

IMPROVING THE CONTENT **AND** **QUALITY OF CARNIVAL SHOWS**

For the purpose of the Carnival in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines “There is established a Carnival Development Corporation which shall be known as the CDC.”

According to Act No. 52/2002, the “Corporation shall have the power to manage, promote, develop and carry out the carnival festival or activity within and outside of the State” and is mandated to “organize promote, conduct and control the operation and management of the carnival of the state either independently or in conjunction with any other company or organization concerned with the development of the carnival”

Among its various functions the CDC has the responsibility of “preparing and issuing guidelines for the organization of and participation in the various carnival shows” connected to “organizing competitive shows within the carnival season” while engaging in consultation with the “various components of the carnival in order to improve the content of shows.”

The Corporation is also charged with “preparing and enforcing rules governing the participation in and judging of shows which shall be issued to the relevant persons prior to the finalization of the programme to which they relate “Part II 4 (3) (L) of Act NO. 52/2002. It is necessary that all carnival stakeholders become acquainted with the relevant legislation governing carnival in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The carnival festivity is no longer run on an ad hoc basis or by “mob rule” as some people mistakenly want to believe.

Improving the Content of Shows

Arising out of Carnival 2008, the CDC very early announced its intention to look at the overall programming and the content of shows. Apart from the fact that this decision was arrived at after an assessment of the 2008 carnival shows, a CDC sponsored symposium held earlier that year strongly recommended such a course of action.

Responding with alacrity to the CDC's announcement, the Youlou Pan Movement (YPM) and the Carnival Bands Association (CBA) submitted proposals in August 2008 recommending far reaching changes to the programme for Vincy Mas 2009. Among the YPM's proposals were the following:-

The removal of Panorama from the Dimanche Gras Show.

Placing of Junior Pan (now Junior Pan Fest) on the first Sunday of the official carnival celebrations.

The staging of Panorama on the Thursday on which formerly, Junior Pan was held.

The Carnival Bands Association (CBA) quite literally came up with revolutionary recommendations among which were:-

Removing the King and Queen of the Bands semi-finals competitions from Victoria Park.

In future, the CBA requested that the preliminaries of the King and Queen of the bands be judged at each respective Mas' camp. This year, the

Queens will be judged on Tuesday 30 June and the Kings Thursday

02 July, 2009. It should be noted here that the CBA is to discuss the possibility of staging the preliminaries the week before the official start of Carnival celebrations from year 2010.

Sections from the Bands to be the main attraction of the Mas' on the Move Show. Sections was formerly part of the Miss Carival Pageant., while the King and Queen of the Bands featured on the Mas' on the Move show.

The CDC endorsed in full the recommendations of the YPM and CBA and for its part decided to discontinue Supa Jamz, the National Soca Monarch Semi-finals with the National Ragga Soca Monarch competition replacing the National Calypso Semi-Finals as the Opening Show for Official Carnival celebrations.

The Calypso Impasse

Last August when the YPM and the CBA made their respective recommendations to improve the content and quality of carnival shows it was expected that the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Calypsonians Association Inc. (SVGCA) would have done similarly. At a meeting of the SVGCA and CDC held last August the matter was raised by the Corporation and the Association promised to respond. This the SVGCA never did.

In February 2009, the proposals of the YPM, CBA and CDC were formerly, presented at a meeting and unanimously approved by the Board of Directors of the Carnival Development Corporation (CDC).

At the said meeting, a further proposal was laid on the table for discussion and approval. This said proposal involved the following:-

That one calypso be sung by competing Calypsonians in the preliminaries, semi-finals and

finals of the National Calypso Monarch Competition.

This proposal was no stranger to the Calypsonians Association since the issue had been on the table since 2005. When the one song proposal was placed on the agenda in March 2006, the response was that it had come “too late” for consideration by the calypso fraternity so the matter was shelved. There was a general refusal by the SVGCA to give this matter serious consideration since that time until the CDC was literally forced to bring matters to a head.

The foolishness of “why we have to follow Trinidad” is just that so much empty rhetoric since the one song proposal was mooted here since 2005. One song in the National Calypso Monarch Competition of Trinidad and Tobago became a reality there in 2007.

When the SVGCA refused to accept its one song proposal, the CDC then gave that body an option. The option was:-

Twenty calypsonians and ten calypsonians singing one song in the semifinals and finals or fourteen calypsonians singing two songs in the semi-finals and seven finalists singing two songs in the National Calypso Monarch Finals.

One would have thought that if the calypsonians “two songs” position was based on a genuine cleavage to principle they would have gone for the second option, but, unfortunately the Association remained stuck to the “old formula” their term.

It is very strange, to put it mildly, how certain newspaper columnists and “talk show” hosts complain about the length and content of carnival shows and whenever the CDC attempt to address the length and content of shows. These same good citizens turn around and lambast the CDC for doing what they have been calling upon the CDC to do.

Indeed, one can forgive those who “write” and “talk” due to a lack of knowledge of and

information on the carnival project. But, there are others who know better. These ones grind their various axes only known to themselves. Others once served on the former ad hoc CDC of the recent past and are fully aware of the problems to which they now turn the proverbial “blind eye”.

Many of these writers and talkers have never or no longer come to Carnival City, Victoria Park to attend a show and go wherever the wind carries them. The “pull down” mentality remains alive and well.

Resolving the Impasse

It took the Chairman of the CDC Mr. Dennis Ambrose to take the initiative in resolving the so called impasse. This was relatively easy since the Board generally wanted to bring an end to the matter. The Calypsonians Association on the other hand had gone out on a limb and needed a helping hand to restore themselves to a level of safety.

In the final analysis, the CDC had previously proposed twenty-two semi-finalists and eleven finalists which the Association had once again rejected out of hand. The Association finally settled for twenty-two semi-finalists singing one song in the National Semis while ten finalists would appear on the Dimanche Gras Show come Sunday 5th July, 2009.

While the CDC is authorized by law to consult with the components of carnival on matters relevant to their respective art forms it must be recognized by all carnival stakeholders that the Corporation have the powers of enforcing rules governing the participation in and judging of shows. The CDC is the recognised body charged with the preparation and issuing of guidelines for the organization of and participation in the various carnival shows.

It can no longer be business as usual. The time has come when all components inclusive of the SVGCA must co-operate with the CDC in its efforts aimed at improving the carnival product. Vincy Mas will be better for this co-operation.