

PORTFOLIO OF SUPPORTING MATERIALS
SECTION III

THE REVIEWS
&
PROGRAMMES

!HalleluiaH!

Excursions into a Third Space

**Carnival Messiah as an instrument of
Postcolonial Liberation**

Geraldine Connor

PORTFOLIO OF SUPPORTING MATERIALS

SECTION III

THE REVIEWS & PROGRAMMES

Submitted in fulfilment for the degree of Ph.D. in
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Department of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies
University of Leeds

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!HALLELULIAH!

EXCURSIONS INTO A THIRD SPACE

Carnival Messiah as an instrument of postcolonial liberation

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MATERIALS

SECTION III

CARNIVAL MESSIAH – REVIEWS & PROGRAMMES

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II.1 CARNIVAL MESSIAH CONTROVERSIAL REVIEWS 1999

Sinai Synagogue, Roman Avenue, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS8 2AN
Tel: 0113 266 5256 Fax: 0113 266 1539

Ms. Geraldine Connor
Popular Music Studies
Bretton Hall
West Bretton
Wakefield WF4 4LG

19 October 1999

Dear Ms Connor,

On Saturday night I had the pleasure of attending the final night of the run of *Carnival Messiah*, and I would like to thank you for providing us with a stupendous piece of theatre. Quite apart from the wonderful artistic qualities, the sheer scale of the production's logistics made the evening awe-inspiring. The theatre-going public is in your debt.

I hesitated before deciding to write to you, because the issue I want to raise is as elusive as trying to nail jelly to the wall. But I am going to try, and I hope that you will follow my train of thought.

As you will see from the letterhead, I am a rabbi. (Strike One!) This means (amongst other things) that I pay close attention to the use of Jewish symbolism and questions of theological interface which appear in the public domain. I came away on Saturday night with some concerns about a couple of small parts of the performance and I want to share them with you. I do this because a) I would hope and expect that this will not be the last performance of *Carnival Messiah* - it deserves much wider, extensive exposure; and b) some members of the Jewish community who are not rabbis also picked up on the same things, so I concluded that I was not merely a victim of my own obsessions...

Let me also say, at the outset, that I am not attributing any kind of malice to anybody involved in the production. My object here is to alert you to sensitivities that were tweaked inadvertently and which, if they are accommodated, I believe would strengthen the production in its next incarnation.

In summary, the issues I would mention are:

1. The use of the melody of *Hava Nagila* with words praising Jesus.
2. The use of the *Shema*, spoken in Hebrew, in the context of "speaking in tongues".
3. The use of a figure (whose significance, I must confess, still escapes me) who appeared to be a cross between a Chasid and a Blues Brother.

4. The broad issue of the unmediated and simple use of the gospel accounts of the events leading up to the Crucifixion which attribute blame for the Crucifixion to "the Jews".

The fundamental problem that underlies items 1,2 & 3 is a cross-cultural one. Jews, as an ethno-religious community, tend to react in ways ranging from mild frustration to outright anger when other groups stereotype or misrepresent Jews and Judaism. You know as well as I do that this is equally true of Hispanics, or Afro-Caribbeans or any ethnic minority you care to name. The simple fact is that *Hava Nagila* is probably the most identifiable Israeli/Jewish melody in existence. This, no doubt, is why it was chosen. So there is presumably a deliberate attempt to link "Jewishness" with "Jesus". This linkage is one that Jews reject and, indeed, find offensive for a whole raft of historical and theological reasons that opens up too broad a canvas to discuss here. It posits a cross cultural connection that does not only not exist, but which is actually a source of pain.

The use of the *Shema*, on the other hand, is about the appropriation of one of Judaism's sancta in a context which is not only unseemly, but inaccurate. The distaste which arises from this runs much deeper than the use of a merely cultural artefact like *Hava Nagila*.

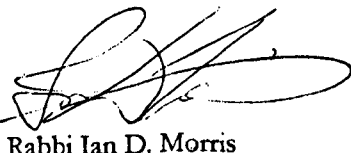
The use of the caricature Chasid carries a resonance of the disdain that flows from any caricature. This is exacerbated by his role appearing to be anachronistic and wholly gratuitous in the first place. (I am not, by the way, a Chasid myself).

The question of using the Gospels in an un-nuanced way as a source for attributing blame for the death of Jesus is a massive, if recurring, topic. I do not propose to launch into a lengthy discourse here. But this is not just the Carnival Messiah's issue. It is equally an issue for the Oberammergau Passion Play (which has responded to some of these concerns), as well as the ways in which mainstream churches teach the Gospels in a post-Holocaust world.

It is not my wish to just write a "protest" letter. As I said above, all I really want is to alert you to some areas of sensitivity. I would also be extremely happy to sit down over a cup of coffee at some stage and discuss any of this with you. I recognize that I have touched on major topics, and then moved on. In fairness, they deserve a careful and reasoned analysis, and if I can be of any assistance in this I would be delighted to do what I can.

I hope that we can be in contact in the not too distant future.

With every best wish and congratulations,



Rabbi Ian D. Morris

II.2 CARNIVAL MESSIAH CONTROVERSIAL REVIEWS 2002

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
THE INDEPENDENT
1 JULY 2002

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
West Yorkshire Playhouse
Leeds

Commendable as it is of West Yorkshire to mount an integrated West Indian-style carnival, I'm afraid this production is an argument for a colour bar. While the black performers are full of beans, as well as the holy spirit, the white ones, flabby and slack, look as if they're wondering what to microwave for supper. But that's not the show's only problem. Thematically and emotionally, too, it suffers from a lack of restraint and focus. Recently *The Mysteries* showed us that, with the barest of means, a troupe could tell Bible stories in song and dance and make the audience practically levitate with joy. Here one is more likely to feel weighed down by three hours of milling and happy clapping.

As co-author, with Mark Tillotson, of the book, Geraldine Connor may not have written the comedy (Joseph to Mary, at the inn: "I always told you we had a stable relationship") or the resonantly spiritual description of Judas ("a low-life scumbag"). Nor did she contrive the uninspiring choreography or the hundreds of costumes, the commitment to universality creating an effect less cosmic than chaotic.

But Connor, as "artistic director" as well as composer, arranger and lyricist, is responsible for this mediocre muddle. The first ensemble number throws everything at us - girls in ruffled dresses; blue devils with pitchforks; men in yellow can-can dresses that can't contain their huge false bosoms. What follows simply repeats those effects, as the individual numbers keep banging out the same rhythms over and over.

The tone of the piece is more that of a professional party hostess than one of wonder and ecstasy. It changes from boring to risible when a white girl, on discovering the empty tomb, says: "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him," like a traveller puzzled about the whereabouts of her luggage. The one genuinely happy moment of this *Messiah* was a rendition of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" by a steel band, at once charming and majestic.

Carnival Messiah disregards gender as well as racial stereotypes to a degree that is at best questionable, such as making one of the thieves crucified on either side of Jesus a female in a flesh-coloured bikini. But there's no question about the one limit this show places on its inclusiveness. Jesus, we're told, fears "betrayal by the Jews," and at one point a man in the black hat and coat and long forelocks of Hasidic Jewry is shown dancing in a foolish, jerky fashion until a large black woman angrily shoves him away - a physical rebuke meted out to no one else, not even the Devil or Judas. Connor is described as a consultant on "carnival-related issues at the very highest level": this suggests she ought to go back to basics.

RHODA KOENIG

II.3 CARNIVAL MESSIAH CONTROVERSIAL REVIEWS 2003



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upclose

T&T's Carnival Messiah speaks out:

In this frank article, written exclusively for the *Sunday Guardian*, Carnival icon **PETER MINSHALL**, critiques Geraldine Connor's controversial musical, *Carnival Messiah*. The production ends its initial nine-day run at Queen's Hall, St Ann's, on Tuesday.



The finale of *Carnival Messiah* is undiluted Notting Hill on the Queen's Hall stage. It is raw sewage up close...

Raw sewage

I JULY 1972, Aubrey Adams presents *Amakula* on the stage of the Royal Festival Hall London.

There are all the characters of *J'Ouvert*. Here are dames Lorraines. There are fancy sailors. There are Bele dancers. There is shango. The blue devils have been tidied up with silver tinsel and fabric. People in England love it.

One might speculate that a young black British girl born of immigrant parents from Trinidad, both in show business, would have seen *Amakula*.

In July, 2003, 31 years later, Geraldine Connor presents *Carnival Messiah* on the stage of Queen's Hall in St Ann's.

Ms Connor begins her show with a 40-minute Carnival cruise ship preamble. There are all the characters of *J'Ouvert*. The fancy sailors and the dames Lorraines are there. The blue devils have been tidied up with silver tinsel and fabric.

In 30-odd years nothing has changed.

In the Trinidad Carnival the blue devil is the best example of what is possible. It is basic. It is pure, raw theatre. It is skin and greasepaint. The hard, unadorned rhythm mirrors and matches exactly the unadorned performer. The predawn timing of the performance is ideal. The elemental dance is all and one and together and perfect in its predatory nature. Faithfully recreated and performed year after year on the streets of Port-of-Spain, the blue devil terrifies, inspires and raises the pores. It is classical.

By the same process of communication, through the human spirit, a fine performance of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus still raises the pores after centuries of repetition.

Carnival Messiah held the extraordinary promise of bringing these two dynamics together, and much more: revealing a glorious, seamless, gleaming Caribbean tapestry of Africa, India, Europe and the Americas, dressing it up, setting it down in the mas, placing it on its dancing toes, and by the end, Handel himself rising with Christ, his chorus sung, calypso, salsa, reggae and soca syncretized as never before, rising from our engine room deep in the Earth, rising up to our Heavens, right up to our Caribbean sun, our moon and our stars. Hallelujah, Our Father, Amen, raising our pores, raising the pores of the whole world.

This was not to be. On Monday night we witnessed the promise broken. There was some Carnival. Here and there, some snatches of the *Messiah* were slipped in. The rest was a production that wandered all over the place in search of something to hold it together.

The general rule seemed to be bigger is better. And when all else fails, send on the children. They're cute. No one seems as yet to fully understand what the lowly blue devil has to teach. Perhaps he is too low.

The highest point in the evening is the simplest and the least crowded. It occurs during "Redeemer" when a conscious attempt is seen seriously to be made between the mas and the *Messiah*. Ronald Samm sings and moves so well.

Alyson Brown's "Dove of Peace" is neither flattery nor tribute to its origin. It is a direct steal. The wings were developed in Chaguaramas. Her every move was learned in Chaguaramas, not Yorkshire, if she were to tell the truth. The jewelled bathcap and the Vic-

torian nightgown are definitely *not* from Chaguaramas.

But Ms Brown, too, moves well, and the ensemble aspires to true art. You see the song. You hear the dance. You are moved.

For quite different reasons, you are also moved at one other point during the proceedings. As a piece of visual theatre the entire "Shango Aye" sequence works. Why? We're on familiar territory. We've been here many

Scenes from "CARNIVAL MESSIAH." PHOTOS: DAVID WEARS



times before. Ms La Chapelle knows this terrain well. The ground is marked with fairly rigid disciplines, always a great help. The monochromatic palate cannot be interfered with. Mr Berkeley's ivory drapes on poles are quietly reserved and grandly operatic. The cast looks regal and elegant, all in white. Ella Andall is always magnificent.

No one ever seems to mind that Shango is casually set down in the Trinidad repertoire of folk dance cheek by jowl with *J'Ouvert*, as in the present instance, with its cargo of bawdy dames Lorraines and other leftovers from the table of Fat Sunday.

Folk is folk. Shango comes from a very real and deeply religious source. It is part of life. Where does life stop and entertainment begin? The question of art and life, the eternal dialogue, is all the more vexing on a small island where egos and insecurities run big.

What is odd is Shango has nothing to do with either Carnival or the *Messiah*, unless in the latter case one is deliberately laying the way for some religious parallel by universalising the Jesus story to link up with the United Nations flag treatment later on.

Yes? All ah we is one? No such luck. All men may be equal in the eyes of God, would that all Gods were equal in the eyes of man.

The lowest point in the evening occurs when Sat Balkaransingh and his kathak partner, Malveni Sealal, are tossed as token kindling on the *Messiah* pyre to burn for a few insignificant seconds to some passing Asian strain.

Ms Connor may be excused. She is from away. Ms La Chapelle has no excuse.

Also somewhat inexcusable is the sledgehammer symbolism of Mama God's two attendants, with their very white stylized

rastalocks, in stark contrast to the very black stylized dreadlocks of the chorus of evil in Hades. This must surely be an oversight.

There is a group of so-called minstrels that are used a great deal as a device to carry the plot along. These Commedia characters would work well with the intimacy and grit of any Port-of-Spain street corner or under a tree in Woodford Square as befits their tradition, but they are somewhat incongruous when held captive indoors, surrounded by the shiny copper panels of the new Queen's Hall, set before a first night audience in all its splendour.

(The same holds true of our own banjo-toting minstrels on Carnival Tuesday: how charming up close, how pathetic in front of a microphone on the stage at the Savannah.)

The *Messiah* minstrels perform a burlesque on the birth and life of Christ. In fact, it seems part of their purpose is to trivialise Christianity.

The rank Talk Tent chatter of these minstrels is in jarring contrast to the language of *The Messiah*: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his Name shall be called: Wonderful! Counselor! The Mighty God! The Everlasting Father! The Prince of Peace!"

(By the way, we understand that a minstrel plays many roles, but wasn't it rather below the belt for Mary, in the midst of childbirth, to morph into a bleating sheep?)

A lack of understanding of the business of outdoors/indoors plagues this production. Centuries of evolution and refinement preceded the emergence of what is now called "theatre" from the original spring festivals, the great religious celebrations of life, the carnivals.

What happens outside is of necessity big,

bold, simple, strong. What happens inside is smaller by contrast, more intimate. Outside you may have a political speech or a rally; inside you may have a conversation. And the magic of theatre is if you want to have a rally inside, you find a wonderful, imaginative, theatrical way of doing it without a thousand people. This is called suspension of disbelief.

Ms Connor appears to be caught at the heart of a terrible conflict. She so desires the release of Handel from his European oratorio confinement into the warm embrace, the full performance freedom, of a Caribbean Carnival, yet, simultaneously, she is driven to entrap the very Carnival within the confines of the European proscenium.

Towards the end, after a long night, we witness the appearance of a 10-member pansite to play the Hallelujah Chorus onstage while a cast of 200 people is idling about in complete silence ofstage. The mind is numbed, bewildered, by this directorial decision.

The finale of *Carnival Messiah* is undiluted Notting Hill on the Queen's Hall stage. It is raw sewage up close. From far, it would be acceptable as street theatre. But on the proscenium stage it is bright, gaudy, visually vulgar and very loud.

It is beyond exotic. It fulfills every cliché and stereotype about black people. Of course white people applauded it. Of course *Carnival Messiah* received rave reviews in the north of England. It would be churlish of England not to like it.

If England say so, it must be so, ent? We are still such slaves, aren't we, to the master's imperative. Huge amounts of money were spent to bring this made-in-England show to Trinidad and to mount it.

Some English critics liked it. That was enough. No more questions were asked, no whys, no wherefores. The tidal wave of superlatives that was delivered in self-justification long before the curtain rose was astonishing.

On Monday night at the official gala opening of the new Queen's Hall, on the occasion of the Port-of-Spain premiere of *Carnival Messiah*, the specially invited audience rose to its feet at the end, applauding, in large part, a parody of its own self.

Grime Messiah
See page 32
Dr Kris Rampersad
kris@ttd.co.t

upclose

Carnival Messiah controversy

Educator, theatre enthusiast and author, MARINA AMA OMOVALE MAXWELL responds to Peter Minshall's review of Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, carried in last Sunday's *Guardian*



Praise song to Minshall

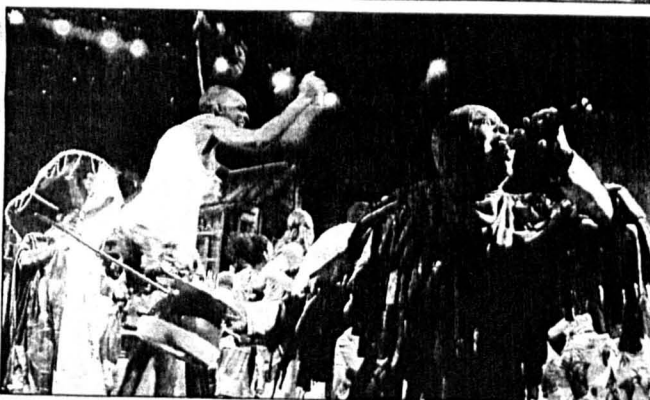
"MAMI MAGIC" O! Carnival Messiah O! Cast & Crew, and Queen's Hall, thank you. Geraldine "Mami Magic" Connor has done it again. She is back, and has gifted us with *Carnival Messiah* — a journey of our selves, of our syncretising and integrating culture; a theatrical experience like we have never seen before. Hopefully, it marks the renewal and birth of theatre here which is forgetting it has a past and is sinking into pure entertainment, lewdness, rubbish and obscenities. *CM* shows a way forward, towards our future theatre. What we can do.

This is a praise-song to Geraldine Connor, MMus, LRSM, Dip Ed, PhD (Canada) and her miracle making players — about 28 from UK and about 150 from right here experiencing the real discipline and possibilities of themselves and of theatre. *CM* is a stupendous, indigenous, multicultural in the truest sense, syncretic, hybrid piece of total theatre. We need new and real and informed critics and reviewers (not journalists who don't know theatre or embittered, vindictive, frustrated artistes) to understand and interpret it for us.

CM encompasses syncretic Carnival out of our African, Asian and multicultural experience and European Oratorio from our colonial heritage. This has never been done before. To compare this to Aubrey Adams' 1972 "tourisified exotica", *Ambakila* is to be idle, superficial, venomous, jealous maybe. Hennish gossip.

Connor saw Adams' show. So did I. Loud and lusty. Feathers and glitter. Stereotypes and clichés. Hardly art. No story-line! Quint, sexy West Indians on show. Exotica. Plenty wine, bottoms rolling, plenty of limbo crotches...

(Sorry Terry J. Not utterly essential always.)



Why sell us this mess of pottage? Maybe this kind of thing raises his pores. Mine and many other pores are quite undisturbed by all that, really.

What dynamics did *CM* promise and indeed bring together — and very, very successfully too? It didn't wander around all over the place at all. What is this grand storyline Minshall and Terry Joseph were missing? We know the story of Jesus *ad nauseam*. It was all there threading through the performance and binding the universalised narratives together. The minstrels were not trivialising anything. When something is yours deeply you can laugh at and with it. It was sheer comic theatre, serious fun. No savagery intended. No church has challenged it. Equal contrast never jars. Some felt it brought their faith closer actually. In Leeds some wept at the intimacy of it all, the true spirituality, the real equality and togetherness ever preached for all by the Christos.

And, they also had a programme setting it all out quite clearly. Was she to chew it all for them too?

The first thing our attackers could have noted is *CM* is a blossoming, rooting and fruition of dreams by many of our spirit mothers and spirit fathers working in our canefields long before us — Beryl McBurnie, Kitchener, Sunciar Popo, Ras Shorty I, Andre Tanker and too many to mention. It is a salutation to Errol Hill with his call for West Indian theatre first and Carnival — a mandate for a theatre.

