band and Trevor Blackette, Leader & Stilt Dancer of The Golden Arrowhead Masquerade Band of Region 3.

President of the Guyana Cultural Association, Prof Vibert Cambridge was loud in his praise for the participation of the bands and their leaders. The "Flounce Off" was such a success that there are plans to make this an annual activity moving across the regions.
GCA SYMPOSIUM IN GUYANA: “Masquerade Lives” “YESTERDAY, THE ELDERS...TOMORROW, TODAY’S YOUNGSTERS!

Masquerade
“Flounce-Off”
at Victoria Village
Margaret Lawrence
A Masquerade musical evolution stage has been set. After a long silence where the progression of Masquerade development was somewhat dormant and stagnated, a premiere launching to rehabilitate and resuscitate the art form thrust its best foot forward with a quantum leap. This exercise was exhibited during the recent Masquerade Lives Symposium activities experience at the Guyana National School of Music sponsored by the Guyana Cultural Association of New York in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sport in Guyana.

Professor Vibert Cambridge – President of GCA New York, in his opening remarks outlined a synopsis of changes that occurred over the years and paid homage to past contributors in the likes of the Dolphins, Hugh Sam, Billy Pilgrim, Tom Charles, Pat Clarke, Terry Nelson and many others. This was a preamble to set the stage for music educator, music arranger, music journalist and musician extraordinaire – for over four decades Derry Etkins. He launched a brilliant seven minute premiere video contribution adding various categories of style and creativity bringing the art form to the fore and his originality profoundly displayed. Derry comes from a family of musicians emanating from Plaisance, on the East Coast of Demerara, a village that produced musicians of the ilk of The Profits', Edmond Wills, Rudy and Eddy Grant, his mom Joyce Etkins and many others.

The famed musician from the yester year Guyana “Telstars” string orchestra skillfully demonstrated and crafted a new composition, unique to masquerade with a flair that defines masquerade as “Sweet Suite.” He eloquently enunciated his structured piece to the capacity crowd which included “Fire In The Land” masquerade band, the winners of the “Flounce Off competition” which was held the previous day at Victoria village.

Surely, a metamorphosis of Masquerade is poised to propel into a new dimension. Derry claims that his vision, cross over or augmentation would not take away from the steady basic rhythmical passages of masquerade, but would rather enhance the rudimentary structure into a dimensional art form we can call our own. In European Art Music, commonly referred to as “Classical” music, a suite is loosely defined as, a collection of pieces written for dancing, often in related keys. “Masquerade Sweet Suite” is a small collection of reflections, suggesting possible scenarios where Guyana’s Masquerade groove can be applied.
Masquerade Sweet, Suite

Edgar Henry

However, he is quick to admit that the format is open to constructive criticism similar to other established Caribbean formats and invites musicians in the Guyana Diaspora to be part of the journey. Just as Reggae transitioned via different changes in Jamaica from Sca and Rock Steady, and in Trinidad and Tobago from Calypso to Soca, Derry hopes that his embryonic original masterpiece will not fall on deaf ears, but will bear fruit, once other practitioners embrace his efforts; his presentation will continue its upward mobility toward perfection.

His classical and jazz background helped him shape his influence and application of his genius in his extraordinary composition. The serenity portrayed in the introductory passage set the motif for the rhythmical up-tempo masquerade drum format in the second movement, followed by the various improvisational styles utilizing its melodic fodder to one of our folk songs – Missy Lass She Gold Ring, taking it through a few rhythmic and harmonic displacements and at the same time capturing the individuality of the flute, guitar, bass clarinet and vibro-harp (marimba) as they produce purposeful variations of melodic hierarchy.

Mr. Etkins envisions a forty (40) piece band somewhat similar to a classical orchestra setting, which could be the epitome of the masquerade evolution. He cautioned however that the current status of players should exhibit nimbleness among themselves accommodating and complementing each other and other bands as well, to establish unity, unification of energy, professionalism, camaraderie and respect.

Out of the question and answer segment arose an intense interactive dialogue including the need for musicians to learn musical notation to enhance their innate skills. Dave Martin of the Tradewinds Band made the observation that it is important for every band to create individual signature themes that would be peculiar to each band for recognition and identification purposes.

It was recommended that the National School of Music should be used to facilitate similar conversations of varied topics to stimulate interest, interaction and feedback as we move forward.

In summary, the premier rendition was well received by all in attendance. Everyone left with the confidence that Derry’s efforts were not in vain once all stakeholders embrace this new evolutional paradigm and work arduously as an enterprise and for sustainability.

The moderator, yours truly, in his closing remarks of the historic evening, praised and complimented Derry Etkins for his invaluable premiere presentation launch and coined the opening words from William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. “If Masquerade Music Be The Food Of Love, Play On… Masquerade Sweet Suite.”
One of the grandest and most important indigenous Christmas time performances in the Caribbean and Guyana is the masquerade tradition. One part of this great tradition may be seen every Christmas on the streets of Georgetown: small bands of youths dressed in some costuming, prancing among the motorists to the sound of a drum. But this is a mere relic of this ancient street performance, which exhibits more about its moribund state than about the tradition itself. What is worse, the motorists and the citizenry of the city barely tolerate them with a sense of annoyance which, in another year or two, is guaranteed to see these bands disappear altogether.

In stark contrast to this is another part of the varied and colourful tradition to be found every Christmas season on Bay Street in the city of Nassau. That is the Jonkanoo festival in the Bahamas, which is the most vibrant, lively and spectacular of the Caribbean masquerades which still exist. In fact, it is surpassed in the region only by carnival.

Masquerades have been highlighted here in Arts on Sunday a number of times, but it is revisited now because of its importance, because of the derelict state of the performance in Guyana, and because of the efforts to revive interest in it through a symposium which is now in progress in Georgetown. This is an event titled the Masquerade Lives Symposium being staged by the Guyana Cultural Association (GCA) and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. The GCA is based in New York and headed by Prof Vibert Cambridge of the University of Ohio; they link with the Ministry to offer academic papers by international scholars, workshops and performances in a gesture to promote the masquerade tradition and revive interest in Guyana where it is moribund.

This folk performance is a form of street theatre and a genre of the varied traditions known in Jamaica and Belize as Jonkunnu or Maskarade, and in Guyana as Maskarade. Dating back to the 17th Century in Jamaica it evolved to be (in the 19th and early 20th Centuries) the largest of these festivals in the Caribbean outside of the Trinidad Carnival. The Guyanese maskarade when it was active and vibrant was very similar to Jamaica and Belize, and also shared characteristics with the Tuk Band of Barbados.

The masked, costumed performers dance along the streets at Christmas time accompanied by a small ensemble of musicians. Foremost in the dance are the flouncers who perform the steps and manoeuvres peculiar to the maskarade flounce. They are largely dressed in colourful costumes somewhat like jesters and are joined by the tall stilt dancers or stiltsmen towering above the band. Along with them is a cast of stock characters. These include the long lady, effigies of white Europeans, Mother Sally and Bam-bam Sally a female figure played by a male in European fancy dress with an exaggerated ‘bumper’ (rear-end), who dance to show off her assets to the amusement of the spectators. The Bad Cow or Mad Cow is a costumed figure in the form of a bull with large horns leaping about dangerously and threateningly. The performance includes a “doctor play” in which a man with a malady (often an oversized “goady”) seeks to be cured by a doctor to the amusement of the crowd.

