

Setting Standards in Calypso

It is well established that entertainment is the key driver of musical and cultural festivals that are celebrated all over the world. In the case of the Crop Over Festival in Barbados which is celebrated annually in the months of June through August, this equally applies. Across the English speaking Caribbean countries, many of the carnival festivals feature the presentation of calypso music.

The calypsonian is classified as social a commentator who uses the lyrics of the calypsos to draw attention and to express opinions on things occurring in the society. This is quite in order and acceptable. Primarily, it is to be expected that the writer/ composer of a calypso and the calypsonian as the singer, would exercise a measure of responsibility in ensuring that what is presented to the public does not infringe the bounds of common decency. For this to happen, there is the expectation artistes recognize that there are standards which apply to the content to be presented for public consumption. This is not to suggest that constraints are to be placed on wit or humour.

The line is however to be drawn when and where there are subtle or blatant attempts to corrupt public morals, and to place a shadow over the standards to which the society subscribes. It is to be acknowledged that our socialization is directed at promoting an ethical and disciplined society. The downhill slide comes when these are by-passed in the short term. It is worse when some conveniently attempt to justify the trend, under the cover that the market demands something more or new. To put it mildly, why should the move to infiltrate the society with smut be accepted? It is not farfetched that smut is supported by those

who deem that it sells, and so will argue that the means justifies the end.

This leads to the question as to who should be blamed for this development and/or trend. The short answer is the society itself. To support it is to give license to an action and/or behaviour. It is noticeable that our leaders at all levels have remained silence on the issue of smut in calypsoes. The government, politicians, the church, civil society leaders, leaders in education and the trade unions have all remained silent. If the offensive nature of some of the calypsoes presented in the Crop Over is to be eliminated, then there is the need for standards to be set and maintained by the National Cultural Foundation. Whilst some might regard such as a move to be the stifling of cultural expression and creativity, this must be challenged on the grounds that there is a time and place for everything under the sun.

The tent managers must take some responsibility for what is offered to the public by their performers. The media houses who should be the guardians of what music is served up to the public, must be called upon take a more responsible position. Those who sing and those who support the female gender assault and sexual perverted calypsoes, ought to stop and think about the impact their offerings are having on our society. Those veteran calysonians who appear to be limited in their lyric offerings, and who seem happy to sing about jamming or pounding a woman with an instrument of some kind, should be ashamed of themselves. If the society is prepared to accept such offerings as a standard, then we are all doomed to accepting 'Something for Something.'