CM is a praisesong to Minshall himself of the Theatre of the Streets — of Carnival in Theatre and the theatre of Carnival. He it is who progenitured our first, full-scale Carnival Theatre, (and TV magical realism theatre wonderfully shot by Christopher Laird with fabulous Errol Jones as Papa Mas) *Santi-*

manity. Connor was the musical and choral director of his great experimental show beautifully written by Tony Hall. She alone voiced it fully for continuity or it would have fallen apart. She has acknowledged and often said it was such an inspiration and learning ground for her.

Minshall has attempted no full-scale theatre subsequently. Is all this just pure jealousy? I gather that his endless indulgent vitriol makes him very difficult to work with.

CM fulfils some part of many dreams eg Efebo Wilkinson's Folk vs Elistit Theatre, Ramleela Circles Theatre, Hosay and Phagwa, Gayelles, Ole Kaiso Tents; Tony Halls Joovay Theatre, Better Village developed to video screen now by Reggie Griffith; my own Yard Theatre started in Jamaica since the 60s where it created and called for equality between classes and colours and for new Open Air Caribbean spaces and playing places. *CM* is partly Rawle Gibbons' Third and Total Theatre path-breaking vision encompassing the enactments an all our festivals. *CM*, an Unfinished Creole "magnificat" is the power of the theatre we have embedded in us from our pasts and presents and potentials. Thank You, Geri.

We have now seen Carol LaChapelle's power, telling, integratory energies of choreography in full flight truly. We have ever-scintillating designer Wayne Berkeley's excellent sets gracing *CM*. Ella Andall is Spirit Mother/Oshun taking us flying. Magnificent — on this I agree with Minshall, Leah Gordon is Mama Latay, surrounded by the Sea our natural habitat, powerfully guiding us on. Too many local talents and professional visitors who taught us so much, to mention. We have seen what real theatre is all about; how exquisite our costumes can be in motion, and as

characters in a stage, the heavenly Dove of Peace. We have seen Geraldine Connor lift Carnival forward into full-scale theatre. Something Dimanche Gras shows gave up on long ago. We have seen her tell our history in the Joovay Ballet Overture in less than 20 minutes. It is a history of roots, rhizomes and sounds and signs and signifiers and it sets the context as all overtures must do. We have seen how theatre can be done, made — right here — by us. With our own face. With the right, real and sustained support. Dreams that have to go on growing.

Here, however, we live in a time of the Vanities (hats and gloves again and plenty pretty style) and Obscenities (Toro, Toro windedown, jump and wave mindlessness and lewdity). Rex Nettleford has said Caribbean cultures are passing through a time of "psychic disarray". And it must pass.

In fact capitalism has caught up with its tail since the 70s and 80s and the world is reeling with global greed and dictatorial grabbing. Obscenities really.

And especially through our television programming, we and two generations have bought them all. The violence, the materialism, the dress, the crime, the consumerism, the lewdness and sexism — all inside the souls of our societies, our unemployed drifting, crucified youth and what passes for our theatre.

We have all the money needed. *CM* proved that too. Was \$50 million spent just to be stylish at Queen's Hall for a new mediocre "validating elite"? Queen's Hall may be technologically improved but that is not enough. Bright, shiny, stylish and too tight a fit. Expensive to rant too. Who can afford to use it? Well, we'll see won't we?

Time is short. I see *CM* as a hope, a projection our artists can learn from and begin to restate themselves and ourselves through art, dreaming and claiming. Why should *CM* have been perfect? We want as ever a quick fix. Why do we only have to find fault and no positives? Minshall, you disappoint. These things, many like *CM*, have to happen to balance the equation. It could be a renewal in the drought of our arts today — a mile-mountain not a mile-rock or a milestone.

That *Carnival Messiah* had hailed in Britain seems to mean that it had to be bad! This acknowledgement and enthusiasm and raves abroad have been deeply resented by some. Green-eyed rubbish has been spewed out as a result.

CM is a tremendous show and UK, which knows theatre doesn't rave about exotica, like Adams' thing.

Forty-eight thousand Europeans who hit the box office and saw the show in UK can't be wrong. It also is where it could happen at all. It was where it could happen. For there still is no support and consistent training here to let something like that happen here. The resentment was really knee-jerk response. It is time to get out of those weary, anachronistic, mean, insular, would-be rebel postures. They waste energy. There is work to be done.

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one year and has not yet had its members declare their assets, on the flimsy excuse that the forms are not ready?

Isn't it the duty of the government to prepare the said forms? Are they serious about demonstrating that they are not corrupt, and that they don't intend to steal public funds?

It happened before.

Not unexpected, too, will be the completed exonerations of the "pack" who, under the hoax of building a new airport terminal, plundered the national treasury.

Trinidad has lost its place among countries of the world that can lift their heads above the entanglements of degradation; iniquity of every sort; a malfunctioning, morbid legal system with its pathetic highly-paid functionaries; extreme poverty in the midst of massive wealth; a legal system adept at punishing some (usually black and poor) but closes its eyes to crime when the same crime is committed by "certain others" and a bunch of hopelessly inefficient Opposition parliamentarians.

It is very laughable that punishment for stealing \$10 million is a fine of \$20,000 (and two years' imprisonment), which punishment will not be applied in T&T unless the perpetrator of the crime is a defenceless, poor person.

Punishment for not declaring assets must include confiscation of those undeclared assets. The high-ranked citizen is never truly punished by our injudicious system.

For me, it is a paradox that constitution reform hasn't yet begun because (as stated by our PM) it will undoubtedly be a long process: it will take a long time. It seems to me that those reasons support the need to start the process "yesterday."

The problem with T&T is we lack truly inspired leaders. In their place we have opportunists, visionless politicians, spineless and cannot-care-less representatives in high government positions, a weak and procrastinating system for dispensing justice, an inert public and hence, the government we deserve, not to mention that bunch of laissez-faire politically-motivated doctors (not the Cubans).

FITZGERALD GRIFFITH

Diego Martin

This Messiah madness

MINSHALL does have a point. But so, too, Marina Ama Omowale Maxwell and Ramcharitar and Terry Joseph and all the other voices of those persons of the theatre (and the wider artistic community) who remain divided over the merits and demerits of Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*; and who, even today, three weeks beyond the gala opening, continue to hold passionately to fixed positions about the quality of the work and its contribution to the development of an emerging Caribbean/T&T aesthetic for the stage.

But the debate did not begin in the press with Minshall.

Long before harsh words emerged in print, there were those who, during the opening night's intermission, could hardly wait to fault the work. They had spied out every blemish, every first-half error and, swirling drink in hand, prowled the Queen's Hall lobby quietly whispering the now-distasteful "s" word to any ear that would listen.

Not that there were many listeners.

For patrons, for the most part, appeared to love the work. Some walked around with quiet smiles, their pleasure at being present at so grand and magical a theatrical moment, obvious.

But others were more vocal, gushing snappy superlatives and predicting, not only an even more magical second "half" but also a swift and certain successful move to Broadway.

No room for detractors here. No room for anything but halos. No wonder the Minshall comment caught people by surprise.

Truth is, *Messiah* was neither as bad as Minshall and Ramcharitar made it out to be nor as amazingly stunning as Maxwell would have

us see it.

It was indeed a great concept brought to theatrical life through dazzling costumes, beautifully designed sets, choreography that was well focused and fully energised, and truly engaging music that paid homage to Handel's melodies and subtleties, even as it celebrated wildly our Caribbean musical sensibilities with driving syncopations and soaring counterpoints that were nothing short of awesome in design and execution.

Ataklan was great. Ella was pure

Maxwell is right. The production is not perfect. But Minshall is also right, for why should we not expect it to be

magic. Redeemer left everyone spell-bound. The audience, by and large, lapped it up.

The acting, too, gave, a more than decent account of itself. The centre-piece was the group of "minstrels" working in the style of the Italian Commedia dell'arte, who played out the story of the birth of the Christ. The craft was good. The comedic playing, crisp and well timed. Excellent ensemble work indeed.

It struck me though, that the decision to go with a small ensemble to act out those critical portions of the *Messiah* story might not have been the best artistic choice. The contrast was simply too great: too tiny a physical focus in contrast with the huge crush of bodies and large costume pieces in the other

segments of the work; too simple a design statement in contrast with the colour and splendour and grandeur of the on-going spectacle; too much straightforward dialogue (un-embellished, unadorned) emerging too suddenly from the vibrant field of music, song and dances all around.

But once the choice was made, the decision then to deliberately embrace the Italian Commedia dell'arte as the preferred playing style, was excellent artistic thinking.

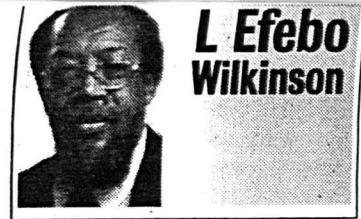
The Commedia emerged as a distinct dramatic form in 16th century Italy. It was an actor-centred playing style and therefore made use of highly accomplished professional players. It was also improvised and, capable of adapting to almost any playing condition.

According to Oscar Brockett, well-known theatre historian, the actor was "the heart of the commedia dell'arte and almost the only essential element" and the script was a scenario, which "merely outlined the principal action and its outcome."

The plot almost always centred on two lovers (read Joseph and Mary). However, the lovers were not usually the centre of interest but provided an excuse for the plot (the birth of Christ) and served as a norm against which other characters could be judged.

Interestingly, it is said when the Commedia first emerged in Italy, it played alongside huge productions of opera and Intermezzi. Intermezzi were spectacular events that made great use of "elaborate special effects" and drew their subjects from mythology.

Opera employed a similar grand style, having emerged in Florence from deliberate attempts to root theatrical practice in the dramatic constructs of ancient Greece: the use of music, dance and chanted



L. Efebo Wilkinson

(sung) dialogue to present spectacular tragedies based on the lives of mythic or historical heroic figures.

Peering through this prism of Western theatre history, therefore, Geri Connor's minstrels, thrust up against the heady Intermezzi type, spectacular backdrop of the *Messiah* with its soaring Creole arias, appeared to mirror a particularly rich moment in theatre history, capturing in the process its essential dramatic qualities. Historical truth, however, does not necessarily make fine theatre.

But the minstrels were good, each player presenting fine, focused, detailed acting. The minstrel scenes themselves, too, were very satisfying. Each one emerged as a moment of distinct quality, partnering such other moments of quality and magic as the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the steel-band rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus.

One needs to understand, though, that while great theatre is founded on fine moments, moments alone do not great theatre make.

Maxwell is right. The production is not perfect. But Minshall is also right, for why should we not expect it to be or even demand that it be. And there's no contradiction really in us wishing it to be perfect yet being very understanding if and when it falls a bit short of the mark.

For we always act that way, those of us, that is, who see ourselves as having some leadership role to play in the development of the arts, in general, and the theatre arts, in particular, in this country.

Cont'd on Page 60

Messiah of many mothers

Continued from page 30

LESTER EFEBO WILKINSON

CONSTANTLY, we demand excellence, perfection even. Yet, at every turn, we proffer advice and supportive guidance when our colleagues falter.

So we criticise, yes, but always we understand the persistent blemish, the wart that simply will not go away.

What then was different this time around? Why the seeming hostility? Why the apparent brutal "bashing" of *Carnival Messiah*?

Because of what he represents to all of us, Peter Minshall's comments were particularly tough for the cast to take. Stories abound about its backstage impact on the evening of July 27. No wonder, then, the stinging retort from Marina Ama Omowale Maxwell, who, usually balanced as a commentator, was unusually harsh in her comments.

To make public reference to *Ambakaila* of the early 1970s as "Adams' thing" might not be seen as being uncharitable, but to describe the production, later in the same piece, as "a bad Adams show" is as tough to take as the Minshall remarks were.

So, too, the personal snipes about "a multi-million dollar house in Federation Park" and Beryl McBurnie's Little Carib Theatre, said to be taken "in her frailest end-days" and "destroyed and gutted of meaning utterly."

Very unnecessary. None among us needs it, not Minshall, not Geri, not Aubrey Adams, not Marina herself, not anybody.

It appears that with retro-vision, given all that has taken place since the mid-1970s, to categorise *Ambakaila* of 1972 (yes, 31 years ago) as "touristified exotica" to be regarded as nothing more than "loud and lusty. Feathers and glitter. Stereotypes and clichés. Hardly art."

But in the living moments of 1972, a mere two years beyond the Black Power revolution (and revolution it was, we do need to acknowledge its demonstrated awesome power to transform), with Best Village making a weekly plea for acceptance and respect (that it is still to get), with calypso and parang marginalised, and all things native (including Divali and Ram Leela) living a fringe existence, with radio stations serving up a steady brew of foreign-sounding DJs with fully foreign fare, with cultural Europe firmly in charge in this twin-island haven, *Ambakaila* was more than a simple statement of the exotic, more than mere minstrelsy.

Today we may ask searching questions about the form, the style, the content of the work, but then many felt proud to embrace Aubrey Adams, *Ambakaila* and the troupe.

His contribution was worthy of regard, for if we are to accept Maxwell's claims about the theatrical heights reached by *Carnival Messiah*, then we ought to also accept, without flinching, the fact that *Ambakaila* is one of the several platforms from which the clearly well-loved *Carnival Messiah* began its leap.

This we need to understand and accept, not just the worthiness of the Adams effort of the early 70s, but also the usefulness and validity of every effort



that helps us locate a theatre that is truly ours in form, style and content; one that connects with us as a people, that speaks a language (visual and aural) of our creation.

And this is why the vitriol is so disturbing, for it gets in the way of analysis and denies us all an excellent opportunity for the kind of intellectual sharing, without which it will not be possible for us to assign real meaning to the *Messiah* project.

But the passion, too, is understandable. We are dealing here with living, breathing, working, persons with years of thankless toil invested in the field, crystal clear ideas about the road we ought to travel, and very strong feelings about the inequalities and naked biases that plague the local theatrical landscape.

Whatever appears to be an undesired, unreasonable edge is frowned upon. The well-fed ones with well-placed fairy godfathers constantly face the caustic tongue of those others waiting penniless and unsupported for the occasional crumb to drop.

Could this be the case with *Messiah*? Could it possibly be that the attack by fellow artists, launched "so savagely and so unfairly" (according to Maxwell), was less about the work itself and more about perceived unfair support provided for Geri and her *Carnival Messiah* by a battery of godfathers and godmothers with fabulous financial offers?

Minshall reserved a special place at the close of his review to drive home the point. "Some English critics liked it," he said. "That was enough. No more questions were asked, no whys,



no wherefores. The tidal wave of superlatives that was delivered in self-justification long before the curtain rose was astonishing." And Maxwell missed the point.

But Minshall doesn't rest there, for the thing he seems to be getting at is the arguments put forward for favouring the one ahead of the other. And what were those arguments? Not demonstrated quality, not proven excellence, but the fact that the UK liked it. "If England say so, it must be so, ent?"

While such feelings are entirely understandable, it is more

than time to put negative thoughts behind us and assess the *Carnival Messiah* project in a manner that would allow us to emerge from this period of theatrical activity better equipped to take the theatre arts forward.

We already know what *Carnival Messiah* is. What we need to ask ourselves now is: what does it mean for us? What has it contributed to the overall development of a Caribbean (T&T) aesthetic for the stage? How has it advanced the cause of our emerging stagecraft? How has it assisted us to define and fully understand the dynamic of our

RIGHT: The "Can Can" dance from Aubrey Adams' *Ambakaila* show is performed outside the Moulin Rouge in Paris. The show was enthusiastically received in London, Paris, Tel Aviv, as well as 33 US cities, Germany, Italy, Canada, Yugoslavia, Monte Carlo, and several other countries.

CENTRE: CORY HERBERT of the Laven-tille Cultural Movement, winner of the Best Village limbo. Photo: DAVID WEARS

BELOW: A scene from *Carnival Messiah*. Photo: DAVID WEARS

native performance traditions? How has it helped to clarify those critical issues of style, of form, of content?

Some (who thoroughly enjoyed the performance) are more tentative in their pronouncements. Maxwell, on the other hand, is anything but tentative. In her view, *Carnival Messiah* will point "a way forward, towards our future theatre." She hopes that it will mark "the renewal and rebirth of theatre here," a country which, in her view, "is forgetting it has a past and is sinking into pure entertainment, lewdness, rubbish and obscenities."

While I agree that *Messiah* was an event of more than passing significance, I do not see it achieving all those grand things that she expects it to.

Maxwell, however, sees *Carnival Messiah* as a marker of tremendous importance, a "mile-mountain" (as in "mile-stone").

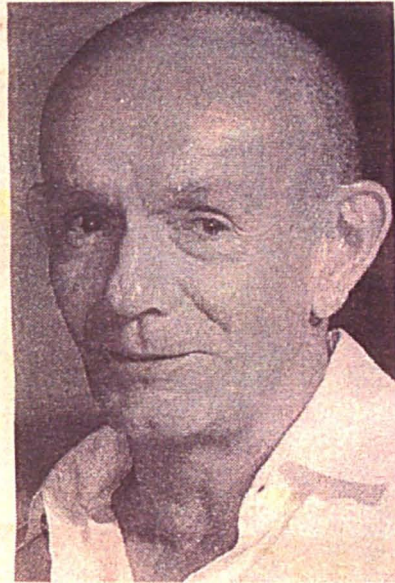
From where I sit, looking back through Caribbean theatre history, if *Messiah* is a mile-mountain then there are many others that must be identified publicly and saluted.

The glamour of the current moment, rather than blind us to our history, should instead become the gateway to past glories: the portal through which we pass to find forgotten treasures, touch long-lost events and engage once more those dreams that, having lived, now make our present real.

I salute my dear friend and colleague in the arts, Geri, and all those who helped to make *Messiah* live. And in so doing, I hope my own praise song will reach backward in time with warm melodies of deep appreciation, to gently caress Arthur Reginald Roberts, pioneering playwright of the 1930s, Beryl McBurnie, Grand Dame of the dance, CLR James's *The Black Jacobins* (1936), Errol John's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957), Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours* (1958), Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* (1960), Best Village, The Trinidad Theatre Workshop, Aubrey Adams's *Ambakaila* (1971), Errol Hill's *The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies* (1971), Ram Leela, Errol Hill's *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (1972), Zeno Obi Constance's *The Ritual* (1978), Felix Edinborough and Paul Keens Douglas's *Mas in yuh Mas* (1980), Peter Minshall's *Santimantay* (1989) and Rawle Gibbons's *Sing the Chorus* (1991). And finally, I do hope I will be forgiven for including among the list my own *Same Khali Pants* of Best Village 1980 and *The National Drama Festival*, 1985. The work continues.

Issues

Not raw sewage, Selwyn



PETER MINSHALL

I wrote a theatre review of *Carnival Messiah*. The *Guardian* published it with a misleading headline. This caused many people to interpret my entire review as coming from a spirit of meanness and insult, and so they missed, or misunderstood, much of my analysis and observations. Among them was Prof Selwyn Ryan, who wrote a "commentary" in the *Guardian* taking me to task.