There are “toasts” recited at intervals – four-lined verses in iambic metre (septametre or octametre) on varied subjects, such as

“Christmus comes but once a year / and every man must have bis share
But poor Brother Willy in the jail / drinking sour ginger beer (ale)”

Or

“My name is John Devour / I eat no fish nor flour
But send those young girls one by one / I devour them by the hour”
Each recitation is followed by the shout of “Ban!” which is a signal to the band to resume playing the music which usually stops to allow the vocal performance. The music is a very fast-paced rhythm played by a Boom or bass drum, a Kettle or Kittle drum played with sticks and a flute (a folk instrument called a “fife” in Jamaica) which improvises, but often plays the melodies of known songs, including Christmas carols. The Jamaican jonkunnu is a much larger and more elaborate affair, and there are variations in Belize and in the Bajan Tuk Band.

It is highly unlikely, however, that any of these performances will be witnessed today in Guyana where the participants who are seen today never learnt the skills. In the past spectators would throw coins to the band and the art of Flouncing includes the dexterity of picking them up off the ground in fluent movements which must be executed without breaking the rhythm or flow of the steps and the dance. The stiltsmen dance with high skills and balancing acts, while the mad cow (bad cow) charges and frightens the crowd. One East Coast village, Victoria, is known for its knowledge of maskarade skills, while the only worthwhile performances at present are to be found on the Essequibo Coast.

The Caribbean masquerades have their origins mainly in West Africa but there are also European roots and influences as well as forms and characteristics that evolved in the Caribbean, including several that developed out of the local social environment. Several African roots have been identified by Sylvia Wynter, Kamau Brathwaite, Martha Beckwith and Judith Bettelheim who provide thorough accounts of Jamaica’s jonkanoo and its various roots. It was first described by Sir Hans Sloane as an African derivative in the 17th Century, but by the 19th Century it had accumulated several influences from the literature, legends and politics of Europe, in addition to elements arising from contact with the local society.

These various causal combinations resulted in the evolution of different forms within the tradition, some of them remarkable in their appropriation of European literary and cultural performance integrated with African theatrical form or religious ritual and Caribbean performance. English naval/military factors, for example, gave rise to Barbados’ Land Ship, while English theatricals, legends and literature accounted for the Mummies of St Kitts and the Speech Bands of Tobago. These combined with local traditions to form the Shakespeare Mas of Carriacou (Grenada) and Papa Jab or Flavier the White Devil of St Lucia. Social factors rendered the folk forms much more intricate and sophisticated and it is possible to sort them out according to their form, content and the driving forces behind them.

These characteristics include spectacle, language, satire, themes of education and elements of rivalry, violence and fear. Spectacle, for instance is the most striking feature of jonkanoo in the Bahamas and in Jamaica; satire is strong in the Bahamas, English literature is recited in Jamaica, in the mummies, the speech band and in Shakespeare Mas where the theme of education may be discerned, while this theme is very strong in Trinidad’s Pierrot Grenade. At the same time rivalry, violence and fear have been prevalent in most of them because of what they have taken from Europe, such as the dramatic conflicts of St George, the Turkish Knight and pretenders to the throne that find their way into maskarade, junkannu and the mummies. Papa Jab (Flavier)’s sons fight among themselves and kill each other, with similar battles occurring in various Maskarade Doctor Plays, all followed by resurrections performed by the “doctors”.

Yet many of these may also be attributed to the African origins – the killings and revivals, the satire, the rivalry, violence and the fear that they generate. This is because they may be traced back to their African forebears, particularly in the Kalabari and Rivers area and Yoruba-land in Nigeria, since maskarade was based on religious and spiritual ritual from the 17th Century and for at least two centuries after.

These and many other powerful factors were dramatic characteristics of the masquerade tradition, including that of Guyana which these symposia, workshops and exhibitions are seeking to revive.
Long Lady in Christmas Masquerade
Rosignol, Guyana
by Vidur Dindayal, 1944
Vidur Dindayal,
I liked to spend Christmas in my old village though Christmas in the city was exciting too.
In the city of Georgetown in Guyana, stores vied to have the best shop window display. There in the tropics you saw live Christmas trees, shipped in specially from England. There to gaze at was the latest in seasonal craze to hit London or New York. You felt with people everywhere the joyous feelings of Christmas.

There was frenzied rushing around to buy presents and things for the home. Everything about home must be spick and span, fresh and clean, even new; nothing but your very best for relations and friends dropping in for cheer at Christmas time.

But for me as a boy Christmas in the village was the best - the Masquerade, the most exciting part, a music group dressed up in fancy costumes. Some wore masks. They made a larger than life puppet of a lady - 'long lady', a horse or chicken, got inside it and danced to the lilting tunes of a flute player and his band playing bugle, trumpet saxophone, mandolin, guitar; kettle drum and big base drum.

You first hear the drums beating in the distance. You catch a glimpse of 'long lady' dancing and that was the promise of enjoyment to come. The troupe draws near and music beckons from whistle and flute. You cannot keep still wherever you are. Helplessly you head for the dancing troupe.

The main dancers, usually two in bright coloured costumes, a joy to see are dancing away, jumping up, jiggling, swaying, shaking, completely taken over by the rhythmic music. That's when you get caught up in the dancing too.

There are no steps to learn. Right steps come naturally. Letting yourself go, the music takes over. Whatever its name you are dancing to it. You move with the troupe, you and your friends. You dance and you jig, you sway and you shake, you catch your breath so when they come back you are ready to dance again and again.

Christmas for us children was never dull, with plenty to do. You played with your toys, you danced with the masquerade in the street. You played with your friends, had your fill of Christmas cake and Christmas drink - cool ginger beer.

When night time came, after a hectic day and a happy one too, you got into bed and slept like a top. With Best Wishes! Happy Christmas!

HAPPY MEMORIES OF A TRUE GUYANESE CHRISTMAS
You would only know for sure
That Christmas was almost there
When the garlic pork was made
And the sorrel and ginger beer
And the house was full of flavors
When mom began to bake
That juicy clove spiced ham
And lots of good black cake
“Church bells are ringing,  
Santa Claus on his way,  
Happy Christmas to you dear;  
Happy Holiday.”

“Happy Holiday.” Lord Melody & The Four Lords (1956)

A confident bass, a wailing saxophone, and a sensitive piano introduce “Happy Holiday.” When that quintessential Christmas song is heard, Guyanese at home and abroad feel the spirit of the season. What is so special about this song?

“Happy Holiday” was first issued as a 78 rpm record in 1956. During the middle to late 1950s, a shift was taking place in home entertainment. There was a movement away from Victrolas and other brands of 78 rpm record players to the smaller and lower cost 45 rpm players that could be “plugged” into the radio—the Eckos, KBs, Mullards, Normendies, Pyes, and Phillips.

The 1950s brought political changes to British Guiana and they also brought changes in the way Guyanese consumed music. The lower cost record players and the widespread use of “hire purchase” encouraged the proliferation of juke boxes. It also increased access to recorded music by Guyanese working class people.

This shift in the technologies for listening to music had other consequences, including the emergence of a recording industry and increased demand for more recorded music by Guyanese. By 1959, “Happy Holiday” was re-released as a 45rpm record.

The late Al Seales is intimately associated with the recording of “Happy Holiday” and the start of a recording industry in Guyana. He led Al Seales and the Washboards and later established the GEMS and the Caribbean GEMS record labels. Seales’ studio was well respected.

Important Caribbean musicians such as Lord Melody preferred to record their music at the studio at 40 Robb Street. The Mighty Sparrow’s first recording was also done there. Seales assembled a powerful studio band, The Caribbean All Stars, which included Bassie Thomas (pianist/arranger), Harry Whittaker (Alto sax), Sydney Prince (Tenor sax), Sabu Lall (bass), Simpson (bass), Messiah (Drums), Charlie Agard (Bongos), Rector Schultz (Guitar). He and his arranger Bassie Thomas experimented with a beat that reflected the intermingling of Guyana’s West Indian and Latin American heritage—the “Bion.”

It was in this environment that Lord Melody (Fitzroy Alexander) approached Seales with the lyrics for “Happy Holiday.” He wanted to produce a seasonal calypso to compete with Lord Kitchener’s “Drink a Rum,” which was the dominant Christmas calypso among West Indians at home and abroad. He was advised against going the calypso route but encouraged to use the “Bion” beat. Further, it was agreed that the Four Lords, which included Neville Rose and Billy Moore, would record the song. Rose was the lead singer and Billy Moore arranged the harmonies. Lord Melody’s is the voice of the famous spoken solo: “My darling, wishing you the best. You know that my love for you did last and will last for many more Christmases.”

The technology available to Al Seals in 1956 did not allow him to record multiple tracks and then mix a final product. He used one microphone—one of the best available at that time—an RCA Noiman. The recording required a complete performance by the musicians and the singers. This required coordination and professionalism. The recording has stood the test of time. Almost 50 years later “Happy Holiday” remains not only one of the most popular Christmas songs in Guyana but also one of the best recorded pieces of music from Guyana.

“Happy Holiday” has been recorded and performed by several other artists. Neville Rose, who migrated to Brazil, is reported to have done a version with solo guitar there. Mark Holder did a reggae version. Ted E. Jones did a soul version, and Ray Seales, along with Trinidadian vocalist Cleo Hart released an R&B version in 1995. For many, including this writer, the original is still the “boss.”

As we celebrate the season and reflect on the longevity of “Happy Holiday,” we must spend some time thinking about the creativity that produced it. Seales started his working life as a sailor on the Demerara River and was given a quatro by an Amerindian man. From the quatro he graduated to the banjo and joined the Washboard Orchestra in the 1920s.

As he acquired seniority and became a leader in the band, he took up the saxophone. His tutor was Gun Fernandez. Seales’ love for music was multidimensional. One of his first entrepreneurial ventures was a beer garden that featured a record player and a collection of contemporary jazz and pop records “which he got..."
The late Al Seales is intimately associated with the recording of “Happy Holiday” and the start of a recording industry in Guyana.

“Happy Holiday” remains not only one of the most popular Christmas songs in Guyana but also one of the best recorded pieces of music from Guyana.

from old friends who were still working on ships coming from North America and Europe. This feature attracted a loyal clientele who constantly offered to buy the record player and the records. Seales, the entrepreneur who never drank or smoked, saw a business opportunity and a way to get out of selling alcohol. He opened General Electrical Musical Supplies (GEMS) at 40 Robb Street. After a few years, he purchased the property, which has remained in the Seales family since. Over the years the business grew from selling records and musical instruments to include a recording studio. Seales never established a pressing plant, so, his recordings were pressed by Melodisc in the United Kingdom.

The GEMS studio made many of the seminal Guyanese and West Indian recordings. Among these was Doreen Gravesande’s “Ting a ling,” which is considered the first recording of a ping pong and voice in the West Indies. “Ting a ling” is another example of the “Biaon” beat developed by Seales and his arranger, pianist Bassie Thomas.

Seales recorded Norman Beaton of the influential group the Four Bees. Their recording of “Melvina,” like “Happy Holiday,” remains popular after almost 50 years. It was the first song by a Guyanese to top the Trinidad and Tobago charts during a carnival season. The Gabby/Eddy Grant rearrangement put it back on the charts in the 1990s.

Before recording “Happy Holiday,” GEMS had released King Fighter’s “My Xmas Card,” the studio’s first original Christmas song. After “Happy Holiday,” it released “Xmas Season” by The Four Bees, featuring Gloria Beaton, wife of the late Norman Beaton.

Al Seales’ recording studio was a magnet for Guyanese and Caribbean artists. Seales was known and respected for his innovation and his quest for perfection. These qualities attracted Billy Moore and the Four Lords to the studio. Moore was trying to develop tight harmonies in Guyanese popular music. His success is evident in “Happy Holiday.”

Seales’ work caught the attention of other music recording pioneers in the West Indies. He is reported to have advised Mr. Khouri who was then setting up Federal Records in Jamaica. He also gave advice to Mr. Harrison when he was establishing WIRL in Barbados and Mr. Cook who established the COOK Label in Trinidad and Tobago.

The exploration of the recordings of GEMS has only just started. Seales’ role in bringing Indo-Guyanese into the mainstream of Guyanese popular music during the 1960s and 1970s will be the subject of a separate feature in the future.

Although Seales passed away in 1995, his spirit lives on. At the symposium on Guyana’s musical heritage during Folk Festival 2003, GEMS Music, Seales’ music publishing company awarded the first GEMS Musical Appreciation Award to the Folk Festival Organizing Committee. The award will now be an annual feature of the Folk Festival, recognizing innovation and the quest for perfection by Guyana’s musicians at home and abroad.
Carolines at Christmas

Edgar Henry

Christmas carols are basically songs in which the lyrics reflect the theme of Christmas. They are traditionally sung at Advent - the period before Christmas during the winter season. No holiday celebration is complete without the stunning sights of twinkling decorations and sounds of carols reverberating in several corners and corridors during the yuletide season. This surely brings about the spirit of the season as the very popular “once a year” tunes are constantly heard in a variety of traditional and contemporary Christmas holiday classics. These are normally heard while shopping at department stores, on the radio, at parties, on television and in almost every advertised commercial, as background music.

Carols became popular after the Reformation in countries where Protestant churches gained prominence. Today, carols are regularly sung at Christian religious services. Some compositions include lyrics which are evidently not of a religious topic, but are nevertheless referred to as "carols" such as “Silver Bells”, “Blue Christmas” or “I Saw Three Ships.”

However, carols such as Adeste Fideles (O Come all ye faithful) “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” and Hark The Herald Angels Sing” and additionally Arthur Sullivan’s “Good King Wenceslas” and “It Came Upon The Midnight Clear” clearly have a religious origin and connotation. Times have certainly changed since many carol compositions are sung regularly in both sacred and secular settings, and are among the better-known modern Christmas renditions.