The writing [following/above/. . .] is my response to Professor Ryan. I submitted it to the *Guardian* in the first instance (because that was the forum of both my review and Ryan's commentary) but the Editor-in-Chief said that he would not print it unless I changed the following two lines:

"The headline was not only a distortion and an insult in itself, but tainted the entire text of my writing and would prevent readers from being able to approach rationally the substantive points made." And, "You became unable to read and comprehend the meaning of the written word. This demonstrates

the terribly damaging effect of the *Guardian's* headline."

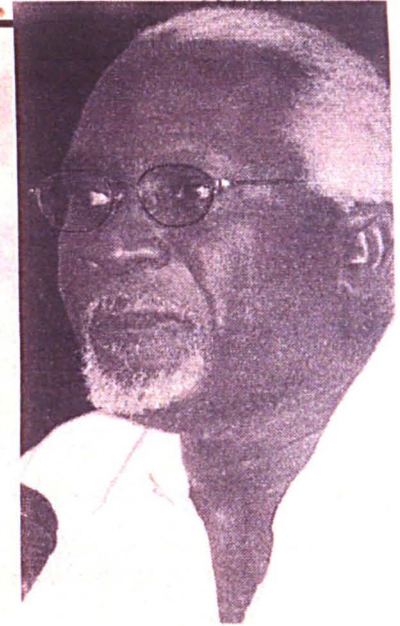
I refused to change them. To change them would be to alter what I believe to be the truth. The headline did distort my meaning. It did insult the creators of the show. The effect was terribly damaging.

The *Guardian* allowed itself the freedom to put its own headline on my writing. It has since published Ryan's piece, which allows him to voice his opinion that I was dishonest, and other writings that express extremely negative opinions of me. I do not understand why the *Guardian* will not provide to me a forum to state what I believe to be the truth. This is censorship.

That paper's masthead carries the words "Guardian of Democracy." Clearly, this has become a meaningless slogan.

I thank the *Express* for the opportunity to make these statements.

—MINSHALL



PROF SELWYN RYAN

As one who respects Selwyn Ryan, the political analyst and educator, I must confess to having been puzzled and indeed startled by his inability to read written language and discern its meaning, as reflected in his knee-jerk response to my review of *Carnival Messiah*. I can only think that the *Guardian's* "Raw sewage" headline so distorted readers' impressions that even someone as well-educated as Ryan became unable to process the rational analysis in the text. It is uncomfortable to be so misconstrued. I will attempt again, in simpler language this time, to explain.

To use the inherent theatricality of the mas to best effect, you have to understand that a good mas is a medium of expression

Ryan is not sure what was "implied" by saying that in the 30 years between *Ambakaila* and *Carnival Messiah* "nothing had changed". Read again.

"The Blue Devils have been tidied up with tinsel and fabric." This sentence is used to describe *Ambakaila*. It is repeated verba-

tim to describe the overture of *Carnival Messiah*. That means that what has not changed is the way the "Blue Devil" is presented.

This reference to the "Blue Devil" is a metaphor, and an especially poignant example, of how elements of Carnival are

handled in *Carnival Messiah*. In tidying up the "Blue Devils" (and other elements of mas) their essential power and theatricality is lost.

Devils come from hell. Unless your vision of "hell" is cartoonish and trivialised, portraying a creature from hell should be a serious business, about a sense of danger, threat, perhaps touching on evil. The masmen who created the Blue Devil understood this.

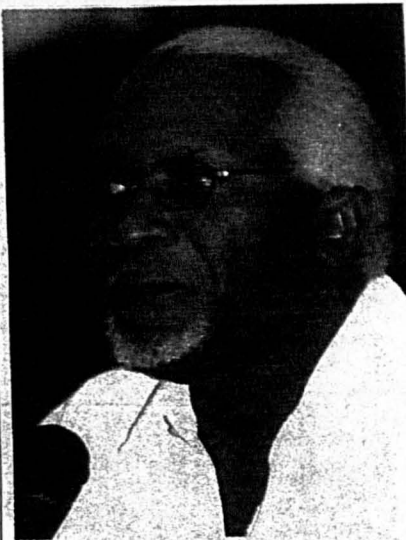
The near-naked body covered in blue grease gives a sense of the primal, a hint of something almost beast-like. It holds the threat of soiling the onlooker. The aggressive pelvic jabs, the

wild leaping energy, the fast-paced metallic rat-tat-tat of the pitch-oil tin, all heighten the predatory, threatening quality. The masman playing devil does so with an expression of horrific wild-eyed mania. His aim is to frighten. Not just play at being scary—really to frighten.

When he succeeds—when children run screaming and grown men shrink back into the shadows, the Blue Devil experiences power. The onlooker, in his rational mind, knows that this is just an ordinary man like himself.

But the theatrical power of the mas overrides his reason, and he

MINSHALL continues on Page 4



Not raw sewage, Selwyn

Issues

RAW SEWAGE from Page 32

What seems to disturb Ryan most is simply the fact that Minshall criticised the show, and Ryan liked it very much. The emotional interpretation of the criticism is that the audience is "wrong" to like it.

Nobody wants to feel as though they are wrong, so, the next emotional reaction is to claim that the critic is wrong; not only wrong, but, since he's criticising such a likeable show, that he must have some grudge, or ill-will, something in the mortar besides the pestle.

A rational response, rather than an emotional one, would understand that the matter of whether a show is popular or enjoyable is different from the matter of its quality. Witness Hollywood and US television.

Carnival Messiah was the sort of show that is easy to like. There is not necessarily anything wrong with this, as long as one understands it for what it is.

Any time you can put scores of people on a stage all singing and dancing, you create a lively human energy. The music (even though it used little Handel and did not follow the oratorio form in terms of relating a story) was competently put together and professionally performed.

The production values—lights, sound, sets, costumes—while middlingly competent by international standards, were above the local norm.

It's always pleasing and impressive to see a level of professionalism in technical execution, no matter what is being performed. This is especially so for those who have not seen much real professional theatre.

In Carnival Messiah, many of the numbers, and especially the finale, are essentially an invitation to celebrate.



PETER MINSHALL

“Part of my purpose seems to be to stand in the public square from time to time, to be stoned and to bleed, in order that some might unmask their darkest fears, release their demons, and free themselves of their poison. So be it.”

Upbeat music, singing voices, lots of performers, up in the aisles among the audience, hands in the air.

You would have to be a real grump to decline such an invitation. Then, too, we as Trinians are so starved for renderings of ourselves (in media that are internationally-approved) that we can be desperate to applaud anything that features even a glimpse of us.

But it's feel-good for feel-good's sake, and Trini in surface form with little content.

A work of high quality would evoke that good feeling as a consequence of having carried the audience on an emotional journey, presenting characters that the audience can care about and in whom they can see themselves, presenting a dramatic arc of emotion and event that creates suspense, anticipation, conflict, climax, resolution; presenting moments of magic and wonder; creating for the audience a heightened understanding of the comedy and tragedy of the human condition.

A work that respects and employs the essence of Carnival, and not merely its surface form, would use the mas and music of Carnival as a theatrical language through which to communicate such a drama, not as a variety show of the carnivalesque. I know that this is possible.

I have caught a glimpse of that Caribbean heaven in performances of the Hallelujah chorus, without the attendant fanfare and publicity, by the Lydian Singers, steel and tassa—a Caribbean fusion of Europe, Africa, and India, with our own New World synthesis, raising pores and spirits toward the transcendent and the sublime.

That Carnival Messiah failed to do these things does not mean that it is

wrong to like it. But if we aspire to excellence, then even while we let ourselves enjoy the superficially enjoyable we should be able to acknowledge what it is and what it is not.

Finally, Ryan also misunderstands what I was trying to say on the television. That was no apology. I do not apologise for my observations and assessments. What I tried to do on Wednesday morning was to explain that the headline was the work of the *Sunday Guardian*, not me. It was to point out that the headline was not only a distortion and an insult in itself, but tainted the entire text of my writing and would prevent readers from being able to approach rationally the substantive points made.

This is clearly what happened to you, Selwyn. "Raw sewage" so filled your brain that you became unable to read and comprehend the meaning of the written word. This demonstrates the terribly damaging effect of the *Guardian's* headline. That's not spin; that's the truth.

"Spin" is a political term. You are a political pollster. Politicians are notorious liars. It appears you would smear us all with their "spin." We do not all necessarily see the world as you do. There are some of us who do not lie.

I am an artist. I do not lie. I am a seeker of truth. In is the nature of my work. I uphold integrity.

The only thing in the mortar other than the pestle is me, and I am taking a good pounding. Part of my purpose seems to be to stand in the public square from time to time, to be stoned and to bleed, in order that some might unmask their darkest fears, release their demons, and free themselves of their poison. So be it.

Conclusion

RYAN read the metaphor of being "slaves to the master's imperative" as applying to him as a member of the audience. Read again. I was writing about the people who decided to spend the money to bring the show from England. I was saying that it is unlikely that anyone in Republic Bank or the Ministry of Culture sought the advice of professional theatre practitioners, or applied their own judgment, or saw the show in England.

They heard that the people abroad said it was good. They did not apply our own critical faculties, our own values, our own judgment. As Best and many others have pointed out, our insecure society tends to give higher value to the judgements of outsiders than to judgements of our own. This is just another example.

RAW SEWAGE continues on Page 33

TanTan, SagaBoy not a copy of bat

MINSHALL from Page 3

is frightened, disturbed, mesmerised, and enlivened by the experience. He has had a glimpse of hell. This is theatre.

In *Carnival Messiah*, "Blue Devils" are portrayed by teenaged boys and girls, in T-shirt tops and shorts, on a brightly lit stage amongst a jovial throng, doing a choreography of one-two-three, lift your foot, wave your fork. They do not communicate danger or the slightest hint of hell. They have been "tidied up" to conform to the polite medium of cabaret entertainment. They communicate nothing.

To use the inherent theatricality of the mas to best effect, you have to understand that a good mas is a medium of expression. It communicates. It can convey mood. It can perform a dramatic function.

This is achieved by a combination of what the mas looks like and what it does. A mas is not a mas unless it is "played."

The creators of *Carnival Messiah* seemed not to understand this. The mas was not "played" (with the exception of Alyson Brown in the Dove of Peace.) Mas was used as decoration, visual filler. It moved about, but it didn't say anything. No connection was made between the opening parade of Carnival characters and anything that happened after it.

The show had elements of

Carnival. It had snippets of Handel's *Messiah*. They were not fused. The promise of fusion was not fulfilled.

"No one seems as yet to fully understand what the lowly Blue Devil has to teach. Perhaps he is too low." With the words so clearly stated on the page, it beats me what takes Ryan wandering off in the direction of folklore and those tacky comparisons between Aubrey and Edric.

Ryan seems not to understand the difference between influence and inspiration, and theft. When a designer employs styles, techniques, or media pioneered by another artist to create his own original work, he is said to be influenced by the other artist. I have always acknowledged that my most kinetic work in the mas, from the Hummingbird through Mancrab right down to TanTan and SagaBoy, has been inspired by the traditional bat.

But TanTan and SagaBoy do not look like a bat. They are not a copy of the bat.

The Dove of Peace is a copy (not exact, but very close) of Joy to the World.

That's the difference. When a designer copies a specific work of another artist, it "is neither flattery nor tribute to its origin. It is a direct steal."

If a writer copied a Selwyn Ryan column and published it under his own name, you would say that he stole what Ryan created. I don't think Ryan would



A SCENE from
Carnival Messiah.
Photo: MICHEAL
BRUCE

shrug it off saying "everyone steals from everyone else." Is Ryan saying that he would not grant a work of mas the same value and respect?

I'm not sure Ryan can fairly say that I was "peevéd". Read again.

I did not condemn or castigate the designer. I pointed out a fact. In the professional theatre there is an assumption that the costume designer will create work that is original. This is relevant to an assessment of the work.

The mention of being "from away" had nothing to do with Ms Connor's Trini credentials. Read again. I was writing specifically about the classical Indian dance,

which Ryan himself found "gratuitous and inserted for political correctness."

"Ms Connor may be excused. She is from away. Ms La Chapelle has no excuse." What does this mean? It means that Ms La Chapelle lives here.

So does Mr Balkaransingh. So does Mr Ryan. So do I. We live here, and we interact with each other on a daily basis. We will all meet at the next reception or cocktail party. With eye-contact alone, the moment of humiliation will be re-lived.

The way I used the words "raw sewage" was neither a dismissal nor a characterisation of the show. Read again.

"The finale... is undiluted Notting Hill on the Queen's Hall stage. It is raw sewage up close. From far, it would be acceptable as street theatre.

But on the proscenium stage [i.e., up close] it is bright, gaudy, visually vulgar, and very loud."

This is to say that the Carnival costumes for the finale were designed as if for the street, and that they do not work well in the closer confines of a theatre. Seen from far, on a street, it is all right, but seen up close, in the heightened focus of a theatre stage, it becomes coarse and distasteful.

MINSHALL concludes tomorrow

Express Yourself

On the subject of 'Raw Sewage'...

THE EDITOR: Anyone who knows Peter Minshall, or has an impression of the integrity of the man, would have been startled to see his face looming large on the front page of the *Sunday Guardian* over the text, "Peter Minshall: Raw sewage in *Carnival Messiah*." The same phrase, "Raw sewage," was repeated as the headline of the review by Minshall on page 11, and repeated again as a highlighted quote.

Minshall himself was horrified. The title he had submitted was "The Devil's Advocate." (This refers to his analysis of the theatrical quality of the Blue Devil, and his lament that it was not better respected or employed.)

Readers assume a headline is a summary of the writing it heads. The use of "Raw sewage" above the review would be interpreted as his overall assessment of the show. But that is not true. Minshall never said that. He never meant it.

Because of what *Carnival Messiah* attempts, it is a significant event, whatever its success or failure. Minshall was disturbed by how elements of *Carnival* were portrayed and by the failure to make a coherent theatrical experience from these elements. He was sufficiently concerned, about the implications for carnival and theatre, to do what he has never done before: publish a written analysis of the work of another artist.

He was at pains to be truthful and exacting, but to avoid sniping or personal attack. Even if the show failed to meet its ambitions, the people who created and performed it have made a tremendous effort, and are in no way deserving of meanness.

It is true that those two words appeared in Minshall's text. As follows:

"The finale... on the Queen's Hall stage. It is raw sewage up close. From far, it would be acceptable as street theatre.

But on the proscenium stage it is bright, gaudy, visually vulgar, and very loud."

This is to say that the *Carnival* costumes for the finale were designed as if for the street, and that they do not work well in the

closer confines of a theatre. Seen from far, on a street, it is all right, but seen up close, in the heightened focus of a theatre stage, it becomes coarse and distasteful.

This is sharp criticism and strong language. But it is part of a reasoned assessment, not an arbitrary insult. And it is a far cry from saying that the entire show is "raw sewage".

Minshall had tried to be careful. Before submitting the piece, he explained to the editor-in-chief that he wanted to write in the role of a professional critic of the theatre (not the role of celebrated masman), and to do a serious analysis of *Carnival Messiah* as a piece of theatre. He asked that no changes be made to his review, and this was agreed.

At first, he didn't even want a photograph of himself to be used. The editor-in-chief said it was customary to run a small photo of the author above the writing, and Minshall agreed on this basis.

It was never discussed whether the agreement not to make changes applied to the title (headline). After the fact, the editor-in-chief said that the agreement could not have applied to the headline, because a newspaper always reserves the right to decide on headlines. In our minds, the most important words of writing are its title. (If an editor were to publish Earl Lovelace's novel with an agreement to make no alterations, surely he would not presume to change its title from *The Dragon Can't Dance to Life in Laventille*.)

But beyond the matter of the "agreement", it was wrong to use "Raw sewage" as the headline because it distorted Minshall's meaning, and powerfully so.

The impact of a headline sears the mind of the reader with a dominant impression. Even though the text was measured, analytical, and fundamentally decent, that headline inevitably tainted its message and meaning. The reader cannot help but interpret the text as coming from a spirit of meanness and insult.

Likewise, in agreeing that the photo of Minshall over his review would be small and discreet, the

matter of using another photo on the front page was not discussed. But, knowing that Minshall was hesitant about using any photograph, was it appropriate, or correct, or fair, to print a large picture of him on the front page with the words: "Raw sewage in *Carnival Messiah*"?

The effect was to create an expectation that Minshall's review would contain condemnation and controversy. Perhaps this helped sell more papers. But it also changed Minshall's review into something insulting. This is far from what he intended to communicate.

This country is fraught with petty public squabbling. The public discourse, especially in the fields of art and carnival, suffers from lack of analysis and terms of reference. There is a reluctance to speak the truth if it might upset the self-congratulatory status quo.

Minshall's decision to review *Carnival Messiah* was an attempt to raise the level of discourse above such sniping, ignorance, and hypocrisy. The *Guardian* could have supported this effort simply by printing the review as submitted. Instead, by the headline that was used, Minshall's attempt at responsible discourse was destroyed.

Another observation: The editor of the *Sunday Guardian* would have been the one to approve the layout of Minshall's review. The same *Sunday Editor* writes a column that discusses *Carnival Messiah* and refers to points in the review. For an editor to read a review before it is published and comment on it in her own writing published at the same time is in bad taste and of questionable ethics.

Moreover, the *Sunday Editor* praises *Carnival Messiah*. Yet, the way Minshall's review was published, which had the effect of portraying him as self-important, disrespectful, and mean, also had the effect of insulting a show the *Sunday Editor* claimed to admire.

Peter Minshall submitted a theatre review on Saturday with the title "The Devil's Advocate". He did so as a theatre reviewer, mindful of the professional responsibility to

both the performer and the community that this role implies. On Sunday he discovered himself featured prominently on the front page of the newspaper, making him, and not the show, the object of attention; this is unspeakably unprofessional and contrary to established practice anywhere in the world of theatre and theatre reviews. Furthermore, it was declared that he was speaking out as "T&T's *Carnival Messiah*," and the first words out of his mouth, in bold print, appeared to be "Raw sewage."

We wish to make it clear that the label "Raw sewage", as a headline for Minshall's review or as an assessment of the show, is solely the work of the *Sunday Guardian*, not of Minshall. We are distressed that this headline has made it seem that this is Minshall's opinion of the show. It is not.

We are distressed that the *Guardian* labelled Minshall as "T&T's *Carnival Messiah*," which makes it seem as though he thinks he is the ultimate authority and saviour of Carnival. He does not. We are distressed that the effort of Ms Connor and her ensemble has been insulted by this headline.

Minshall respects their effort. We are distressed that the observations and analysis of the review have not been received as intended because of the effect of the headline. We believe that the *Guardian* owes an apology to Minshall, to Geraldine Connor and her ensemble, and to its entire readership.

THE CALLALOO COMPANY

Art of bacchanal

Kevin Baldeosingh joins the debate

DIDN'T see *Carnival Messiah*. Being a professional writer in this country, my budget doesn't stretch to \$200 to go to a theatre production. And, being a professional writer in this country, I wasn't among the select elect who got complimentary tickets. My fault for not being a businessperson, an academic, or feminist.