It is often difficult to draw a distinction between a Christmas carol and a Christmas Song. The style, rhythm and intended purpose of Christmas music depend on the venue and participants. Performed by a church choir, the songs would be somber in keeping with Christian ambience. However, the Masquerader’s interpretation would contain a rapid, ‘flounce off’ beat, which would exclude a meandering crooning song such as “White Christmas.” In Guyana, Masquerade bands, performed and played their special brand of music which includes many carols played in an upbeat rhythmic format. This was a common sight on the streets of towns and villages. Mother Sally, Long Lady, mad cow and other costumed caricatures, performed to the delight of onlookers. During the performances one or more of the members of the band would approach those being entertained in order to collect money, now and then food and sometimes alcohol. The spectators generally encouraged the dancers by prodding and cajoling them to perform their best acrobatic dance steps. In Guyana, it is common to hear the lookers-on shouting “Blow, Man, Blow”, thereby requesting another carol from the flautist.

It is important to acknowledge that masquerade bands are not as prominent as before, and to revive this historic tradition, this month the Guyana Cultural Association of NY in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in Guyana will be showcasing a Symposium in Guyana under our slogan “Masquerade Lives.”
Several different Christmas episodes, apart from the birth of Jesus, are described in Christmas carols, including “The Star of Bethlehem” and “The Annunciation.” Carol selections have come a long way from a memorized repertoire, ranging from traditional classics to contemporary favorites, arranged in a variety of styles. I dare say that almost every 5 year old kid associates a familiarity to the words or the melody of the famed carol “Jingle Bells.”

The joyous themes for many traditional Christmas carols were banned in England by the staunch Protestant Oliver Cromwell and many of the very old Christmas carols and songs were subsequently lost. Christmas carols were only fully popularized again during the Victorian era when they again expressed joyful and merry themes in their carol lyrics as opposed to the normal, more solemn, Christian lyrics found in hymns. As religious observances in the United States and England were closely linked, the popularity of Christmas carols grew in both countries in the 19th century. Many Christmas traditions and characters such as “Santa Claus” and “reindeer” bear no relation to Christmas per se, but artists utilized these images to produce relatively popular and recognized carols worldwide.

Notwithstanding, there are certain classical musical selections that are not really considered carols, but are widely played and performed throughout every year as well as at Christmas. These selections include “Ave Maria”, “The Holy City”, “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring” and the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Caroling at Christmas Guyana Style involved the ancient tradition of traveling from house to house to wish neighbors good cheer. This gesture didn’t only involve singing, but also wishes of good health and good fortune to neighbors. No one is quite sure when the custom began, but the custom did give us the song, “Here We Come-A-Wassailing” — sung as carolers wished good cheer to their neighbors in hopes of getting a gift in return, often followed by “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” This spirit of camaraderie brought about solace, comfort and peace to neighbors who had previous disputes. This reconciliation produced a neighborly resolution lease for the New Year ahead.

Get into the mode and mood of Christmas. Enjoy singing the wonderful words and lyrics of the Christmas carols and Christmas songs which will surely capture those nostalgic memories of bygone days.

A very Merry Christmas to all!
Spencer Richards has been a constant presence in Guyana-American cultural life for a while now. An entertaining and informed raconteur on many subjects—sports, politics, literature, he is also a respected aficionado of art and music. When I met Spencer for the first time early in 1980s New York, he was co-host with violinist Ramsey Ameen of a show originally entitled, Unholy Missions, and later, Evidence, broadcast on New York’s Pacifica community-oriented radio station WBAI. In that forum he presented a regular disquisition on the intricacies of classic jazz, among other subjects.

Spencer grew up in Georgetown, where his dad, E.A. Richards was a civil servant who rose to the rank of Deputy Commissioner of Labor before retiring. He went on to work at Bookers Sugar Estates before establishing his own management firm, Richards Associates. Spencer’s mother, Mildred E. Richards, was deputy headmistress at St Ambrose Anglican School. With a 1970 degree in Economics from the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, Spencer eventually settled in Brooklyn, New York. In the city he became part of a network of creatives, which included writers, musicians, and artists of all sorts. On the move within this vibrant milieu, he kept coming across paintings and sculpture that grabbed his attention. This nascent interest in visual art intensified over time. Some art (and artists) intrigued or puzzled him. But he found there was much to love and many pieces he wanted to live with—especially those produced by Guyanese and artists from the African diaspora.

In addition to his various cultural activities, and working as personal assistant [and Keeper of the Archives] for Guyana-born Royal Academician and painter, Frank Bowling, OBE, Spencer Richards also happens to be a talented photographer. His images of Jazz icon Miles Davis in action have been published in a major book by Quincy Troupe, entitled, ‘Miles Davis the Autobiography’. Spencer’s also written liner notes for albums by Cecil Taylor, Kalapurusha, and Sun Ra.

Over time, he’s gathered an intimate, personal, but respectable collection of artworks by Guyanese artists such as Dudley Charles, Frank Bowling, Philip Moore, Winston Strick, Leo Panar Whittle, Arlington Weithers, the late Omowale Lumumba, and Donald Locke. There are pieces by other artists, such as the fine Trinidadian painter LeRoy Clarke, Malik Cisse [The Gambia], among others. Spencer continues to frequent exhibitions and events in the region and abroad. Apart from major museums and galleries he’s visited around the world, he has found inspiration and challenges to his conceptual and aesthetic processes during regular trips to such independent art venues as Skoto Gallery of Contemporary African Art in Chelsea, New York, and the New Jersey organization, Aljira, A Center for Contemporary Art, where he was once a board member.

CH: One wonders where this obsession with art begins. For a Guyanese the question is even more intriguing given the lack of ‘formal’ venues such as art galleries and museums when you were growing up...and even now. Or were your interests mainly literary then?

SR: Actually, it took until 1997, when I saw Sir John Everett Millais’ Ophelia hanging in one of the galleries of Tate Britain that I realized I’d encountered this and other master paintings as reproductions in books very early in my life, particularly in successive volumes of The West Indian Reader, the compulsory ‘reading’ book in former British Guiana. And I remember in primary school, several classes were marched down to see Denis Williams’ ‘Human World’, which had recently been brought to Guyana as the first work in Guyana’s National Art Collection.

CH: Music is a huge interest to you, jazz in particular, tell me something about that and how you came to do the WBAI show.

SR: in the late 50s while still in Guyana, Leo Whittle introduced me to Better get it in your soul, a Charles Mingus composition.
SR: After that, 'Just Jazz', Basil Hinds' Radio Demerara program, fed my craving for the magic of that music. But years of working for a record store in New York provided my real music education. In the late seventies, Ramsey Ameen who held the violin chair in the Cecil Taylor Unit, came into King Karol on 42nd street. We struck up a conversation and several days later I was invited me to write the liner essay for Taylor's New World album. Shortly thereafter I began to co-host the WBAI show at his request.

CH: How did you come to focus on art by Guyanese, and whose work did you acquire first?

SR: I visited Guyana in 1984. I'd gone to the RSCPA building to see the Porknocker effigy; I'd always terrified me as a child and I suppose I was trying to prove to myself that I had grown up. There was an art exhibition in one of the galleries, and I was quite drawn to the work of one painter who turned out to be Dudley Charles. I ended up buying one of his paintings and my enthusiasm for his work has not diminished in the intervening years.

CH: You've spent some time in London recently in your capacity as Frank Bowling's assistant... how was that experience?

SR: You know I'm leery about that word 'assistant' as descriptive of what being in the studio with Frank is like; I always emerge from that experience in both NY and London feeling like a special witness to his way of proceeding with the creative act of making art.

CH: I know you just returned from viewing the big art fairs in Florida... what's your personal impression of the state of art right now, in general... and in relation to the Caribbean diaspora?

SR: There was an omnipresent vibrant energy in the Wynwood Gallery district where the gloriously spray painted walls set up an interesting dynamic for what one found inside the galleries. Art Basel at the Convention Center had more 'masterpieces' per square inch than I've seen anywhere outside museums. One of the things that continues to impress me about these fairs, several of which I've seen in NY, London, and now Miami, is how they continue to expand the museum viewing experience.

I thought Venezuelan painter, Oswald Vigas, was a great find. Then in the consortium of galleries calling themselves "7", was the work of Frank Bowling, Aubrey Williams, and Hew Locke—all from Guyana, and all represented by Hales Gallery of London. To corrupt Duke Orsino: "If music be the food of love/Give me an excess of it/that surfeiting, the appetite may feed, and so thrive." Now, substitute the word 'art' for 'music' and you get an idea of the joy derived from the intensity of continuous visual stimulation, and finding the occasional aesthetic surprise.
YOUNG GUYANESE SINGER EXCELING ON THE MUSIC SCENE

SHANICE
A. HODGE

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN MUSICAL PRODUCTION OF "HAIRSPRAY."
Shanice Hodge started singing even as she was learning to talk. Now the 20 year old is center stage, playing the dynamic and charismatic role of “Motormouth Maybelle” in the musical production of Hairspray on the campus of Binghamton University. Hairspray was Shanice's first main stage production on Binghamton University's Campus.

This past summer Shanice took part in the production of Chicago at Cider Mill Playhouse playing the role of "June" and an Ensemble member. Shanice says “I am grateful for his opportunity because it has opened my eyes to the wonders of acting and has made performing an integral part of my life.”

A junior at Binghamton University majoring in Musical Theatre and minoring in Chemistry, Shanice Hodge is on the pre-med track and plans on attending Medical School after her graduation in May 2014.

A soloist in her church choir at Vanderveer United Methodist Church, Brooklyn, New York, Shanice has performed at countless church concerts and as the new Vice President and Director of the Binghamton University Gospel Choir, she has performed for various banquets and shows on campus. She is the Activities Coordinator of an HIV and Self esteem Awareness organization called WE SPEAK BU, and the Corresponding Secretary of the Pi Eta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Shanice is the daughter of popular singer Compton “Coody” Hodge. She lives with her mother Fay Cholmondeley-Browne, stepfather Maurice Browne and brother Lutha Hodge in Brooklyn, New York and remains active in her church choir at Vanderveer UMC.
DUE TO LACK OF VOTER SUPPORT...

TREVIN HUNTE

LOST OPPORTUNITY TO BE IN THE FINALS OF THE VOICE

BEST WISHES FOR A SUCCESSFUL MUSICAL CAREER
On the night of December 10, 2012, we sat before our TVs and we saw Trevin Hunte’s homecoming as a contestant on ‘The Voice’. He was excited, emotional, and his family was tearful. Then we saw him at the Lithonia Middle School in Georgia where there was an outpouring of pride and joy—the implied inspiration from an ex-student on the way to stardom was a heartfelt. But there was no organized city-wide turn-out in support of Trevin Hunte’s bid for winning ‘The Voice’ outright. No… Trevin—the humble, talented Black kid that he is—came simply and left simply.

Compare his homecoming with that for Terry McDermott, Nicholas David, and Casadee Pope. Ms. Pope was an honored guest on a local radio station. Later, she stood with a band to perform before a live audience of thousands. And man did she make an entrance: She arrived with a motorcade complete with police outriders. The Mayor of Palm Beach City also presented Casadee Pope a golden key to the city. Mr. David’s homecoming to Minnesota was also very impressive: There was a massive welcome hosted in Minnesota Mall of America for Nicholas, and there he received a golden microphone from the Mayor. And Terry McDermott would not be undone. He was heavily supported by Scottish Americans in New Orleans.

My people, THAT is what organized community power looks like. Now, translate those numbers that came out to see Pope, David, and McDermott in terms of raw votes and I-Tune-downloads; and then compare it to Hunte’s home-coming support. … I’m sure that for many, it was a foregone conclusion: that Trevin Hunte, despite his enormous talent, was going to be eliminated.

Is there a lesson here for Guyanese and other Caribbean immigrants in the U.S.A? You bet there is. Here it is: Never mind how talented we are—how skillful we are, if we continue to be a disorganized Caribbean community here in the United States of America, our chances of real success are slim. It is only when Guyanese, Jamaicans, Bajans, Trinidadians, and all other Caribbean people see ourselves as part of one community, will we rise above the rim of the crab barrel and be the winners we truly are.

HAPPY MEMORIES OF A TRUE GUYANESE CHRISTMAS

And finally on Christmas Eve
When the Christmas tree was lit
Our home transformed itself
Into such a magical sight
With small change in my pocket
And my cap guns in my hand
I strolled along Camp Street
Eating nuts and apples
“Carbon tins” are firing
And guns are popping loud
And last minute shoppers
Are bustling among the crowd
Continuing the Tribute to Past Guyanese Teachers

History is not was, but reflected in what is (Anonymous)

My introduction to formal education at Suschamachar’s, a kindergarten church school at the corner of South Road and Light Street, Georgetown included writing with a slate pencil, repeatedly “rubbing out” mistakes, sometimes with spit on my finger tips, mostly due to lack of confidence. My brother attended Teacher Georgie School on Princess Street. I then went on to Primary School, where I was introduced to the lead pencil and eraser, exercise book, big cursive (“join-up”) writing in a tracing book, and the “wild cane.” Discipline re-enforced. By Third Standard I was using a fountain pen with a fine-tip “nib”, and doing plenty sums, although my penmanship left much to be desired. The well-worn, but sturdy wooden benches and matching desks appeared to have been built a century earlier. Wearing khaki short pants, brown Bata “yatin” boots and lugging a home-made cloth book-bag, I sat next to my buddy Michael (whom I overheard promising his “gyrl” friend a bottle of “Cush Cush perfume”). Confidence regained.

Here we are – from slate and pencil to mouse and keyboard. As we continue to honor the memory of teachers who were instrumental in giving meaning to the above school environment, let us be reminded of how we progressed from there to here- through them.