But I don't regret not seeing the show. Judging from the kind of people who loved *Carnival Messiah*, I probably wouldn't have, and not seeing it allowed me a clearer view of the controversy sparked by Minshall's now famous review: a controversy which, as it turned out, was more instructive than the show itself. Besides, I've never been too enthralled by song-and-dance productions. When I go to the theatre, I want interesting characters, a gripping plot, and good dialogue: in other words, I go to the theatre to see a play, not a production. And *Carnival Messiah* was clearly not a play: not one person who praised the show mentioned any of the three basic dramaturgical elements I have listed as a reason that they liked it.

Instead, political analyst Selwyn Ryan said that *Carnival Messiah* was "shockingly awesome", and said nothing more. *Newsday* columnist and businesswoman Donna Yawching described it as "multi-layered both visually and musically" and opined that it was good there because "people liked it" (a criterion which logically makes *Lara Croft Tomb Raider* into high art). *Guardian* columnist and self-described "radical feminist" JQ Baptiste simply prostrated herself at Geraldine Connor's sandaled feet. And Lester Efebo Wilkinson, a man whose opinions on cultural matters I thoroughly respect, praised mostly the spectacle of the show.

This is not to say that spectacle is not, of itself, a valid criterion for judging a theatrical production. Arts scholar Ellen Dissanayake, in her book *Art and Intimacy*, suggests that "supernormal signals" are an integral part of art's moral function in a given society. "Something that is supernormal (that is, larger or more) automatically suggests greater importance and thus compels greater regard. Hence the tendency to excess in ritual elaborations, where words, voices, actions, movements, bodies, surroundings, and paraphernalia are made as elaborated and exaggerated—as impressive or beautiful or costly—as possible."

But a show that is mainly spectacle fulfills only the first half of Horace's dictum on literature's purpose: to delight and to instruct. And yet, if *Carnival Messiah* was merely delightful, the reactions to Minshall's review would not have been so vicious. Everyone who took Minshall to task accused him of being petty, jealous, and personal. The irony was that his accusers all displayed exactly those characteristics.

Marina Omawale Maxwell, an almost-PhD, in a piece three times longer than Minshall's review, responded mainly with racial and sexual slurs. Ryan, starting off by saying that if the review hadn't been written by Minshall he would have dismissed it as "the work of someone who was writing out of pique or jealousy or out of an arrogant sense of artistic super-

iority", then went on to accuse Minshall of these self-same faults. And Connor herself, in a short interview with Baptiste, spoke in an obvious reference to Minshall about the pettiness of the local artistic community.

Minshall has said that he did not intend to offend, and perhaps he even believes this. But Minshall is a true artist, and it is therefore impossible for him to separate the professional from the personal. *Carnival Messiah* offended the artist and therefore offended the man; and that is why Minshall felt motivated to write a review, and it is also why the tone of his review is so dismissive. Ryan summed up the general view when he wrote, "My dear Peter, your reaction was so choleric that I suspect there is more in the mortar than the proverbial pestle."

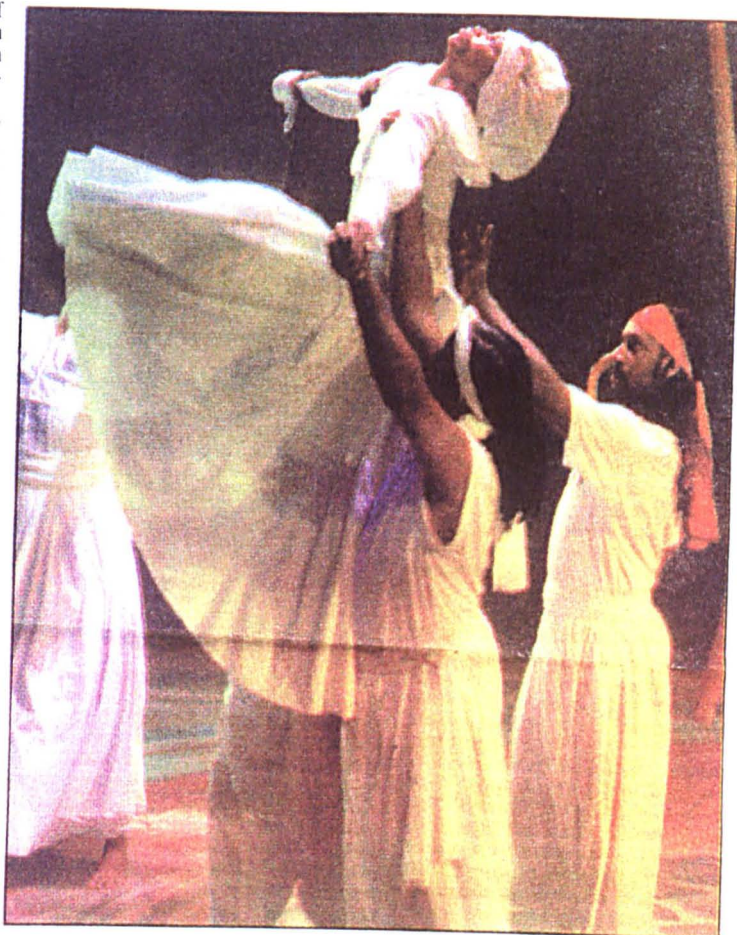
However, the objectivity of the sort Ryan and his cohorts want cannot be the purview of a real critic. Oscar Wilde, in his classic essay *The Critic As Artist*, writes, "A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the word. It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiased opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless. The man who sees both sides of a question is a man who sees absolutely nothing at all. One should, of course, have no prejudices, but it is one's business in such matters to have preferences, and when one has preferences one ceases to be fair."

So the question really is: why did Minshall's preferences so deeply offend those who saw *Carnival Messiah*? The answer is to be found in the main focus of his review: the Blue Devil. "In the Trinidad Carnival, the Blue Devil is the best example of what is possible. It is basic. It is pure raw theatre. It is skin and grease-paint. The hard unadorned rhythm mirrors and matches exactly the unadorned performer," he writes. But, in *Carnival Messiah*, "the Blue Devils have been tied up with silver tinsel and fabric".

The artist's intuition is spot on: *Carnival Messiah* has little to do with art and everything to do with status. Recall the pompous, poorly-written text of the full-page colour ad for the production's Benefit Night: "It will be all glitz, glamour, sparkles, dresses, well-known and beautiful people all around when the red carpet is rolled out you will feel the style and elegance as it will be dripping of sophistication."

Thorstein Veblen was the first to make the point that the psychology of taste is driven by three pecuniary canons: conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure, and conspicuous waste. In *The Blank Slate*, evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker notes, "Through most of European history, fine art and sumptuousness went hand in hand, as in the ostentatious decoration of opera and theatre halls, the ornate frames around paintings, the formal dress of musicians, and the covers and bindings of old books. Art and artists were under the patronage of aristocrats or of the nouveau rich seeking instant respectability."

So here we have Minshall writing, "On Monday night we witnessed the promise broken. There was some Carnival. Here and there, some snatches of the Messiah were slipped in. The rest was a production that wandered all over the place in search of something to hold it together. The general rule seemed to be that bigger is better. And when all else fails, send in the children. They're cute. No one seems



to understand what the lowly Blue Devil has to teach. Perhaps he is too low."

Here Minshall accuses the director, and the uncritical audience, of elitism: and, in our society, elitism is synonymous with pretentiousness, not excellence. Offensive enough, but then Minshall follows up with this: "The finale of *Carnival Messiah* is undiluted Notting Hill on the Queen's Hall stage. It is raw sewage up close. From far it would be acceptable as street theatre. But on the proscenium stage it is bright, gaudy, visually vulgar and very loud."

What! How dare this man deny the Queen's Hall patrons their wood-pannelled, cushioned comfort, and insist that real Carnival belongs to the street? So the Blue Devil reveals the real root of Minshall's offence: not aesthetics nor dramaturgy nor even ideology, but mere bruised egos.

But still: so much outrage, so much venom, over a mere theatre production? The offended tone was that of true believers confronted by an atheist (a reaction with which I am all too familiar) and this was perfectly natural: for to tell high-brow people that their aesthetic sensibility is hollow is not only to tell them that they lack real status, but also to accuse them of immorality. Pinker explains, "Artists and critics have long believed that an appreciation of elite art is ennobling [but] though moral sophistication requires an appreciation of history and cultural diversity, there is no reason to think that the elite arts are a particularly good way to instil it, compared with middlebrow realistic fiction or traditional education. The conviction that artists and connoisseurs are

morally advanced is a cognitive illusion, arising from the fact that our circuitry for morality is cross-wired with our circuitry for status."

This being the case, Minshall's review was also sparked by his own sense of moral outrage: that so much money should have been given to a production that, in his view, betrayed the essence of the mas. But did his outrage justify that kind of review? Arthur Koestler, in *The Act of Creation*, writes, "snobbery is by no means a trivial phenomenon, but a confusion of values which, in various forms, permeates all strata of civilised societies, present and past and it is in many respects a negation of the principle of creativity. The creative mind perceives things in a new light, the snob in a borrowed light; his pursuits are sterile and his satisfactions of a vicarious nature. He does not aim at power, he merely wants to rub shoulders with those who wield power, and bask in their reflected glory."

This is why the patronage of *Carnival Messiah* was a backward step for the arts in Trinidad and Tobago. And so it will continue to be, as long as elitism in this society equates with pretentiousness, and not with excellence. That was the lesson of Minshall's review, as indeed it has been the lesson in much of his work: but the only thing the reactions proved is that our elites, despite their putative respect for Minshall, haven't learned a damn thing. ■

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No longer theatre

Jeff Henry sees the need for controlled chaos and disciplined confusion.

I AM reluctantly entering the discussion on the production of Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, because I believe that there are very important elements missing so far in the debate.

Kudos should be given to Miss Connor for conceiving the idea for such a venture. What touches me most is that she is the daughter of Trinidadian parents - if she was not born there at least she was schooled and acculturated in the English environment. She has, however, retained the ingredients that allow her to create such a project. She is typical of the many people of Caribbean heritage living in metropolitan cities across the globe who carry the torch of their Caribbean culture.

I also want to pay tribute to the funders both private and public for their generosity in sponsoring the production. This kind of support for theatre should continue in this country. Who ever encouraged the powers that be to give their generous support to this production did the right thing. It was a vibrant production, evidenced by the fact that the audiences gave the show standing ovations. I would not dare to judge the level of sophistication of any audience in this country or any other.

Again I applaud Miss Connor for stating vehemently that she is a 'new Caribbean European' whatever that means, or that she is going to contribute toward the 'creation of a new Caribbean paradigm' and so on. I can understand her desire to confront with passion her stodgy English professors who were supervising her thesis informing them 'that there is a different world fermenting out there.' However these statements have no place in a theatre programme. They sound pompous and arrogant. The role of the theatre is to entertain educate and inform through clever devices in the subtext. One should not pontificate.

Theatre is a collective art. It starts with an idea, which is then fleshed out by the creative team of the costume designer, light designer, musical director, choreographer. This team uses their collective expertise to enlarge the original concept. Finally the performers, actors, dancers, singers, musicians expand the concept. Productions fail when the creative team loses its compass - a term used in theatre - veering off course. Each performer on stage must know what his or her role is on stage at any given time, which is referred to in the business as playing the situation and/or playing the moments.

The role of the reviewer is to address these specifics as a means of focusing the performers and the creative team on what worked and what did not work and why. The reviewer's role is to say why this happened and why something else did not. The audience completes the spiritual and the magic circle; its gut reaction must be respected.

The marketing of this production was excellent, however it may have been responsible for some of the problems that existed in this show. The marketers went overboard in the publicity, probably caught up in the enthusiasm engendered by the energy and positive vibrations in the rehearsals. Thus the bar of expectations was raised extraordinarily high by the definitive statements on the goals of the show which should not have been stated on paper before hand but enacted on stage.

Apart from the personalities, what is the debate about? Is it about carnival? Carnival as theatre? Attempting to merge Handel's *Messiah* with carnival? Should carnival be staged in a theatre? Is carnival theatre? Or all of the above?

What is theatre? The dramatic art is called theatre. Drama is a literary composition that tells a story of human conflict by means of dialogue and action. The theatre is a place where these presentations are performed. A theatre can be a permanent place for per-



formances such as Queen's Hall or a temporary place like the streets on carnival day. In theatre culture there is a saying that 'less is more'. Queen's Hall was selected to present the production. A chosen space dictates the type of production that can be presented. Carnival denotes excess, but when a limited space is chosen - like Queen's Hall - the laws of theatre in enclosed spaces takes over. The first challenge is how to produce a carnival scene since the freedom of the streets is lost. On the streets one plays from dusk to dawn. In the street, the sky is the limit. The colours of the costumes are chosen for the sunlight. In the theatre one has to compromise size of costume and colour selection in order to accommodate the lighting restrictions dictated by the theatre. The theatre starts at a specific time and is concluded at a specific time. The performers are rehearsed as to exactly what they are doing and the curtain falls at the allotted time for conclusion.

To display carnival within these confines one has to create controlled chaos and disciplined confusion. It must be performed as spontaneously as a band on the streets on carnival day, which means that each individual on stage must know where he or she has to be standing and playing at a given moment, and what they are supposed to be doing. When that has been rehearsed to the letter then and only then one can afford to improvise within that framework. Transferring the carnival, in its pure state to the stage is not acceptable because it is no longer theatre. When one makes the transition to the stage one must conform to the rules of theatre.

Our great Icon Beryl McBurnie used to twist up her face and her body in her inimitable style and cry out "Darling... the Essence". What she meant was that you cannot transfer the form as is from the community yard to the stage. It moves from a stage of being to becoming. Each carnival character has a 'persona'. The commedia character Harlequino in this production is a perfect example - he had moments through movement to display his pantomime 'blanc'

from stage right to left. Although there were people around him - he was given space to make his statement. I cannot say the same for the Beast the Pierrot or the Midnight Robber - these characters were not given moments of space and focus. I know they moved and talked but they did have their moment, there was clutter around them. It would have been interesting for example if the Pierrot did the prologue. However that is a director's choice.

I believe that Handel was indeed inspired to write the Hallelujah chorus because he believed that Christ rose from the dead, the chorus and the whole oratorio celebrates Christ's birth. Carnival is also a celebration. Here was a lovely opportunity to play around with the Hallelujah chorus, playing it with carnival flavour and tying it in with the carnival. An example of this was David Rudder's temerity to sing the High Mass in calypso rhythm which he did some years ago in the calypso tent, in the dance halls and on the streets on carnival day - what an occasion. The Doomsayers were crying out that there will be fire and brimstone and all sorts of disasters would happen that day. I was fortunate to be in Trinidad to witness this wonderful stirring occasion, it did not even ram. Let me say without fear of contradiction, as I am not given to such bold statements, when the DJ'S, Music Bands or Steel Bands struck up the High Mass on both carnival days, no masquerader winned to the tune. What is it about carnival that creates these tensions and high emotions? What is carnival? I am not referring to the theatre in carnival. I am sure if Miss Connor had seriously thought about this subject, she would not have attempted to tie the Trinidad carnival with Handel's *Messiah*. (She must be a brave soul to attempt to bring this production to Trinidad.) Carnival means different things to different people. It depends on their status in society, their information and their experiences. There are terrible conflicts about carnival. Whenever there is a link to Christianity, there is always some form of objection even by people who are participating.

Coming to Trinidad with this production

where the dynamics, history and baggage of carnival is very complex. Miss Connor needed to sit back and review the show in the Trinidad context. The production as such needed review. In 1999 I was invited to participate in the carnival arts conference 3 with a group of others who came from abroad as well as some local participants. Miss Connor presented excerpts from the *Messiah*; at that time it was a work in progress. She spent two weeks in the country, there was quite a bit of publicity about the workshop in which she presented excerpts from the work as it was then. She also gave some interviews about her ideas. No one challenged the concept, was it because it was not a full-blown show? The concept was indeed challenging, that was the time for many questions to be asked. I wonder why no one challenged it then. Is workshopping not a process where criticism could be attempted?

Check out what has been taking place in Trinidad in the past three years. I do not believe it's Bacchus, he does not have a clue where Trinidad is located. I firmly believe it's a 'Carnival Jumbie'. Check your carnival history. The traditional mas history is riddled with Jumbie characters. Jab Jab, Jab Malaise, Basil/Death that mysterious character that lurked in gateways before j'ouvert, the Devil, Dragon band with a pantheon of underworld characters, the Moko Jumbie. My grandmother referred to the vengeance of Moko when some misfortune fell on some terrible man. I also remember the statement 'the poor devil' meaning, what a pity, but he got what he deserved.

The excitement in carnival happens on the streets of Trinidad every year. The pan yards are going through tremendous changes but unfortunately they are sidelined on carnival day. (However yard presentations are bringing back pan to the respective communities.)

The ferment of Trinidad style carnival is taking place in over 40 cities in England and North America. The Caribbean islands are restructuring their carnivals to compliment Trinidad's. We need to connect Trinidad and the diaspora in a meaningful way as Trinidadians and other West Indians are rooted and connected in so many countries through our style of carnival. Carnival and its exportation is our 'cultural capital' to be exploited as is oil and gas but the people are imbued with the culture whatever that is that is the positive Jumbie.

This is a direction I hope our discussion can take, to explore the process of unraveling the intangibles that are art. The definition is not important; it is the doing, the making the performing. Let us go back to the history of carnival because its history is an uplifting experience of struggle, survival and celebration. Trinidad is the mecca of carnival. Do not allow the intellectual research and exploration to take place in distant places without our knowledge and/or participation; otherwise other people will define it for us. This should be the agenda of the debate and the discussion. Carnival itself is a complex phenomenon. Let's look at the different interpretations and different attitudes that segments of the population bring to bear on it. They are like shifting sand. Here comes Miss Connor - brave soul that she is - to make links or whatever her purpose to Handel's *Messiah* what a recipe for 'blows' on all sides.

I encourage the debate to continue without involving personality assassination taking place as 'ole talk' on the radio and television or articles in the paper. An official conference on the subject of carnival on the street and in the theatre to take place here and not abroad might be worthwhile. ■

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Criticism & the crisis of reading

Raymond Ramcharitar finds popular artists trapped in an official conception.

DEREK WALCOTT saw it coming as early as 1970, in his essay, "What the Twilight Says", which observed the characteristics of the then forming cultural religion-machine: "But Carnival was as meaningless as the art of the actor confined to mimicry. And now the intellectuals, courting and fearing the mass, found values in it that they had formerly despised." He said more in the same essay, of course, and with considerably less restraint—like: "So now we are entering the 'African' phase with our pathetic African carvings, poems and costumes..." By contrast, Naipaul's summation, a few years earlier, in the *Middle Passage*, was decidedly generous, if his observations were similar.

These two foundational pieces of cultural criticism remain eerily relevant, perhaps more so today than at their points of origin, since the state of reading and art are now in common crisis—a crisis of, appropriately, many dimensions, many of which were precipitated in the responses to the *Carnival Messiah* imbroglio which erupted in the *Guardian* in late July with all the subtlety and attractiveness of a burst sewage pipe. I don't think Terry Joseph's assessment published first in the *Express* particularly wounded anyone; neither, in the larger scheme of things, did my own, a few days later also in the *Express*, in the final week of July. It was Peter Minshall's review of the show (*Guardian*, July 27) that brought thunder down, or shit up, depending on how you want to look at it.