Carlos R: Mr. James K. Marks, former Head Master, Queenstown R.C. School (Lonkey), at age 90, resides in Canada with his wife Mary. There is a saying “those who dared to teach will never cease learning.” This is so true for Mr. Marks, a very patient man, who allowed his students to learn from their mistakes. He touched many lives and all that he asked in return was that students develop academically and contribute to society. Everyone who fell under his wings became a better person. He did not want us to be perfect, but accepted us for what we were. A model of honesty and integrity, his acts of kindness created a ripple with us in our own lives. He was a disciplinarian, but fair. He took a ferry from LaGrange daily and was always punctual. Very resourceful, he created an exam environment by typing exam questions and printing them on a manual printer with liquid ink solution. The papers were all blotched, but very professionally done in those days. He challenged his students, teaching us that it is what we do with our life that counts and it will be based on how well we use what we learn. Queenstown RC being a Catholic School was under pressure to focus on religious teaching, but Mr. Marks was adamant to have a greater balance, insisting that all subjects be allotted equal time. Looking back with gratitude, I think that we loved Mr. Marks because he treated us equally well, although he was a staunch disciplinarian.

T. Eric M: At Smith Church Primary in the late 40s and early 50s Mr. Harold Jackson (H.M.) and Mrs. Pollard in Scholarship class were the two teachers I remember most vividly. At the new Queens College building (opened 1951), I remember Carl Browne, who taught Geography; E.R. Burrowes, our Art Master; H.R. Persaud (Bats), who taught English in the Fourths; Joshua Ramsammy, Archie Lee, Josgua Ng Chung, Jerry Niles, Richard Alsopp, Pryor Jonas, and M.T. Lowe. These were men of substance who made learning enjoyable and who exerted great positives on the boys who came under their influence and tutelage. Later, as classroom teacher, I was greatly influenced by George N. Cave (“never turn your back on a class”), Basil Hines (“a school must have a tone”), Edgar M. Wilson (“we are only playing around the fringes of knowledge”), and Ms. Celeste Jaundoo (“we have to keep trying”). These were great mentors, leaders and educators who loved children and also loved learning. Their efforts, contributions, and sacrifices remain immeasurable and are indelibly imprinted in the memories of many.

The genius, dedication, commitment, work ethic and products of this often underappreciated and unheralded legion of teachers must be retold. Their story is our history.
A Day To Be Remembered

There I was sitting at the bar staring at my drink when a large, trouble-making biker steps up next to me, grabs my drink and gulps it down in one swig. "Well, whatcha' gonna do about it?" he says, menacingly, as I burst into tears.

"Come on, man," the biker says, "I didn't think you'd CRY. I can't stand to see a big man crying."

"This is the worst day of my life," I said. "I'm a complete failure. I was late to a meeting and my boss fired me. When I went to the parking lot, I found my car had been stolen and I don't have any insurance. I also left my wallet in the car. I walked home and then my dog bit me."

Recapping what transpired:

I came to this bar to work up the courage to put an end to it all. I buy a drink, I dropped the cyanide capsule in and sit here watching the poison dissolve; and then you show up and drink the whole damn thing! But, hell, enough about me, how are you feeling? Hope you made your will?

Guyanese ain't stupid!

Their Last Meal.

Three prisoners are waiting to be executed and they are asked what they wish to have for their last meal. The Trini requests "A Chicken Roti." The Warden gave him his Roti and then escorts him to his execution.

The Jamaican requests Jerk Pork. He is given his Jerk Pork and then escorted to his execution.

The Guyanese prisoner requests a bag of plums. The Warden asks "Plums?" "Yes, Plums" says the Guyanese. The Warden replied "but them outa season!"

"So?" replies the Guyanese "I gwine wait." Baptism Good for the Soul!

A drunken man goes to the seawall and he butt up with a preacher baptizing people in de Atlantic. He walk in de water and bump into the preacher. The preacher turn round and nearly get lick down by the alcohol pun he breath, so he ask the drunk "You ready to find Jesus?" The drunk answered "Noooo" The preacher grab he and dunk he in de water. He pull he out and ask he "Brother, have you found Jesus?" The drunk answers "But them outa season!"

"You ready to have your will?" The preacher grab he and dunk he in de water again for a little longer. He pull he out again and ask "Have you found Jesus my brother?" The drunk again answers "I tell you Nooo"

Sp the preacher grab he and dunk he in de water. He pull he out and ask he "Brother, have you found Jesus?" The drunk replies "Noooooooo" The preacher dunk he in the water again for a little longer. He pull he out again and ask again "Have you found Jesus my brother?" The drunk again answers "I tell you Nooo"

By this time the preacher don’t know what to do so he dunk he again... but this time he hold he down for about 30 seconds, till he start kicking, then he pull he out.

The preacher abain ask the drunk "For the love of God, have you found Jesus?" The drunk man wipe he eyes and catch he breath and ask the preacher "You sure dis is which part he fall in?"
The devastation caused by natural disasters in the Caribbean, the Gulf and Eastern Coasts of the U.S. has exposed the vulnerability of both economically advanced and impoverished nations. The unprecedented havoc wrecked by Hurricane Sandy and the merciless “lass lick” from a Nor’easter, tested the will and faith of thousands. The capacity of survivors to cope is not only determined by their resilience, but intricately connected to the response of the community, and mitigating efforts by government and relief organizations. For many Caribbean immigrants, this Monster Storm has transformed the American Dream into an American nightmare.

There has been escalating scrutiny of the policies and actions of public officials regarding appropriate disaster planning and response to the needs of survivors. The poignancy of lessons learned in its wake is clear. For example, the non-existence or collapse of water control systems, the questionable “Zoning System”, the capability of utility companies, the contentious debate about global warming, preferential treatment of certain communities and the tacitly demeaning sentiment: “Like a Third World country”, all mark new realities in assessing cause and effect of a disaster of this magnitude.

As City and State officials grapple with explanations and possible solutions, factors such as geopolitics, socio-economic exigencies, the influence of the media on public consciousness, and the intersection of the disaster with existing inequities, feature prominently in decisions about resource allocation for recovery and reconstruction. Some of the hardest hit communities, including those with large Caribbean immigrant populations appeared not to have been given as much media coverage. Clearly this signals the importance of establishing Caribbean media outlets in the Diaspora.

Likewise, there is an urgent need to respond to the inevitable psychological impact, particularly as it relates to losses incurred. Coming to the North America to establish a ‘better life’, many immigrants sacrificially relinquished pride possessions, including homes, land and career in the home country to start a new life devoid of what some may describe as dire conditions. Unfortunately, Hurricane Sandy made that road unexpectedly treacherous for some. Human adjustment to stressful experiences becomes important in crisis situations. People build and sustain resources such as a home and other assets to enhance their life circumstances and for immigrants, as evidence that they have “made it” in America. Owing to lifelong investment in these resources, psychological distress occurs when there is a threat of loss, damage or destruction of possessions.

The human cost manifested in death, displacement and untold suffering, has given rise to multifaceted risks to the affected populations. Undoubtedly, this experience shatters common beliefs about safety and security, especially for immigrants from countries that have a history of natural disasters or spiraling social problems. “Ah never expected this to happen here”; “What can we do, start over again?”.

The assistance provided by Hometown Associations and Diplomatic Corps was creditable. Immigrants have bonded with their American counterparts to mourn, reciprocate help and reassure one another. Such interactions provided a good source of immediate comfort and an opportunity to gain from cross-cultural perspectives of coping with stress and bereavement. However, in some instances there is likely to be prolonged feelings of fear, anxiety, hyper vigilance and depression, especially among those who do not have a strong supportive network of relatives in the U.S. Feelings of helplessness and vulnerability will be common, particularly among the undocumented and those awaiting adjustment of immigration status, who tend not to readily reach out for assistance.

As is common in the aftermath of disasters, people will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but the onset of critical incident stress, i.e. the worrying produced by a traumatic event that affects emotional lives and ability to cope, is to be expected. Many households, including children and the differently abled will experience some level of distress. Such projections include a sizable English Caribbean population. However, amid sadness, frustration and anger, there was camaraderie and lasting friendships among diverse neighbors who shared the same fate.

Expressions of mental distress and the perceived role of Helping Professionals will determine the extent to which survivors benefit from or seek counseling. Both receiving and giving help can be therapeutic and central to coping and recovery. Some people exhibit stark fatalism, while others demonstrate complacency or deny the pain caused by personal loss. Among Caribbean immigrants, such reactions tend to be congruent with culturally defined coping behaviors. Having relatively modest pre-migratory resources, immigrants develop an attitude of “making do with what we have”, which can either enhance or retard the recovery process. Proven resilience among Caribbean immigrants in crisis situations makes it less likely that many will experience long-term adverse psychological effects. However, this depends on organized community support, which is needed to help us “get back on we feet”.

Guyana Cultural Association of New York Inc. on-line Magazine
As decades roll by and generations age: as old habits, behaviors, customs and circumstances give way to modern practices and as the old becomes the new, becomes the old then another new again, older folks who have survived, recall with nostalgia, sometimes longing, the past they faced, lived and loved.

Guyanese now past fifty reading this and who have lived a significant portion of their lives in Guyana, will have mixed memories of the triumphs, the pains, the plain joy, the bitter sweet. In town or village on street or savannah, in restaurant or on four-corner bridge, he or she remembers:

**EATING:** Black-pudding, Potato Pudding; Jillabee, Foo-Foo, Coo-Coo, Conkie, Chip-Chip Sugar Cake.

**DRINKING** Mauby, Mango Fly, Sorrel Drink, Pep-me-up, Jamoon Wine, Rice Wine, Castor Oil, Glover salts, Billious Wash, Ginger Beer.

**WEARING** Flannel “Siinglets”, Rescue-the-Naked, Serge, Sharkskin, Sebo, Bulldog.

**USING** Glamma Cherry, Carbon, Flour-Paste, Asafoetita, Congo Pump, Daisy, Neem, Coconut Oil, Coalpot and Coals, Black Sage.


**GOING** To treats, Excursions, Queh-Quehs, Bush Cooks, Sixty-Three Beach, Kissing Bridge.

**SAYING** Trans-p, Sky-Juice, Binnee, Banna, Putta-Putta, Lammata, Thickness, Chubang, Mook, Putax, Throw-up and Clap, Boo-leggeh.

**SINGING** Oh my Dear, Down on the Bottom Floor, Passing Memories, Dig Me, Where are your Friends Now, It Burns Inside, Sookie, SahaniRaat, AUntie Bess, Itannami, So Long for Now.

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**GENIPS**

It grows during the summer: June to September. It tastes like a combination of a lime and a peach.

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**OIL LAMPS:**

An oil lamp is a form of lighting using an oil-based fuel source. They were used as an alternative to candles before the use of electric lights.

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**PRESSING COMB**

Is a metal comb used to straighten moderate or coarse hair and create a smoother hair texture. It is heated and used to straighten the hair from the roots.

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**WASHBOARD**

Is a tool designed for hand washing clothing. Clothes are soaked in soapy water in a washtub, then squeezed and rubbed against the ridged surface of the washtub to force the cleansing fluid through the cloth to carry away dirt.
Guyana Cultural Association will celebrate the life of Pamela Maynard and other cultural and literary icons Trenton Mack and Jan Carew at a service of celebration on January 27, 2013
St. Gabriel’s Episcopal Church, Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, NY
4.00 p.m.

Pamela Maynard was one of Guyana’s singing icons who charmed global audiences with her dynamic personality, compelling charisma and expansive voice.

The golden voice, whose hits included the soca medley “One Day at a Time” and “Misty Blue”, was silenced in November, succumbing to breast cancer in a city hospital at age 58.

Pamela Maynard’s musical career was deeply influenced by her parents. Her father operated a sound system and her mother, Mavis, wrote the lyrics for her daughter’s debut hit, “Lost, Lonely & Helpless”, and shared the stage with her and Eddy Grant at a show in Georgetown.

After leaving school, Maynard joined the Guyana Defence Force and performed at state receptions for several visiting dignitaries, including Fidel Castro. She also sang with some of Guyana’s top bands at the time, including the Yoruba Singers and Sid & the Slickers.

Maynard made history in the film industry. She received awards in for (4) genres of music including Best Reggae, Country and Western, Soul and R&B from SurfNoir Inc in the USA. In the UK she received the prestigious JetStar Award, the Music Volks Award in Germany and the Reggae Award, best Calypso and best Gospel Awards in Canada to name a few.
WE REMEMBER & CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF A GUYANESE LITERARY ICON

Jan Carew died on December 5 at his home in Louisville, Kentucky, United States of America at the age of 92. Carew was born in Agricola, East Bank Demerara on September 24, 1920 and also had very strong ties to Berbice.

He has led a rich and varied life as writer, educator, philosopher and advisor to several nation states. After his initial education in Guyana in South America, he studied at universities in the U.S., Czechoslovakia, and France. In London, he worked as a broadcaster and writer with the BBC and lectured in race relations at London University's Extra-mural department. He also lived in Spain, Ghana, Canada and Mexico. He has taught at many universities in the U.S., including Princeton, Rutgers, George Mason, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and the University of Louisville.

EUSI KWAYANA PAYS TRIBUTE TO

Jan Carew

After Mittleholzer in 1841 Jan Carew was the first Guyanese to burst upon the world of fiction with a published novel. This is according to Kenneth Ramchand in the West Indian Novel and its Background. It was Black Midas (1958). It is the pork-knocker tale of Shark.

Years earlier, Carew was bicycling from Georgetown to Buxton to Friday nights to have conversation, lecture and close chatter with ordinary people. One of the few still alive remembers him. Higher up the coast, Bertrand Abrams, Oswald Bland, Una Weatherspoon, Prakash, the Baynes sisters, Merle Grenada and others met weekly to grapple with new things in an effort to understand the changing world. Naming names is important so that the past has a personality. In his discourses Jan Carew spoke with conviction of the need to encourage “a poetry that smells of our earth and represents more truly the dreams of our people.”

Ramchand does not miss this element in Carew’s writing. He reproduces a conversation between Rhodius and Shark (Black Midas) as they travel the turbulent river in the silence of the night. Shark knows that the drowned men talk because he is up and down the river; “when the star bright, when the moon hang” and when it is too dark for him to spit through it.

Ramchand finds that Carew intends to show that the pork knocker have the “jungle in their veins.” Jungle or not he really see the human as wired to the environment. Twenty, thirty, nearly forty years go by and he produces another work of fiction after lining in Europe, Africa and the Americas. It is The Guyanese Wanderer in 2007. It is a package of ten tales, eight of which are set in Guyana. The other two have Guyana on their mind.