Prof Selwyn Ryan's apology, published in the *Guardian* on August 2, provided a rare, revealing glimpse into a normally invisible discourse (the authority-fantasies of Afro-Saxony), but it was Marjorie Omowale Maxwell's review that got the party started, quickly. I must confess, I did not read more than a few paragraphs of Maxwell's review—this was all I needed, I thought, to realize that there was nothing in there worth reading or knowing; but I was wrong. Thanks to Lennox Grant (in the *Guardian* on August 10), who actually laboured through Maxwell's article. I was made aware of the homophobic shit-splattering dimension.

(All sorts of ethical questions, which cannot be pursued here, arise at this juncture: the first and most forceful is how the hell could the *Guardian* publish that shit? And why didn't the *Guardian* publish Minshall's letter to the editor, which subsequently appeared in the *Express*, after his paid advertisement? But that's for the authorities.)

Of interest here, though, is that between Maxwell and Ryan, the main pillars of the pro-*Carnival Messiah* arguments seemed to coalesce. Prof Ryan argued with Minshall (and Joseph, and me) that he and a thousand others had enjoyed the show. What was wrong with the "critics"? He put in the quotation marks, and it's not hard to "read" that bit of punctuation: Who the hell is them to say ting to a professor, social scientist, and a thousand other presumably (from the ticket prices) leading citizens? Maxwell, and Lisa Allen Agostini, who also reviewed the show, were enraptured around the other pole: According to Allen Agostini, "[W]riter director Geraldine Connor is a genius to so brilliantly marry European classical tradition with the best of our own tra-



ditions, birthing a whole that is pore-raisingly good" Not only that, it managed to marry "Africa, Kingston, New York. Oh! But Europe wasn't left out." (*Guardian*, July 22).

Oh! But Asia was left out: and here is the defining characteristic of the other pole: the inescapable, ubiquitous, and tiresome desire for racial/nationalist restitution/reassurance (some might say "reparation"), which "everyone" tries to pretend isn't there, which is also a main reason "everyone" (from the multitude of letters to the editor in all the papers that were published) seemed to like *Carnival Messiah*, and why they took Minshall's review especially so badly. *Carnival Messiah* (as "everyone" saw it) was more than just art: it was the means by which "Africanity" was matriculated into international artistic and cultural equivalency. Minshall's review had the effect it did because of his unquestioned authority on, and over, Carnival, which these days, is an African thing. That paradoxical state of affairs, of a white man being a master of an African thing, was tolerated only as long as he didn't interfere with the ongoing chorus of praise of Carnival academically, intellectually, and artistically. The minute he "attacked" the thing, well, hunting-homo season opened.

Authority is related to the other pole, where Professor Ryan was grounded, representing Afro Saxony, or as Dutch anthropologist, Peter van Koningsbruggen, in his remarkable book *Trinidad Carnival. A Quest for National Identity* put it, "Black Authority". (*Trinidad Carnival*, for the interested, presents as complete and incisive a picture of all the social dynamics of Carnival as humanly possible, and the fact that a foreigner, through examining the press and observing the society can figure us out so completely provides a long overdue hint that perhaps, in the mass anyway, we're not as complicated as we think.)

On the question of power, knowledge, and validation van Koningsbruggen noted that "Carnival presented a 'native' alternative to colonial culture. It formed the centre of a cultural movement or climate as the embodiment of a political goal of national independence" (*Trinidad Carnival*, 122). So politics, society and culture (and nationalist sentiment, and

therefore ethnicity) were/are inextricably linked, but there was more involved in the mass manipulation of consciousness by the Great Leader: he [Eric] Williams placed a special emphasis on the desire of Trinidadians to be seen to be respectable and to be regarded as cultural and intellectual equals by the rest of the world. Williams attacked the morality of reputation by propagating serious political organisation and ambition. This reputation morality [...] contains a powerful resentment against the colonial morality of duty and service (165).

And in examining the local phenomenon of truth being linked, like everything else, to ethnicity, Van Koningsbruggen, in discussing the demonisation of Naipaul as a "racist" in popular Trinidadian sentiment, cited the *Guardian* of February 2, 1987, which carried a story headlined "Ignore VS Naipaul says Wole Soyinka". Van Koningsbruggen interpreted this to mean that the fact that an African authority has spoken, no matter how insignificant his remarks may be, confers the force of an oracle on the judgment for at least a small sector of the Trinidad population. (172)

Only these days, it's not a small section of the population, and the conclusion is by no means restricted to van Koningsbruggen's analysis if Naipaul is still the national scapegoat. Naipaul and Walcott have made the points (in the works cited) as literary observers and cultural interpreters rather than in the mode of a social scientist; and other scholars have come to similar conclusions in examining the bits of the argument relevant to their own cases—Louis Regis in his *The Political Calypso*, Rohllehr in *My Strangled City and Other Essays*, various scholars (but particularly, O Nigel Bolland and Percy Hintzen) in the collection *Questioning Creole*—all these books and essays (and many more) are aligned with van Koningsbruggen's assessment.

II

But if the desire for racial and intellectual equity via a form of emotional affirmative action explains why inane babble passes for art and criticism, and why those who know better encourage the low, upon whom assurance now

sits like a silk hat upon a Bradford millionaire, in this foolishness, it raises one or two other questions which are not entirely new, but are worth raising again.

In reviewing Earl Lovelace's collection of essays, *Growing in the Dark* in these pages a few weeks ago, I noted Lovelace's limited "background books"—shorthand for the range of knowledge of which he has chosen to avail himself. Lovelace is an individual and entitled to read whatever he likes, and apparently whatever he's read works for him: he is also one of our leading artists. However, what became apparent from the reviews that accompanied and followed mine, he is also considered one of our leading intellectuals, which indicates that the paucity of critics.

This is not to say there are not competent or exceptional local critics (though they frequently choose silence when things like this erupt); but the fact that the discourses of academia, ethnicity, and nationalism have all been collapsed into a single structure, makes it difficult for any serious critical discourse to take root, and has produced a group of people who produce what appears to be intellectual work that services that world view, which has generally, erroneously been passed off as art and criticism. The responses to *Carnival Messiah* from the society generally (again, going from the letters pages of all the papers) indicates that criticism, too, has succumbed to the general impoverishment of all spheres of life—and not only that, an insistence that we local ting is as good as de res'. The lone attempt to mediate the populist ignorance with Minshall's assessment came from Efebo Wilkinson in the *Guardian* a few weeks ago; whatever its efficacy in this instance, I can only hope it is the start of regular contributions to public debate (healthy or not) by people who administrate culture on behalf of the state.

III

Criticism is, simply, the production of meaning. Naturally, different people have approached this in radically different ways. Novels and works of art can be read (among many other things) as moral fables, formal assemblages, reflections of society or human psychology, or power relations. Also relevant here is a fact that is now commonplace anywhere criticism is bought or sold—that all social phenomena constitute "text", and can be read as such, and generate critical discourse; and while that mode of "reading" society is practiced here by calypsonians and others, academia (with one or two exceptions) stubbornly refuses to formalize this practice by teaching its students to become cultural critics, providing alternative cultural worldviews—leaving them to learn from the calypsonians and radio talkshow hosts.

What emerges from this evident potential for multiple meanings being produced from multiple texts is the need for an appreciation of uncertainty and flexibility in our interpretive paradigms—a realization that all meaning is constructed and relative. Unfortunately, what this is taken to mean is too often that "my view is as good as yours; and all views are equally valid"; or the equally popular "if you use words I don't understand, you're pretentious and a pseudo-intellectual", which generates either the worst kind of relativism (anything goes); or a retreat into fundamentalist logical positivism (in polite society this is sometimes called "Enlightenment rationalism" or some such), which is where our masses and academics reside respectively, though the neighbourhoods



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Hallelujah, indeed

IT WILL be a long time, I suspect, before anything like *Carnival Messiah* is seen again on a Trinidad stage. Not merely because of the size, scope and expense of the production, but because of the unusually high level of intellectualism that lies behind it; and the rigorous professionalism that brought it to fruition.

I'm going to make a presumptuous leap here and guess that most of the people who went to see *Carnival Messiah*, and who dissected it afterwards in glowing terms or bad, probably did not understand what it was all about. Depending on their own emotional baggage, they would have fastened on one half of the title or the other, expecting either a show about carnival and "we diverse culture", or rollicking rendition of the life of Christ, Trini-style.

In *Carnival Messiah* Connors, a righteously qualified ethnomusicologist and senior university lecturer, was not attempting a Trini version of *Jesus Christ, Soca-Superstar*. Her aim, as she puts it, was "the creation of a new cultural paradigm" — one that would embrace equally the forms of colonial classicism, the Caribbean Carnival aesthetic, and the sounds of the African diaspora, forging out of all these diverse elements "a new cultural space" that could then become "a tool of liberation for all."

A daunting proposition, surely; but at the end of the day it could only be considered successful if it translated into good theatre — if, in short, people liked it. And this is where Connors can count her greatest tri-

umph — because for the most part, people did. Long it may have been, and ticket prices exorbitant; but the crowds that emerged from Queen's Hall for ten successive nights bore wonder on their faces, that had little to do with ethnomusicological theory and everything to do with the sheer magic of having experienced that Trinidadian rarity — damn good theatre. Unawares, they had been caught up in Connors' "cultural space", and "liberated" without even knowing it.

Having sat in on several rehearsals, I was impressed by the utter professionalism of the operation, the (unaccustomed) discipline demanded of actors, dancers and singers, from top to bottom. It was clear that Connors and her team (including a music director and a dance director) were not there to fool around. The schedules were grueling: it was not unusual to hear her say, after six or eight hours of work, "Okay, we'll break one hour for dinner, then take it right through again from the beginning." This was an experience which many of our all-too-casual semi-professional artistes would carry with them forever.

The results were worth it, as I'm sure every one of the performers would agree. The concept behind the production, with its 200-odd performers, was simple: use a handful of professionals, like yeast in dough, to do the tricky stuff; and use the masses — well-rehearsed and cohesive — for emphasis and drama. Multi-layered both visually and musically, it worked like a charm.

Certain scenes stood out. The



Shango Aye sequence, featuring Ella Andall at her formidable best, was riveting. Perfectly choreographed, with utter control over the ebb and flow of its dancers, this seemingly spontaneous scene of divine possession illustrated the truism that art is NOT life, nor vice versa. The strength of art is its very artificiality: it takes life and builds upon it, breaking down complexities and complicating simplicities; stylizing reality into something higher. Even a foreigner who had never heard of shango would have been spell-bound by the primal power of this vignette.

Another strong sequence, similarly deceptive in its apparent spontaneity, was the J'ouvert rendition, replete with pierrot grenades, dame lorraines, blue devils, stickfighters, and everything else you might expect to see on a Dimanche Gras stage. But, unlike Dimanche Gras, this was not boring. Subtle refinements — a restrained and genteel bélé, for example, and the wonderful intricacies of the king sailors — created a

scene that was more than the usual banal parading of "we culture". It was a genuine jamette Carnival, the type we used to have before it was "Poisoned" to death. Wayne Berkeley's Green Corner set, spectral and evocative, poignantly underlined what we have (on all fronts) lost.

Wonderful though these scenes were, I suspect they left some viewers a little confused — what could shango and jouvert have to do with the story of Christ, or with Handel's masterpiece? Anyone who managed to slog through Connors' dissertation in the show's programme would have found the answer. She points out that Handel's oratorio, while having a religious basis, is *not* in fact a biography of Christ, but rather "a lyric-epic contemplation of the idea of Christian redemption." What is important are the themes of life, death, rebirth and glory. Viewed in this light, the exuberance and drama of *Carnival Messiah* fall perfectly into place.

There were other memorable moments: the nightmarish medusae in the Garden of Gethsemane; the spine-tingling crucifixion on moko-jumbie stilts; and of course the Redeemer sequence featuring Alyson Brown in a gigantic Minshall-esque knock-off that could have come straight from his band *Hallelujah*, accompanied by a robed African playing the exquisite *kora*.

Nevertheless, *Carnival Messiah* did have its weaknesses. Foremost among these was an awful Coral Queen/Mother God figure in a Belmont-band costume, who deliv-

ered a soulful, pseudo-poetic narration that the play could happily have done without. She was accompanied by two dancers with white mops on their heads, reminiscent of those *Matrix: Reloaded* ghosts on a bad-hair day.

Also, after the intermission, the show seemed to lose focus. With the protagonist dead, buried and resurrected, what else was there to say? The production slid into a kind of variety show format: a little salsa, a little rapso, an Elvis impersonation, some hip hop: Auntie Kay would have been proud. As for that business of running a bunch of flags all around the stage — ough. In theatre, message should never outstrip medium.

Finally, the famous Hallelujah Chorus, traditionally belted out by full choirs and sometimes even the audience, came as an anti-climax, performed as it was by a stingy contingent of 11 pan-players.

This might evoke oohs and aahs "in foreign"; but here, with Renegades just down the road and All Stars three blocks further, it just didn't cut it.

Even if they couldn't fit a whole steelband onstage, some clever sound engineering could surely have created a solution.

But these are minor quibbles in what was an awesome production. By the time the entire ensemble flooded back onstage and spilled down the aisles for their grand Hallelujah finale, all faults were forgotten, and exuberance ruled. I left the Queen's Hall auditorium in a state of utter exhilaration.

Nothing voluntary with Caroni VSEF

CARNIVAL MESSIAH- "LESS IS MORE"

Concert Review: Willi Chen

Feature Speaker at Seminar on 'Theatre Design'

At Queen's Hall

July 27th 2003

"Carnival Messiah" is an ambitious musical extravaganza of enormous proportions but the Queen's Hall stage could not accommodate this mammoth spectacle with its cast of 200. The Choir had to stand in the audience throughout the four-hour show. It was fast-paced, bristled with fire, a passionate, indiscriminate Niagara dispensation of colour, conviviality energy and pastiche. Its breathless repertoire is expansive. It swallowed each morsel of our cultural identity, our life, and landscape to be exposed in one night of theatre.

This is the biggest spectacular musical to be brought to Trinidad, appropriately performed for the opening of the New Queen's Hall. Geraldine Connor must be given credit for this concert that took four years and huge sums to produce. An extraordinary attempt to break all cultural boundaries through her vigorous visual assault, superb choreography, resounding music, fantastic co-ordination of dramatic entrances and exits. Did she succeed in doing this as a stage performance? Or was it concocted in the spirit of a tourist-packaged piece of commercialism? Could this have motivated wild reviews?

There were many commendable qualities that came off this show that did not necessitate it being branded as "Raw Sewage". There were numerous spots of creativity. In the blaze of colour, the stage sets, the terse scripted skits, in the humour, in the music and dance—all enhanced by proper lighting. What prompted this axe-grinding, derogatively harsh criticism? But then there were also other aspects of the musical that did not succeed as well.

Flaws in the production were evident at the first public Sunday dress rehearsal. Geraldine ✓ Connor attempted with some success, to fuse many entities of a diverse and diametrically opposed nature in a high-pitched format of music, song and dance. She has used Ash Wednesday as a dividing line of licentious freedom, celebratory and rebellious energy and passion, and the story of the life of Christ as steeped in its religious and meaningful and pertinent sobriety. Her stage is her melting pot.

This is an almost impossible exercise unless cautiously and astutely constructed to produce a tour de force of an integrated production. She attempted to use Handel's awe-inspiring music and all of Europe's classical religious songs, mixed all the Caribbean rhythmic tunes of various callings and genres, adding more incompatible ingredients to the pot-pouri of this musical. How well did she succeed?

But the story of Christ was treated as a cosmetic approach to the indigenous aspects of our culture, taken out furiously and indiscriminately to be used as ostentatious parades of moko jumbies, tassa drums, blue devils, Dame Loraines, shango worshippers, flag

bearers, minstrels, - j'ouvert revellers and Sat Balkaransingh, as a patronizing icon of accommodation.

Its trivialising treatment of the religious theme, borders on blasphemy and cheap humour. The crude nativity scene was a rum-shop scandal with bleating sheepish figures crawling around an actor supposedly impersonating the Virgin Mary- agonising in childbirth with limbs askew burlesque.

The crucifix scene was a bold frontal thrust on the audience that could have been sensibly and effectively played at the rear in semi darkness with the use of lightning and a thunderstorm to dramatize the sense of mystery for heightened effect of the Messiah message. The "open and shut" case skit, despite its precise and crisp performance did not fit in this play which at times gave off a variety concert spirit of comic relief to an incongruous cause.

The stage's linearly graphic depiction of old buildings setting the stage for playing of old time Carnival was done incongruously in a different style to the other sets. It was lifted and lowered like the other stage sets in full view of the audience even when the actors were still lingering on stage. This was in itself theatrical abomination. Where are the stage curtains? Money spent on red carpets could have been used. And direct audience participation does not mean the continuous and repetitive hoisting of numerous flags and banners through the aisles, or the Dame Loraines who must throw their ponderous weights around, much to the annoyance and embarrassment of some people in the audience.

As an invited speaker at the Seminar, the topic of my submission was "Less is More". I said that the show would improve with each performance. Other speakers expressed the need for a new direction of our Theatre, of "our Culture" that most encapsulate all the diverse aspects of our life. This prompted me to ask why the "Dragon Dance" was not put on. And further, as a token to the ethnic minority group, "Mile a Minute" that chivalrous foot-trotting Chinaman could have been introduced through the aisles as a runner at the heels of the police and thief duo, to share his pistache. And maybe a cloth-bale toting vendor to complete the range and balance of ethnic relevance of the society's multiculturalism.

Street Theatre is not Stage Theatre. And Stage Life is not Real Life. Performed as its appropriate artistic status, Theatre is a strong visual range of a metaphorical nature. It explores the nature of humanity at all levels. And in a play, musical or concert the essential ingredient is internal consistency.

So that despite all the vibrant energy, glorious colours, songs and fabulous lighting effects and dance, what was missing was that elusive glue pot of cementing continuity; subtlety was lacking. No treading line to harness the segments towards a cohesive whole. In short, there was too much, too long and too loud.

I agree with him +

you also would not mark that fantastic "pas de deux" fight

ethnic multiculturalism

you needed to end the act I

In my talk at the Seminar, I recommended the adoption of the ruthless strategy of condensation by selecting and rejecting and by dumping all extraneous "fat" so that Carnival Messiah could still succeed as a stage concert musical and not as street theatre enacted on stage. *

After which, Geraldine Connor could now stand out more prominently as a courageous professional Caribbean artiste. Carnival Messiah could be a turning point showcase of theatrical musical adventure, and she would serve as a vigorous tableaux vivant, who could romanticise all the diverse elegiac native exoticism that is entrenched in our own rich indigenous cultural heritage.

All of which prompts me to add that I do not want to see Carnival in Queen's Hall. The whole pre-Lenten festival of wanton abandon and licentious revelry is on the open street gayelle each year. In the limited confines of the Queen's hall stage I want to see a reconstructed enactment of theatre with a plot, that not only alludes to the power and gaiety of our Carnival celebrations through the essence of things, but as an invented distillation of all Carnival components in a package that must be vibrant, memorable, not more than three hours long, and above all, economically wrought with stylistic vision, a smaller cast to stimulate a new perception, a novel impression of life, - expressive of all great works of Art.

The Prose is As Constipated as ever -
* But he has one point -
Some sequences of the show need trimming & tightening

II.4 CARNIVAL MESSIAH PREVIEWS 1999

The carnival queen

The question *What is the Millennium Dome for?* could have a spectacular answer provided by Yorkshire. Stephen Biscoe reports.

THEY don't come much bigger. Her voice is enormous, her energy phenomenal, her figure is large, her personality atomic - and Geraldine Connor wants the Millennium Dome for her extraordinary musical show *Carnival Messiah*. Born 46 years ago in London to a Trinidadian couple, she was reared in Trinidad and is now senior lecturer in popular music at Bretton Hall, part of Leeds University.

More than that, she is a dominant figure wherever Caribbean arts are practised because when people want something done, they know Geraldine Connor will do it.

A graduate of the Royal College of Music in voice, piano and conducting, she was the first woman to play with a Trinidadian steel band.

Like all the other players, she had a nickname: hers was Fat Woman, and when she laughs at the memory of it, the glass in your hand vibrates.

Her credentials include membership of the Music Panel of the Arts Council of England, and she is an adviser to its Drama panel. She serves on the Notting Hill Carnival Assessment Committee, and closer to her home in Skelmanthorpe, she is a member of Yorkshire and Humberside Arts and is centrally involved in black arts policy and funding at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Her *Carnival Messiah* draws on her background as a student of classical western music, her work in pop as a backing vocalist for Bob Marley, Tom Jones, Judith Durham and Jimmy Cliff, and her studies of Caribbean carnival culture in which dance, music and theatre are combined.

Its origins go back to when she heard a Quincy Jones recording of a soulful *Messiah* with spiritual and jazz elements.

"I heard this thing," she says, "and my first thought was, wouldn't it be a good idea to do a rock version with my students because they are well into rock and pop and punk and then I thought no, why not do something that highlights the musical and theatrical traditions of the Caribbean."

Her interest in these had developed after she left the Royal College of Music and returned to Trinidad where she set up and ran the music department at the island's top boys' school, Queen's Royal School.

Perhaps her idea for a *Caribbean Messiah* would have got no farther, but Bretton Hall at that time gave its students of dance, drama, music and theatre five weeks in which to work on projects, culminating in a series of one-night performances at the Wakefield Opera House.

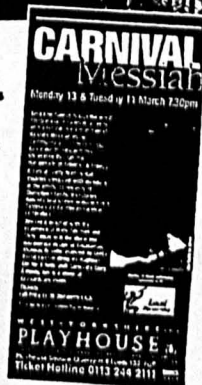
She was not involved, being too busy working on a Master's degree, but was rung up two days before the project's start and told that two people had dropped out, and could she help? "Well, I never say no. So I said 'Yes, sure, no problem.' She found herself with 80 students and two assistants.

What eventually evolved was a version of the *Messiah* linking three parallel strands.

One is the conventional Bible story of the Conception, Crucifixion and Resurrection, the second is the carnival tradition of Dimanche Gras, Lundi Gras and Mardi Gras, and the third is the African tradition of Birth, Death and Rebirth. The climax is a joyful *Halé*...



Carnival procession: Geraldine Connor's show is gaining a life and longevity that may lead to the Millennium Dome.



Connor's first attempt to get Arts for Everyone funding failed, and she felt too dispirited to press on. "I thought: 'All right, I'll just have to leave it.' I sat on it for three months and in December last year I thought 'I'm not having this. I've got to pick myself up and start again. This project is too good.'"

Geraldine Connor has contacts everywhere, and one was almost next door. Andrew Senior, a solicitor who has gone into theatre production, had seen the *Carnival Messiah*, and now she asked him about her predicament.

He was interested and sympathetic. So much so that together they have formed a company which last week submitted an application for Arts for Everyone money, backed this time by Bretton Hall. Crucially too, Jude Kelly has offered to give it a month's run at the West Yorkshire Playhouse next year.

Another of Geraldine Connor's friends, the Trinidadian Peter Minshall who did the opening and closing ceremonies for the Barcelona and Atlanta Olympics has said he wants to design the masquerade sequences, and yet another talented Trinidadian, the international choreographer Carole La Chapelle, wants to contribute. The production will use professionals in the main roles, supported by a chorus drawn from schools and community drama groups from across Yorkshire.

After its month's run, Connor wants to take the professional core to Manchester, Bristol and Coventry, and train new people in each area to fill out the chorus for week-long performances.

In the Millennium year it would be ready for London and a huge arena production, perhaps at the Dome. The Notting Hill Carnival Trust has written to Peter Mandelson about having it staged there, and he has said it is on the list of contenders. If it is put on there it will have grown to include steel bands and at least some of the singers and dancers from Yorkshire, the North East, the West Country and the Midlands who had been involved already. They would join a rolling cast so that it could run nightly for six months or more.

Carnival Messiah is beginning to look as

Chorus accompanied by an explosion of uninhibited celebration.

When it got to the Opera House, the show was sold out.

Jude Kelly, artistic director of the West Yorkshire Playhouse, had seen the dress rehearsal - she knew Connor through her work as a choral director with Black singers in Leeds - and wanted *Carnival Messiah* at the Playhouse.

In February 1995, excerpts were performed in the foyer as part of a foyer programme, and in March that year the full show was squeezed into two days between schedule productions in the Quarry auditorium.

Connor recalls: "They had to do something they had never done before. People arrived at the door and there were no more tickets; they had to bring a video out into the restaurant area and put it on because they refused to go home. My friend Cathy who's a receptionist

we've never had that happen in this place before." And for two nights that went on." In the days following, there was some criticism that there were two many whites in the show, but Connor is unrepentant. "I have no problem with that because I want it to be as multi-racial as *Carnival* is."

After the Playhouse production, she accepted that it was as far as she could go with it. "I sat on it for six months and then one day I thought: 'No no no no! This thing has a life of its own. I ain't seen nothing like this before and two days just is not right. It's not yet been done as I wanted it done and it should be.'"

A link, via a cousin, with the Manchester Business School resulted in a group of students being asked to prepare a feasibility study to take the production to three UK venues and three European ones. The figure their exercise came up with in December 1996 was a depress-

Hallelujah!

It's the hip Messiah

Geraldine Connor has crossed all the boundaries to fuse Handel with the soul of the Caribbean. **KAREN JOYNER** meets her.

THERE'S no mistaking Geraldine Connor. As she sweeps across the cafe in her black robe dress, red and blue flecked scarf wrapped around her plaited hair, the vibes of energy precede her.

This is a woman to inspire even the most feeble. She speaks with a chocolate round voice, her warm eyes sparkling and hands gesticulating as she speaks of her childhood in Trinidad. In the midst of rehearsals for her unique *Carnival Messiah*, she is fuelled by her enthusiasm for Caribbean culture, as she fervently passes it on to a chorus of West Yorkshire performers.

The idea of combining the beat of Trinidad with the voices of the world came about a few years ago when Geraldine (head of popular music studies at Bretton Hall College near Wakefield) was asked to do a project with some students left over from the modular system. "I was rung up two days before and told I had 80 students to work with," she chuckles. "I had always had this idea in

the back of my head that I would like to bring the Trinidadian carnival over here, and this was the chance." Ironically, as a youngster Geraldine learned of European classical music before she was exposed to Caribbean culture. Because of the historical

"I want to make this a touring production and take it wherever I can. I would love it to go to the Caribbean, South Africa and Europe."

background of the country and colonial influences, the emphasis was on a British education despite the obvious melting pot of culture and religion all around.

"We were very big on holidays out there. Every possible holiday for any religion at all and we'd be celebrating it," she recalls.

Influences

"I had the influences all around me of steel bands, folk music and a society where there was a high proportion of the Asian and black community. "Despite a background of the West Indian carnival, I found myself learning Handel's *Messiah* first at school, and before

learning about the weather in Trinidad we'd learn about the snow in England!"

After studying at the Royal College of Music in London, Geraldine went back to live in Trinidad in the mid-70s, and became re-immersed in the world of steel bands and folk.

Journey

It was through this combination the kernel of the *Carnival Messiah* idea came about. "It is the result of a long journey," explains Geraldine. She started by taking the original *Messiah* known to many, and working on it with her group of

students to inject carnival blood into the work.

Through improvisation, jazz, calypso, gospel and rock the choral piece metamorphosed into a work of praise with a fast-beating heart.

The finished product was put on for one performance only at Wakefield Opera House, and to Geraldine's surprise it was a sell-out night.

"I looked out the window and there were people just queuing up the street, I wondered what they were doing until I realised they were there to see us!" she laughs. After encouragement from friends, professional musicians and theatrical contacts, it was decided to set up the *Carnival*

Messiah as a community project. Another two performances at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1995 sold out, and then Geraldine set about putting together a bid for the Arts For Everyone scheme to continue working with the piece.

"I was turned down," she says. "Only those who have filled in those application forms know how that feels. You put such a lot of work into the bid - as much as into the project itself - and then you are told 'no'."

The powers that be decided that the company Geraldine wanted to work on the project with would not be capable of managing the scheme properly. Undeterred, Geraldine decided to form her own company, and re-submitted the bid last November. This time she was awarded £100,000 and the route was clear.

"To be honest I'd already started the work as though I was going to get the money, because we know that if we waited until we heard, we would never get it done in time," she smiles.

Auditions

In March auditions were held for the community cast, and of 150 who turned up, 60 (30 adults and 30 children) were picked.

Rehearsals since then have been every weekend for 12 weeks, and currently are happening every day ready for the September 20 opening and the month-long run at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

There is a 27-strong professional cast made up of musicians, actors and



BRUCE ROLLINSON

● **GERALDINE CONNOR: 'I think George Handel would have enjoyed this a lot'**

technicians, and a steel band and gospel choir too. Jean 'Binta' Breeze, who was high profile during the Windrush anniversary celebrations, is narrating as Mama God, and barriers of race, language and creed have been non-existent - the only standard prerequisites being ability and enthusiasm.

For Geraldine it is the fruition of a lifelong dream, and another step in her dual mission to

spread the arts and encourage artistic expression for the black community.

"I look at the students at Bretton Hall and I don't see any black people," she says. "Especially on the course I teach, there should be more representation. Having said that, this *Carnival Messiah* is open to everyone."

Father

From a background where everything seemed possible, Geraldine hopes to pass that idea on to other black performers in the UK. Her father was an actor who played Pericles the year before Paul Robeson took on the role of Othello. Her mother, Pearl, was the first black agent in Britain, encouraging other performers to have the courage to stand up against prejudice and ignorance and aim at the roles they desired.

The message of working together to create such an eclectic sound is one which Geraldine hopes she will eventually have the chance to spread around the globe.

"I want to make this a touring production and take it wherever I can," she says. "The community programme will work wherever it

goes, and I would love it to go to the Caribbean, South Africa and Europe."

It starts its life in West Yorkshire though, and as she prepares her chorus and musicians for the grand premiere, Geraldine sums it up with typical flourish. "I think George Handel would have enjoyed this a lot," she says.

● *Carnival Messiah* is at the West Yorkshire Playhouse from September 20 to October 16 at 7.30pm, plus matinee performances. For further details or to book tickets ring 0113-2137700.



● **MUSIC AND MOVEMENT:** Rehearsals for *Carnival Messiah* at Bretton Hall College, near Wakefield.

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Carnival Messiah for 2000

by LAURA ANN PHILLIPS

THE songstress burst on to the sunbathed porch, arms outstretched as if to gather the world to herself. Around her retreat, nestled in the Northern Range, nature's voices whistled merrily, wheeling and pecking to protect a nest or favourite perch. From this still-untamed world she seemed to draw her strength, away from the sounds of her little village in the north of England.

Geraldine Roxanne Connor was raised and educated in Port of Spain by her grandparents from the age of eight, but was a frequent visitor to her parents, Pearl and Edric Connor, resident in England. British-born, she experienced from her early years the fusion of her European and Caribbean self. The merger would eventually affect how she approached her students first in Trinidad and then those who were culturally bereft in Britain and finally to a millennial business-arts project.

Following in her father's footsteps as broadcaster, educator, musician, singer and songwriter, she has added other credits. Current advisor to the Drama Panel of the Arts Council of England, 45-year-old Geraldine understands the power of the arts to touch lives, to empower and heal.

Heal? I pointed out that her list of achievements did not include "social work" and wondered at what point that aspect developed. Geraldine chuckled at the thought that art and social work were two separate worlds. "Artists are social workers!" she shot back with a throaty laugh, and rocked in her carved, wooden chair. "That's my opinion!"

"When I was in Trinidad," she explained, "I was teaching at what was a very prestigious school, QRC, in those days, was very well-off and had a highly-acclaimed academic record. So I had quality material to work with."

"I would go back to England to visit my mother on holiday, and saw all these black people who seemed not to be doing anything, not to have pride or focus... or anything, to be honest! In the media, they were downtrodden, and began, in my opinion, to believe it."

Even now, "they are treated as sec-



Cover of Carnival Messiah brochure

ond-class citizens, and I talk about black people, not just Caribbean people, because, in England, you're either white, or you're black. Or rather, you're either white, or you're not!

"When you fill out a form for a job, for example, at the end they have this page, at the top of which is said: 'This is for statistical information only.' They ask you your name, age, gender, and then: 'What origin are you? White? Black-Bangladeshi? Black-African? Black-Caribbean?' Black, this, black that! They have about 50 categories! These things appear in everything you do as a black person in Britain, but you don't recognise it."

It is insidious, what I call 'establishment racism'. So insidious that you're put down before you even stand up! Imagine that most of them have come up as little kids (in that system); their parents probably migrated to Britain, and were treated badly in the first place; black people were not welcomed in Britain.

"There are some wonderful English people - Scottish, Welsh. No matter where they are, they will always be wonderful, and you meet them in every society. But then you have the other people that ain't so wonderful, and that, my dear, is Joe Public, and that's every day! And when you meet up with those people, that is what you have to deal with."

She sat back in her chair, fingers pressed firmly into the dark grain of the heavy, wooden table.

"I start from that premise. I am a musician, and I think that I can use art - music, specifically, but the arts, in general - to empower people. Not only empower, but teach them their traditions, because a lot of people don't know their traditions - and why should they? If you're not a musician or a practising artist and come to a new country, you absorb what's given to you."

"I have to say that we (in T & T) have absorbed a lot of colonial art appreciation, as opposed to our indigenous music."

"When I taught here at QRC until 1984, I was quarrelling with the Ministry (of Education) every day. I said: 'Why are we not work-

ing with calypso and steelband in the school, as a serious Caribbean, curriculum-object? Why am I still having to teach Beethoven and Handel?"

"I have no problem with Beethoven and Handel, that was my education. I think there's a place for everything, but that's just it. Everything. Not half of everything! I came out of Trinidad being a brilliant pianist. I could play any Bach you wanted... or any kind of 'fancy thing' that belonged to Europe. But I didn't know my folk songs. I knew some calypso from what I heard on the radio. I found out at 10 that *The Supremes* were black! I never knew that!"

She tossed her head animatedly. "That was my awakening. I never knew. You know when you just don't know! In Trinidad it's very easy for us, now. People have taken hold of their culture," then, tongue-in-cheek, "maybe they've taken hold of it too much. People say, 'Oh gosh, this ragga thing and this rapso thing ...', but the point is, it's art. It's about us expressing ourselves as we are."

"To find a middle, you have to go over the top; sometimes, you go under the top. For many years, we were under, now we have passed that medium and gone over. The point is, we are finding ourselves as a people, with our own culture, which we never had."

"We used to be very proud, and nothing's wrong with being proud," she continued, "of our Oxford education and the fact that we could recite the whole of Shakespeare. But, if we were asked to deal with one of our poets in Trinidad

disadvantaged communities, sharing her Caribbean musical heritage with anyone willing to share it. As a member of Black Expressive Theatre Enterprises, a body which oversees all aspects of Black Arts policy and funding at the West Yorkshire Playhouse - one of the largest playhouses in West London - she is in a prime position to do just that.

One of the initiatives born out of her involvement in culture-sharing is *The Carnival Messiah*. Originally an "emergency" production put together in two days and performed for a body of consultants, *Messiah*, according to Geraldine, just "had a life of its own".

The Carnival Messiah is a presentation where "Europe meets Africa on a Carnival stage", according to its policy document, and encompasses various musical forms, including gospel, calypso, reggae and European music.

REFERRING to the production's "religious" overtones, the born and bred Anglican is unapologetic: "It didn't come out of any major religious fervour. I have just been brought up in a particular way which has worked for me, and I think can work for a whole heap of people."

"Christ's story is a simple story of a birth, life, death and resurrection and we haven't strayed from that. I have no big spiritual message. If people take a leaf from what I do, fine, but I can't say I want to be any 'example' to people."

Her Trinidadian roots, though, will inform the universal nature of the production.

"We (in T and T) have a lot of different people who don't agree on everything, but they agree to live together, and they do, very happily! Everybody celebrates what they have to celebrate and we share it all in one little island. Anywhere else in the world, that is unusual. Downright not happening!"

"I can take this *Carnival Messiah* and share what we have and take so much for granted, because what we have and can make use of, the rest of the world doesn't. *Carnival Messiah* is about pulling together Africa and India, China and England and everywhere, and making a microcosm of what we have here."

The production is intended to tour, and use the talents of the arts community of the country or area in which it is performed. A core group of artistes from Britain and the Caribbean has been selected to tour with *Messiah*, including our own Peter Minshall, Carol La Chapelle and Andre Tanker.

So when will the *Messiah* visit our shores? Dates have only been projected so far, not scheduled, since touring depends heavily on funding. As originator and artistic director, Geraldine believes that the project which first expressed the fusion of her Caribbean and European self, and then in the lives of those who became involved, will touch others wherever it goes.

For funding opportunities or additional information, contact Executive Producer Suzanne Robertson at The Carnival Messiah Company Limited, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Playhouse Square, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UP. Telephone: 011-44-113-213-7222, fax: 011-44-113-213-7223; e-mail: www.carnivalmessiah@yahoo.com.

"I am a musician and I think I can use art ... to empower people ... teach them their traditions"
- Geraldine Connor

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II.5 CARNIVAL MESSIAH REVIEWS 1999

A Messiah for the Millennium

From: Karen Whiteley,
Street Lane, Leeds.

Sir, - As the year 2000* approaches, I feel that many people will share my disappointment that the Millennium is being reduced to a money-making exercise, rather than a celebration of 1,000 years of faith and culture.

For those who, like me, have been searching for the true spirit of the Millennium, I bring glad tidings. Last week, I found it, pulsating with life and energy, at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds when I went to see *Carnival Messiah*.

This is not only the best production I have seen in nearly 50 years of theatre-going, it is the definitive celebration of faith and culture that I was looking for.

Never have the inspiring story of Christ's life and the wonderful music of the *Messiah* been so accessible. Combining the two, the multi-talented company of *Carnival Messiah* make us laugh, wonder, mourn and rejoice, as they take us on the journey through Christ's time on earth and at the same time, our feet tap, our hands clap and our hearts sing to their wonderful arrangements of the *Messiah*, making it fresh and new and exciting.