Carew in his writing took on huge issues... spoke with conviction of the need to encourage “a poetry that smells of our earth and represents more truly the dreams of our people.”

Carew in his writing took on huge issues, as Caribbean people tend to do. Williams linked the enslavement system with capitalism, its offspring. Amy Jacques Garvey took on Mussolini’s seedling of world fascism, James took on Stalinism from outside, Jagan wished to hitch his wagon to a new civilization. Carew took on its human failings from within. Rodney revealed ruthless mode of the extension of Europe extraction into Africa.

Carew sought with much sweat to find what the imperial narrative wanted to hide. Grenada: The Hour Will Strike Again recalls the self-government, the social net-working, transport systems and the freedom struggles of the indigenous peoples the Caribbean, and the several links between them and the rebellious Africans.

Jan Carew visited Guyana about the mid nineties and may have recharged for The Guyanese Wanderer allowing it to be so authentic. It spared neither himself nor other males. The head cockerel boasted a lover at the very top of the social stairway and another at the very bottom. As mayor of a town he is presiding over a meeting a sex worker blows in to demand her dues. The Mayor wins handsomely at the next general elections. It is in Ghosts in Our Blood That Jan Carew after conversations with Malcolm X reveals his rich complex liberating thought and the personality his marvelous Grenadian mother, Louise Little.
Trenton Mack:

Acknowledged in the Caribbean Diaspora and as a member of several Guyanese based choirs, the highly respected Trenton Mack, whose powerful voice was legendary, passed away earlier this month. Trenton Mack started his singing career in his hometown, in Essequibo, Guyana and was recognized at the British Music Festival with honors. In the United States, Trenton Mack was honored by the Guyana Cultural Association for his outstanding contribution to music in Guyana, and has performed and toured with the United Nations Choir to Germany, Japan and throughout the United States. He was also a member of the Guyana Ex-Police Association of the United States and a member of their choir.

WE ALSO REMEMBER OTHERS WHO HAVE LEFT US IN 2012:
Designer and Historian Godfrey Chin,
Artist and Sculpter Phillip Moore
Musician Denis De Souza
Broadcaster Hugh Cholmondeley
Actress Elizabeth Wells
Movie and record Producer Vivian Lee
Randolph Kirton
Photographer Ken Moore

THANK YOU TO THE POMEREOON OIL MILLS FOR ITS SPONSORSHIP OF THE “MASQUERADE LIVES” SYMPOSIUM IN GUYANA

“The Guyana Cultural Association of New York, Inc., extends its sincerest thanks to the Pomeroon Oil Mills for its support to the Masquerade Lives Symposium, especially the Flounce Off at Victoria. Through the Bad Cow Masquerade Competition in Charity, Essequibo, the Pomeroon Oil Mills is in the forefront of initiatives to revitalize masquerade in Guyana. The company freely shared information on organization and judging criteria which guided the organization of the Flounce Off at Victoria. In addition, the financial contributions of the Pomeroon Oil Mills, Inc., provided the prizes for the Flounce Off. With continued passionate support from Andron Alphonso, Pomeroon Oil Mill’s Chief Executive Officer, Masquerade will live on in Guyana. Thank you, Andron and Pomeroon Oil Mills!”

WE REMEMBER & CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF A GUYANESE LITERARY ICON

GCA HONOREE & GUYANESE CULTURAL ICON
Merundoi wishes you and yours a blessed and enjoyable holiday!

May the Blessings of the Season be yours to enjoy and share. You have supported us throughout 2012 with your sponsorship, listenership and advocacy and we look forward to collaborating with you in 2013. Together we will make Guyana a wonderful country!
Sugar Foot Joe
The Masquerade Dancer
by Derrick “John” Jeffrey

Slowly lifting his head off a pillow on a hospice cot
Where stars are born and the salt brown Atlantic
chases the jumbee crabs from the mud-flat
People say, “he mudda wash he foot wid white rum
in a trench near de burial ground”
That is why he can’t resist the sound of the kettle drum
Sitting up straight in a bed where he is given up for dead
The kling kata-kang klic-ka-tang, klee-tag-tan rid-inn-dang
Sticks on the rim of a kettle drum swirled around in his bead
Slowly climbing down one foot touches the ground
Steading himself and holding the bed
Revisiting an art some say is dead
Peep-peeee pope-pee peep-pee-dep pedle-e-leep -
peep-pedeeee-peepe
peedle-eece-peeep, peeeedee-pieap pie-pee
The tin flute rekindles the days of his youth
Two feet down and ready to go “Blow man blooroo.”
Old age kept saying, “Please Joe—don’t go.”
The thump, the boom, de boom
de boom-boom of the base drum was too much to resist
The flute, the kettle, and a base drum player name
“Bicycle Man”
The shack-shack shaker introduces the band
“A wo fo happen les he happen one-time”
“A rachie-bachie boom-boom”
Sugar Foot waves his hand. The rhythm is fast
Bam-Bam Sally shaking her ass stomping on Mad Cow’s grass
This is for Christmases now and pass
Nurses and doctors gather around
as Joe moves to the rhythm of the kettle drum
Glittering sequence tingling bells Buck-beads
move around in a shack-shack
One step forward and two steps back
The kettle drum rattles and the tin flute shrills
Someone throws a Big Gil
One brass penny is plenty money buy a Flutee or a mauby
Flouncing to the ground in a split like James Brown
The Big Gil is tin-cup bound. Wishing it was a shilling instead
He continued to flounce to the music in his head
The gathering grows larger around his hospice bed
Kicking another coin with his big-toe—
up and into his pocket it go.
Ka-lit-e-tang kee-tang-tang reek-e-boom chee-ke-boom
chak-a-shak shak-ka shak
Bam-Bam Sally leads the band—Mad Cow with tin-cup in hand
“What a performance Joe
Next time you should come out of bed
and really give us a show.”
Time for your medication….Uncle Joe
THE NEW YORK TUTORIAL SUPPORT GROUP INC.

VALENTINE BALL
Friday, February 08, 2013;
Time: 10:00 pm – 3.00 a.m.;
DJ Hannah
St. Gabriel’s Anglican Church Hall,
331 Hawthorne Street,
Brooklyn, NY 11225

SPRING FLING DANCE
Friday, June 21, 2013;
10:00 pm – 3.00 a.m.;
DJ Hannah
St. Gabriel’s Anglican Church Hall,
331 Hawthorne Street,
Brooklyn, NY 11225

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS
Hold the date for our 21st anniversary of Women Celebrating Women

PALM SUNDAY -
March 24th, 2013
when we will honor a distinguished group of women who have excelled at service to the community. Nominations are under consideration for women entrepreneurs who have distinguished themselves.

Many happy returns for the Christmas Season!

Warmest Regards
Dr. Una S.T. Clarke, C.D.
(REPLY TO KITTYCLARKE@HOTMAIL.COM)

TO HAVE YOUR EVENT PROMOTED IN FUTURE GCA NEWSLETTERS:
Contact
Claire Goring - claireagoring@aol.com
or Edgar Henry - ehenry7255@aol.com