This is true theatre for the



people, with the cast making exits and entrances from all parts of the theatre, bringing the carnival, in all its colour and exuberance, out into the audience, so that we become part of it.

So powerful is the effect

that when the show ends, the audience can't bear to let it go and stand applauding and cheering, willing the cast to come back and do it all over again.

So, who needs the over-priced Millennium events,

the expensive baby-sitters and the commercial hype? You can celebrate the Millennium now, for the next fortnight, for about a tenner, by going down to the West Yorkshire Playhouse - to carnival.

Something to celebrate: A scene from *Carnival Messiah*, at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds.



Theatre review

Carnival Messiah ★★★★★

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

This really shouldn't work. Geraldine Connor's ambitious attempt to marry Handel's *Messiah* with traditional West Indian carnival ought to be an epic disaster. In addition to the lofty aims of the musical itself, there's a choir, a DJ, a steel band and another clutch of musicians mixing reggae, atmospheric

rock and bhangra. The 100-plus cast is a collection of opera and theatre professionals and 70 volunteers, including children. The props department seems to have learned its trade in previous lives in the court of Louis XIV and to cap it all, a lot of the action takes place among the audience. And yet a packed Playhouse grants it a standing ovation.

Things began ominously. Within minutes there are about 75 people gyrating about the theatre. The music is uplifting, the costumes (some of them 20ft high) breathtaking, and

every corner seems to contain some energetic flash of colour and activity vying for attention. It's an incredible but confusing spectacle. However, once the actual plot is introduced, *Carnival Messiah* holds a vice-like grip on the imagination that could have the most hardened atheist running to the church.

It's easy to see why some conservative eyebrows have been raised. Much of the script is as irreverent as it is funny. When Mary is in labour she curses "Oh, Jesus!" and the Angel Gabriel arrives stuffed in a

trunk. The key message, however, is to brilliantly equate the Resurrection with the emancipation of black people. More than that, this multi-racial, multi-generational epic provides powerful evidence of what unity can achieve. Some of the scenes (especially the genuinely outrageous trial sequence and the atmospheric Hell scenes) are simply stunning, and there are many fine individual performances. *Carnival Messiah* is indeed an immaculate conception.

Dave Simpson

Till October 16. Box office: 0113-213 7700

Review

Handel goes to Trinidad

YOU know that a production has been really exciting when you get up to join in the standing ovation and your knees are wobbly. *Carnival Messiah*, conceived and staged by Trinidadian-British composer Geraldine Connor, is a must-see — a musical extravaganza with stunning Caribbean costumes.

The show is a staggering fusion of Handel's *Messiah* with black and world music styles — everything from traditional Orisha chanting to hip hop.

The *Messiah*'s libretto and melodies are interwoven with danced and sung rituals from African-tribal and other religions. There are dramatised scenes from the biblical story of creation and the life of Christ, many of them acted out in a comic style reminiscent of the medieval *Mystery Plays*.

All this is set into a tripartite framework, akin to a Trinidadian carnival's Dimanche, Lundi and Mardi Gras, and Jean "Binta" Breeze heads the cast as a voluptuous yet ethereal Mama God, wafting around in a gigantic azure ruff.

The event could have been a terrible mess. Connor has had to drill an amateur community chorus that, though not quite a legion, is one hundred strong and includes droves of schoolchildren. They perform in rep teams, a cast of 50-plus swirling each night around the amphitheatrical stage. And indeed the show does need tightening in places. The acting takes a while to warm up, and occasionally you lose the plot. But that

Theatre

Carnival Messiah
WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

doesn't matter in the scheme of things. The chorus are impressively committed, and both they and the live band — armed with bongos and steel drums, electric guitars and synthesizers — are clearly having enormous fun.

An inspired pan-religious pastiche with the spirit of a street party, *Carnival Messiah* is the West Yorkshire Playhouse's millennial alternative to Tony Harrison's celebrated adaptation of the *Mysteries*, due to be revived at the National Theatre in December.

Connor's reworking of *For Unto Us a Child Is Born* pulses with particularly explosive *joie de vivre*, a ragga rabbi bringing the good news and the chorus turning a desert marketplace into a jubilant disco with perhaps a touch of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (on the original recording of which Connor sang).

Elsewhere, the Grenada-born singer Ella Andall's Yoruban ululations are cryingly beautiful. And Handel's *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth* is transcendently married with soul and west-African rhythms, as the carnival's Spirit of Faith — like a vast, white, gossamer butterfly — unfurls, swirls gently and embraces the singer in its wings.

Tickets: 0113 213 7700

Kate Bassett

Handel gets hot, hot, hot

A Caribbean version of *The Messiah*? It might just work, says **Brian Logan**

The purists aren't happy, but Handel might have been. The notoriously noisy composer never heard his *Messiah* performed by anything other than the most spartan of choirs, but it will be given full-throated voice this week by a cast of opera professionals and 70 volunteers, backed by steelpan and African drums, while revellers in spangly bikinis whoop. "There's

room for purists," says Geraldine Connor, the project's creator, "and there's room for people who want something new."

Carnival Messiah attempts to marry Handel's oratorio tracing Christ's birth, death and rebirth to the traditions of Trinidadian carnival, with the assistance of a distinguished performance poet, a sitcom star, the man who designed Miss Universe 1999, and a stage

full of schoolchildren. Not to mention Connor, a composer, broadcaster, educator, and erstwhile Bob Marley backing singer, whose belief in the endeavour is indomitable: "I don't allow people to tell me I can't do it. I'm breaking down a lot of walls, and I don't care and I don't need to care. This is how I want to express myself."

Creative chaos reigns at West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Leeds theatre that has helped to develop the project since it debuted as a work in progress at Wakefield Opera House in 1994. Now that it's spiralled into a professional epic, there's a buzz about the place, partly of trepidation: no one denies that *Carnival Messiah* may yet prove a grand folly. In one rehearsal room, a cast of five improvises the Nativity, with added Caribbean folk songs and much irreverence. Next door, Connor is honing opera diva Anne Fridal's rendition of a solo from the *Messiah*. Ram John Holder, who

starred as Porkpie in Channel 4's *Desmond's*, runs through a calypso about Jesus turning water into wine. Downstairs, poet Jean Binta Breeze practises her reworking of Genesis: "In the beginning there was silence, and silence was black."

Of the seemingly autonomous development of the various strands of *Carnival Messiah*, Connor says, "I believe in people's right to creative expression."

I first met Connor and Fridal in Trinidad in February, where a group from the West Yorkshire Playhouse had been sent to experience *Carnival* first-hand. We were together for *Jouvert*, the otherworldly nocturnal bacchanal from which Trinidad's two-day orgy launches. Amid the abandon - every street choked with carnivalists jumping up to the crackle of amplified soca, daubing each other in paint and axle grease, gulping each other's rum - we danced through *Port-of-Spain* behind a travelling steelband. I remember

Fridal crooning classically as the band pitched its tinkling symphony into the night. I remember thinking: how do you put this on stage?

"We have to be very clever theatrically," says Connor, "to try to keep the rawness and the chaos. But *Jouvert* has a lot in common with this show: there are so many





Redemption
song... Halden
Medina, left,
and Carole La
Chapelle, right,
rehearse the
Carnival
Messiah

PHOTOGRAPHS:
JOHN FURLONG/
DON MCPHEE

things going on at one time; you'll see some and you'll miss some."

Classical purists may worry about Handel's music. "I've used six pieces from Handel," says Connor. "Not necessarily the most famous, but the ones I like the most. I've allowed my musical fantasies to run riot." Those fantasies include complementing Handel's *But who May Abide with a Shango* drumbeat (Shango is an African god of thunder), and adding a reggae rhythm and ragga vocals to *For A Child Is Born*. On *I Know My Redeemer Liveth*, "I've adjusted the notes to fit the African tradition, and then I calypso-ised it at the end. But it's not far away from what Handel wrote," she adds, reassuringly.

Mixing Handel and the culture of the West Indies may seem an odd idea, but Connor had an odd upbringing. The daughter of pioneering actor, singer and promoter of Caribbean culture Edric Connor - who became the first black actor to perform at the RSC a year before Paul Robeson - Connor Jr was raised in Trinidad and Tobago, but given "a thoroughly British education, which included loads of Handel". Her latest project is "simply the bringing together of two of my own traditions, which I've grown up with."

But *Carnival Messiah* is a cultural as well as a personal expression. "I think," adds Connor, "that Trinidad, for such a small country, has an amazing culture, and it's such a good-news culture that the world needs to know." To which end, she's invited several of the country's most revered carnivalists, including designer Wayne Bar-

clay and guitarist Andre Tanker, to contribute to *Carnival Messiah*.

It's evening at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, and Connor is putting the community component of the cast through its paces. The 70-strong horde is singing *Jesu Christo* to the tune of *La Bamba*. Playhouse supremo Jude Kelly arrives with best wishes. She has supported the project, she later explains, because "I believe that blind faith - er, not blind faith, conviction - should be backed". Of course, *Carnival Messiah* is a terrific show for the Playhouse to be seen to be involved with: it's a musical, it's community based, and it's defiantly multicultural.

The rehearsal turns to Handel. There's a boy in a Manchester United shirt singing *I Know that My Redeemer Liveth* with such verve you might think he believed it. Connor brought *Carnival* and Handel together partly because "a lot of people don't realise how closely religion is related to *Carnival*". The show highlights the associations between *Carnival*'s contours, Handel's depiction of the phases of Christ's story and the corresponding birth-death-rebirth cycles celebrated by the African Yoruba religion. It also parallels Christ's resurrection with black emancipation in the Caribbean.

Connor's own take on religion - "You'll never see me in a church, I curse a lot, I'm badly behaved, but I'm a very spiritual person" - applies to *Carnival*. People behave badly there, but its urgent joyfulness is profoundly spiritual. What Handel said of the conception of *h* Messiah - "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the Great God Himself" - isn't far from what you may think, after a few rums, a Trinidad's *Carnival*. Because if *Carnival* demonstrates anything, it's that life and art, the community and the artist are inextricable.

Carnival Messiah, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, until October 18. Box office: 0113 213 7700.

CARNIVAL Messiah scatters the exuberant pageantry of Trinidadian Carnival over the rich musical seed bed of Handel's Messiah. A riotous blaze of colour blooms, not with the trim tidiness of municipal gardens, but something altogether wilder, more joyous and exhilarating.

If the medieval York Cycle of Mystery Plays is our city's pinnacle of community theatre, then Carnival Messiah's bang-up-to-date celebration of the life of Christ is the most thrilling, multi-cultural spiritual experience to be savoured on the eve of the Millennium: a show that puts Chapelton into the chapel while leaving Jesus Christ Superstar looking as Seventies as the Bay City Rollers.

Conceived, adapted and directed by Geraldine Connor - who also wrote all the musical arrangements - this world premiere sprang from workshops at Wakefield Opera House in 1994 and the West Yorkshire Playhouse a year later. The 1999 version, brought to the stage by the Playhouse, Carnival Messiah Limited and Bretton Hall College, is a magical roundabout of song, dance and Caribbean storytelling, performed by a company drawn from the world of theatre, opera, dance and the nightclub, complemented by a buoyant chorus of community players.

Connor applies the ebullience of Caribbean pantomime to re-tell the story of Christ, with the aid of

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seven minstrels, led by Ram John Holder, Jean Binta Breeze's Mama God and a masquerade of more than 100 community performers, dancing and singing with abandon. How Busby Berkeley and Bob Fosse would love the audacity, epic scale and merry-go-round-whirl of Carol La Chapelle's choreography.

Clary Salandy's masquerade and costume designs are worth the admission price alone. In all, 1,000 costumes dazzle in a palate of colours that would make even a meadow of butterflies jealous. From temple headgear to magnificent winged creations to adaptations of club and street fashion, Salandy waves a magic wand to conjure a clothes show from somewhere over the rainbow: Paradise with a West Yorkshire postal address.

If the costumes are this production's peak, the music makes your heart leap. Everything but the proverbial kitchen sink is thrown



into the melting pot in a new handle on Handel's oratorio, with a community band, choir and steel band (for Hallelujah) playing their part. Twice Anne Fridal's Mary hits the operatic heights, and Brian Green's He Was Despised and Ronald Samm's I Know That My

Redeemer Liveth are breathtaking, but it is Connor's vibrant use of jazz, Bhangra, Calypso, reggae, soca, gospel, African, rock and hip hop that light up the night like shooting stars.

This Messiah could be more focused, the storytelling is under-used, and Tom Briggs-Davis's Ragga Storyteller is too like the Blues Brothers, but Hallelujah what a night. Don't stop the Carnival Messiah!

A show unlike anything staged before has had its first night. Stephen B

Hot to Handel as life

coe reports on a memorable extravaganza.

turns into a carnival



The Voice of Truth and The Dove of Peace take centre stage in *Carnival Messiah*.

FOR three days and nights, on a hot and humid Caribbean island, thousands of people have their senses bombarded by the spectacle, colour and pounding music of Trinidad's gargantuan carnival.

And now, in the heart of Yorkshire, there is an echo of that distant creative explosion. It is to be heard in the West Yorkshire Playhouse, and despite being home of theatrical dramatics, nothing like it has been experienced there before.

The cause of it is the larger-than-life figure of Trinidadian singer and musicologist Geraldine Connor, who conceived the unlikely idea of bringing together the spiritual power and musical genius of Handel's *Messiah* with the traditions and creative vigour of Trinidad's carnival.

The result is *Carnival Messiah*, which opened yesterday with a professional cast of 40 which includes Rain John Holder (Pork Pie in *Desmond's*), international opera singer Anne Frida, a 50-strong community chorus with members drawn from all across Yorkshire, three separate 20-strong children's choruses, 20 Gospel singers and 20 members of a steel band.

The show's designer is Trinidadian Wayne Barclay who has worked on shows for the Paris Lido and in Las Vegas, and has been designing prize-winning carnival costumes for 30 years.

Rehearsals at the Playhouse started in mid-August, bringing the theatre's quiet summer break to a crashing end.

Head of Communications Philip Meeks, in

common with the theatre's other regular staff, was stunned by the sudden transformation as the large Playhouse complex was overwhelmed by the surge of activity.

Meeks describes the experience: "There is creativity in every corner. You walk into an office and there are three people rehearsing there. You walk into any of our conference rooms and there is a huge rehearsal going on.

"The wardrobe department is making something like 800 costumes because members of the Community Chorus have more than one costume in the show, and the whole of the rehearsal room is full of racks of costumes and we are talking about huge, outrageous, outfits.

"We've had to bring in extra wardrobe people because these aren't costumes you can bring in ready-made. This thing is huge."

Even portable cabins have had to be installed to provide extra dressing rooms.

"This is a much bigger project than anything seen at the West Yorkshire Playhouse," Meeks says. "I've just been proofing the programme and there are three pages of credits in tiny little letters.

"The Trinidad Carnival is epic, and what we're seeing here is epic. It combines theatre, music, dance, visual art, event theatre and spectacle with a huge cultural and racial mix. There are Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, Chinese, Filipinos and European - I've never seen diversity on such a scale."

For Meeks, impressions jostle in his mind for space. "I've never seen so many people dedicated to a single project," he declares.

And he has never seen so much activity centred on one person.

"The whole concept is wrapped up in Geraldine's vision and energy and she has carried that to everybody in the building."

As soon as she is seen in the open-plan area where people meet to eat, drink and chat, like a queen bee, she is surrounded.

Meeks was with her the other day: "As soon as she appeared, people were coming up, asking her this, asking her that, telling her their costume didn't fit or wanting advice about something, and bang, bang, bang, without stopping or even pausing, she'd dealt with them all so that by the time she'd got to the stairs they'd all melted away. It was astonishing."

Carnival Messiah was first seen several years ago as a student performance on a shoe-string budget at Wakefield Opera House.

Jude Kelly, artistic director of the Playhouse, saw it and wanted it at the Playhouse where it was performed for three days, drawing audiences that swamped the theatre.

Now it is being done on the scale which Geraldine Connor had always envisaged, and whether *Carnival Messiah* moves on for productions in other cities and other countries, it will have left an indelible mark on all who have been involved with it at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

...us messian

— but not as we know it

A BUST of Handel sporting cool shades and a sweatband, reproduced in the programme for *Carnival Messiah*, at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, is an apt symbol of this irrepressible extravaganza.

This is no mere *Messiah* rehash, nor your typical multicultural mish-mash, although it must provoke renewed amazement at the sheer variety of musical and theatrical styles co-existing in Britain today. Its presiding genius — artistic director, composer, adapter, arranger — is Geraldine O'Connor, born here, though her family came from Trinidad.

That island looms largest in its inspiration, notably the carnival and its origins in Orisha, the Yoruba-derived religion which African slaves took to the Caribbean.

The vitality of this background infuses immense colour into *Carnival Messiah*. After a prologue from Mama God (the poet Jean "Binta" Breeze) over a traditional Yoruban chant, J'Ouvert (the opening of carnival) becomes the overture, using phrases from Handel's overture as

Dimanche, Lundi and Mardi Gras, or alternatively, the *Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mystery*. The life of Jesus is treated with a degree of whimsicality; though this chimes in with carnival masquerade tradition, seven minstrels re-enacting the main roles and switching *personae* at the drop of a hat. Outstanding among this excellent group are the guitarist Ram John Holder, Renée Castle (briefly an appealing Mary), and the energetic Benedicte Seierup.

Many of the parables are recalled in a calypso. Palm Sunday provides a splendid procession from all parts of the theatre, to music that blends Indian *bhangra* and Latin American *soca*. Jesus and the robbers are crucified on stilts, with the main outlines of "He Was Despised" beautifully intoned by Brian Green as the Lone Disciple.

Equally well projected is Ronald Samms's increasingly intense account of "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" against sensational obbligato on the kora (21-stringed harp-lute) by Seiko Susso.

The loudest music

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Roder



Church Times 6.10.99

REVIEWS

Carnival
Messiah

West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Stephen Biscoe

TRINIDADIAN singer and musicologist Geraldine Connor thought she had something big on her hands when students of Bretton Hall College perform her *Carnival Messiah* at Wakefield Opera House, and Press Night at the West Yorkshire Playhouse of its lavish new production showed she was almost right.

Carnival Messiah is not so much big as massive.

At its end, the auditorium was filled with an emotional response which harked back to the ground-breaking musical *Hair*. Her show takes the exploration of Theatre's boundaries into an even more exotic land.

This new country, I thought, was the creation of an expansive genius; a place where dance, movement, colour and music provide a vibrant landscape in which peoples and cultures are united in an exhilarating sense of common humanity and spirituality.

The show's core is the story of Christ, told by

seven minstrels with a quirky mix of irony, humour, flippancy and reverence.

These minstrels are singers, musicians, dancers and story-tellers, and manipulate imagination with two suitcases as their only props. This simplicity is in stark contrast to the brilliant colours, elaborate carnival costumes, complex choreography, awesome sets and compelling music which envelopes it.

The real power of the show derives from its combination of professional singers and musicians with a multi-racial community chorus.

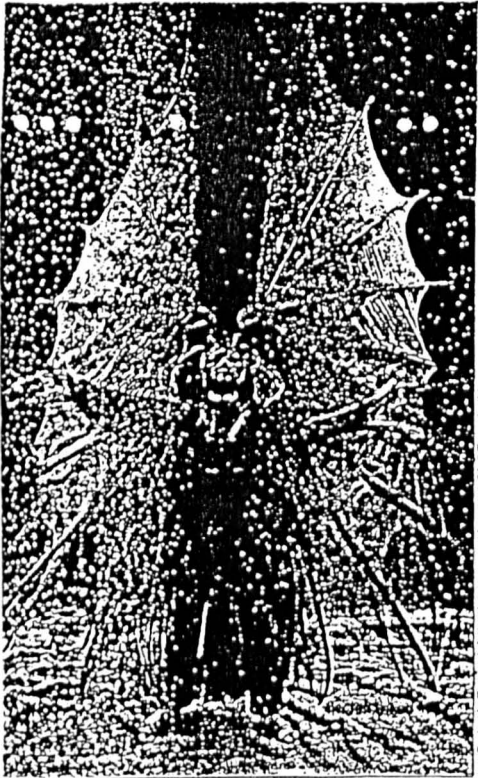
When *The Messiah* came through as a dominating element, it swamped the theatre: the version here of *He Was Despised* had tears running down my cheeks, its emotional power almost unbearable.

Handel's contribution, however, is made on Connor's terms, and I could have wished her refusal to submit had been less determined; similarly, while from time to time setting up a spiritual crescendo, she more than once backs away from the promised climax by engineering an inexplicable mood change.

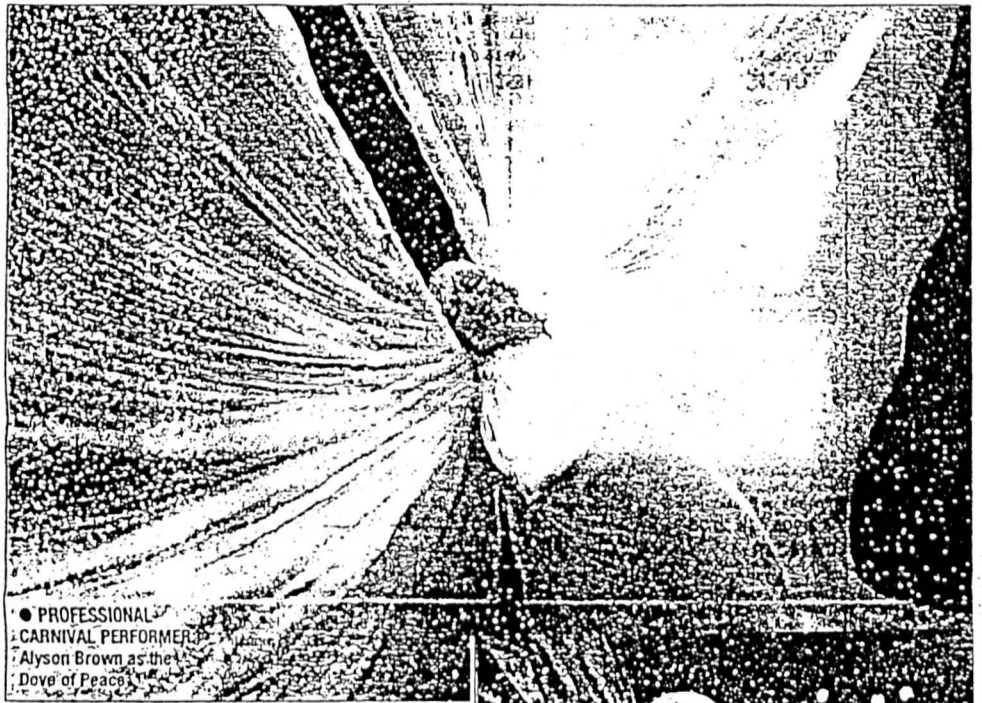
Costume king's

wardrobe brings a mass of colour and textures to the stage

carnival colours



● FLYING HIGH: David Hamilton as the Eshu the Dark Angel



● PROFESSIONAL
CARNIVAL PERFORMER:
Alyson Brown as the
Dove of Peace

It's like the question 'How do you eat an elephant?' One piece at a time. With such an enormous project as this you have to cut it down into small chunks and deal with it bit by bit

West Yorkshire Playhouse's head of wardrobe, Stephen Snell



● BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL: Donald Edwards as Mama God's



A 26-day carnival is quite an event, but a Leeds theatre is pulling off the feat thanks to a set of costumes which comes straight from the experts.

KAREN JOYNER met their creator **Stephen Snell**

THIS is a baptism of fire," admits Stephen Snell. "After this I'm hoping I'll be able to do anything!"

With a cast of over 100 and about 700 costumes to organise, the *Carnival Messiah* has been a logistical challenge for the West Yorkshire Playhouse's new head of wardrobe. Coordinating the look of the project from the very outset has been a task involving a core team of eight and numerous additional helpers. The result is a production which takes the breath away with its never-ending waves of colour and movement across the large Quarry stage. In this telling of the Messiah story there are carnival dancing girls, a devilish mob and ethereal winged characters. Even Christ goes to the cross on stilts, this is evidently a project which needs costumes which are

adaptable, stretchy and stunning. With his Caribbean-style shirt and heavily tattooed arms and chest, Stephen is an eye-catching advertisement for his trade. Several studs and rings of metal pierce his ears and the tattoos are clearly an on-going project. "It started just as one band on my arm," he admits pulling up his sleeve to show the original decoration. "It's something I've always liked and I started this about seven

years ago then just kept going, there's more to come. I think it covers about 40 per cent of my body."

Despite studying architecture and interior design at college, Stephen has worked almost exclusively in the sphere of theatre costume. "I wanted to learn a craft and had always been interested in the costume side," he says. "My sister worked in the industry as a cutter and designer before she went to do the family thing, and I remember as a child playing

around with her sewing machine."

Starting at Leicester Haymarket he moved on to Theatre Clwyd in Mold in 1988, where the success of the youth theatre led to a trip to New York to work with kids from the projects. "We took them out there to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Central Park, and it was just a wonderful experience. The kids were from all backgrounds, very poor homes out there, and to have them mixing with these children from north Wales was just fantastic."

Now at the Playhouse after a spell teaching freelance in Liverpool, Stephen has been plunged head-first into productions. As *Carnival Messiah* pulls in the crowds (until October 16), he's already stuck into *Lettuce and Louage* which opens on October 29, and *Singing in the Rain* - all very different visual challenges.

"With Carnival, Geraldine was so informed about it and had the whole idea set out in her head, that it took quite a while for me to take it all in," he admits. "The language of the show between Handel and the Caribbean music needs breaking down and designer Clary Salandy who specialises in carnival costume was able to do that. "It's like the question 'How do you eat an elephant?' One piece at a time. With such an enormous project as this you have to cut it down into small chunks and deal with it bit by bit.

"I didn't really know until the opening night who was where in each scene, nor did I have a final list of the people playing each part."

For the complex and beautiful winged costumes of *Mama God*, *Eshu the Dark Angel* and the *Dove of Peace*, Clary's company Mahogany Arts constructed the basic framework while Stephen's task was to find the materials which would work with it.

"That team has done these frameworks for years, they know the exact dynamics, the balance of the costume and how it moves.

"David Hamilton who plays Eshu and has the black and pink costume is relatively inexperienced and has had to learn how to carry the costume. Then Alyson Brown, who plays the Dove of Peace is very experienced and is a professional carnival performer.

"She is performing at the Pyramids for the Millennium Jean Michel Jarre concert." Dragging himself out images of the floaty butterfly costumes and yards of sequins, Stephen has more mundane tasks to consider. He's spent ages booking shoemakers for *Singing in the Rain*, and despite the fantasy created on stage admits it's a hard graft to create the magic.

"I've got three bases at the moment in Mold, Eccles and Burley," he laughs. "It's hardly Paris, Milan and New York, but it'll do."

And with that, he rushes off to get two new spin dryers for a very damp sounding

MUSICAL THEATRE

Carnival Messiah

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

Nigel Cliff

WHAT was the point, I wondered on the way up to Leeds, of settling snugly into a velvet seat in order to watch the riotous abandon of carnival unfolding tantalisingly out of reach on stage? Or of listening to Handel's *Messiah* in anything other than its intended form? Trying to yoke the two together struck me as magnificent folly.

As it turned out, *Carnival Messiah* was even more harebrained — and magnificent — than I had imagined. Taking her cue from the oratorio, Geraldine Connor tries to narrate the stories of Christian and African religions through the traditions of the Trinidad carnival. Handel's melodies surface every now and then. Once or twice they are even sung in a recognisable fashion, albeit to the

accompaniment of reggae or dance beats. More often they are rudely interrupted by the wails of a rock star in shades and leather trench-coat, or submerged beneath the ruckus of carnival — the Hallelujah Chorus is rather delightfully performed by a steel band. A DJ is stationed alongside a gospel choir, and jazz fusion, bhangra, calypso, reggae, rock, hip hop, African folk and soul rub shoulders with an awful lot of electronic music reminiscent of Jean-Michel Jarre circa 1986.

Surprisingly, this catch-all eclecticism gels more often than not. Although the admirable inclusivity sometimes threatens to shade into anarchy, Connor makes some pertinent comparisons between different but equally inspiring traditions. Designed by Wayne Berkeley, with spectacular carnival-style costumes by Clary Salandy and variously frenzied and delicate choreography by Carol La Chapelle, the result is a procession of visually spellbinding scenes.

The occasional snatches of dialogue, though, are less alluring. Seven travelling minstrels relate the life of Jesus through endless gibes which veer between the fitfully amusing and the cringingly crass (Mary in trouble with Joseph for getting herself pregnant). The second half loses the thread with a series of celebratory sing-songs and, given that pluralism — of colour, creed and culture — is the point of the show, there are some crude comic stereotypes.

Some shameless limelight-stealing aside, though, the cast's infectious enthusiasm convincingly captures the spirit of carnival, and there are some moments of genuinely moving intensity. The talented professional company is supplemented by a hundred dancers, gospel singers and steel band players drawn from local community groups. Marshalling so many disparate forces is a substantial achievement in its own right.

Times

27.9.99

Leeds Daily News
Sept 30, 1999



● Renée Castle, Kerry Frampton, Benedictine Selerup, Nigel Wong and Ram John Holder as The Minstrels in a scene from *Carnival Messiah*.

CARNIVAL MESSIAH, WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

TRADITIONALISTS may shudder at the thought of it, but George Handel's *Messiah* has been transformed from a reverential piece of classical music into an all-singing, all-dancing spectacle in Geraldine Connor's new production for the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Spotting parallels with the origins of Trinidadian carnival, (the story of Christ is believed to have provided the foundation for the celebrations), the writer and director has used key parts of Handel's oratorio as the basis for her new show - but this is the *Messiah* as you've never seen it before.

The first three-quarters-of-an-hour are a pageant of song and dance as wave after wave of performers in colourful costumes fill the stage - there's everything from men in drag to dazzling blue devils - and the band slips seamlessly between calypso, soca, reggae, hip-hop and gospel.

Then it's down to seven minstrels to tell the story of the birth, life and death of Christ with a mix of humour

and pathos.

Their scenes are punctuated with bursts of the original oratorio, superbly performed by Anne Fridst, Brian Greene and Ronald Samn, with massed choirs and skilfully choreographed dancers.

Spoken interludes feature poet Jean 'Binta' Breeze, resplendent in lime green with an amazing blue rail, and there's a remarkable tableau recreation of the Last Supper.

Christ becomes a still walker for the crucifixion, while the Dove of Peace (Alyson Brown) and the Dark Angel (David Hamilton) - with billowing wings - battle behind him.

But most emotive moments come towards the end - the flag ceremony, an angelic host singing *I Know My Redeemer Liveth* accompanied by a West African kora, the *Hallelujah* chorus played by a steel band and the rousing finale by the full cast.

This visually sumptuous and musically superlative production is a credit to all involved and a real must-see before its run ends on October 16.

DUNCAN SEAMAN

Carnival Messiah
West Yorkshire
Playhouse, Leeds

TWO Sherburn singers made their debut in *Carnival Messiah* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds.

Carrie and Danny Winfield, of Pinfold Avenue, were part of a group of 14 young singers to take to the stage in the carnival extravaganza based on Handel's great oratorio.

The pair were also joined by former Sherburn High student Joy Johnson from Leeds.

Conceived and realised by Geraldine Connor, *Carnival Messiah* is being performed by a cast of over a hundred singers, dancers and actors, backed by two steel bands and African drums.

The work includes *And the Glory of the Lord, How Beautiful are the Feet* and *Hallelujah*, but in emphatically Afro-Caribbean style.

The life of Jesus is traced from nativity, temptation in the wilderness to death and resurrection. Our guide through the critical events in Mama God, a statuesque figure in lime green dress – the costumes throughout the show are stunning, particularly those of the angels, good and evil.

These are topped by 10ft high wings, which must have caused problems getting on and off the stage.

A septet of minstrels provides the best humour of the work, telling the

Messiah as you've never seen it before!

REVIEW by
David Ward

nativity story in irreverent fashion. But they made a serious dramatic contribution in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

After the crucifixion, the Hades scene is designed to strike fear into the onlookers with its African/traditional jazz. The Dark Angel is routed by the Dove of Peace, leading into the resurrection passage.

This performance featured Simone Sauphanor (Mary), Ronald Samm (Voice of Truth) and Jean 'Binta'

Breeze (Mama God). Samm sang *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth* with great authority and presence.

Nine-year-old Carrie, a student at Hungate Primary School, and Danny, 12, who attends Sherburn High, performed songs in the children's community group alongside professional opera singers.

Carnival Messiah is likely to appeal to young and old alike, for the immediacy of the music both vocal and instrumental. The ballet sequences are athletic, graceful and effective.

Handel purists may not approve, but I have a shrewd suspicion that Handel himself would have liked it. The show runs until October 16.

Brother and sister in world musical premiere



TWO youngsters with stars in their eyes are to perform in the world premiere of *Carnival Messiah* in Leeds.

Carrie and Danny Winfield tread the boards at the West Yorkshire Playhouse this month in Geraldine Connor's adaptation of Handel's *Messiah*.

The brother and sister from Sherburn join more than 100 performers, including two gospel choirs and a steel band, in this magical Caribbean pantomime that retells the story of Christ.

Carrie, 9, and Danny, 12 - pictured centre front and left - have spent months in rehearsal and are now counting the days to their first performance.

Carnival Messiah combines jazz, calypso, gospel and rock to create a breathtaking and electric piece of theatre and is expected to earn rave reviews in the theatre world.

Danny, a student at Sherburn High

School, said: "I can't wait. We have spent a lot of time rehearsing, dancing, singing and making costumes and masks, it will be amazing to perform in front of so many people."

His idols include actor Tom Cruise and King of Pop Michael Jackson. Last summer Danny won Sherburn's Talent 98 contest performing songs from Joseph.

Wowed crowds

In the December competition he came joint first with Carrie, who sang *Colours of the Wind* by Vanessa Williams, when he wowed crowds as Michael Jackson.

"I would love to be as famous as Tom Cruise or Michael Jackson when I am older," he added.

Carrie and Danny went on again to steal the limelight at the recent West Yorkshire Playhouse talent contest *The Force of One*. Danny won the age 12 to

14 section singing *Earth Song*. Carrie, along with two others, came first in the nine to 11 sections for dancing and singing as Whitney Houston.

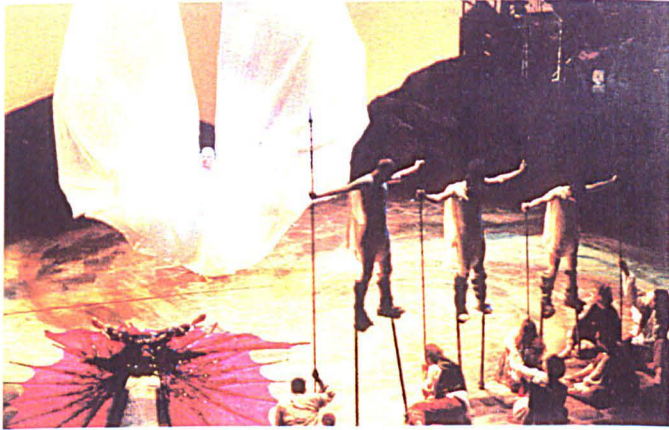
The pair, who will be singing and dancing with other children in *Carnival Messiah*, are students at the Studio La Pointe drama group in Garforth.

Proud mother Janet said: "From an early age they were both singing and dancing around the house. Then Danny appeared in his primary school's play, *Joseph*."

"Since then they have won Sherburn competitions and when they heard about *Carnival Messiah* were thrilled to pass the auditions."

Carnival Messiah is at the West Yorkshire Playhouse from September 18 to October 16. For more information or to book, contact the box office on 0113 2137700.

CARNIVAL MESSIAH



To say that she's possessed may not sound complimentary, but it describes the passion and drive that Trinidadian-British composer Geraldine Connor poured into her production *Carnival Messiah*, premiered at England's West Yorkshire Playhouse late last year.

"I could not believe the force I was working with," said *Carnival Messiah*'s choreographer, Carol La Chapelle, also a Trinidadian — certainly not unaccustomed to working with artistic geniuses, yet still awed by Connor's creative spirit.

That force filled the 750-seat theatre for four weeks and brought standing ovations aplenty for the two-and-a-half-hour-long eclectic musical. "The response to *Carnival Messiah* in England was phenomenal and unprecedented," said the exuberant Connor. "There's something very special in terms of what *Carnival Messiah* is . . . people seem to be taking it to a level I



never thought it would reach."

Connor, the daughter of Edric Connor (the Trinidad and Tobago folklorist, one of the pioneers in exporting local culture), didn't grow up with her parents, but has still followed in her father's footsteps. She's currently a Senior Lecturer in Popular Music Studies at Bretton Hall, University College of Leeds, but her life has been devoted to the arts and West Indian culture. *Carnival Messiah*, the unusual mixing of an 18th-century biblical classic with Caribbean flavour, is Connor's way of "taking our culture out to the world."

Carnival Messiah involves a cast of 130, with 800 costumes, and took seven years to develop. But this is just the beginning of its journey. Connor has intentions of touring England with the production, not to mention Broadway aspirations, and, of course, bringing it to the Caribbean as well.

Even with the long life she envisions for *Carnival Messiah*, her constantly-on-the-go mind is toying with possibilities for her next project. "I'm into hundreds of different things, but I know my next work is going to be something with contemporary, popular music."

Top Wings of Carnival Messiah Above Geraldine Connor Below Rejoicing for the Messiah

Brigitte Bento-Espinet; photography by Horace Ové



Handwritten scribbles at the top of the page, including a large 'P?'.

A Messiah to make your heart leap

Trini musical gets rave reviews in England

Trinidadian musician Geraldine Connor's spectacular *Carnival Messiah* won lavish praise from the critics in England, where it ran at the West Yorkshire Playhouse from September 19 to October 16. Numerous Trinidadian performers and theatrical practitioners were involved in the production, including set designer Wayne Berkeley, musical director Andre Tanker, singer Anne Fridal and choreographer Carol La Chapelle.

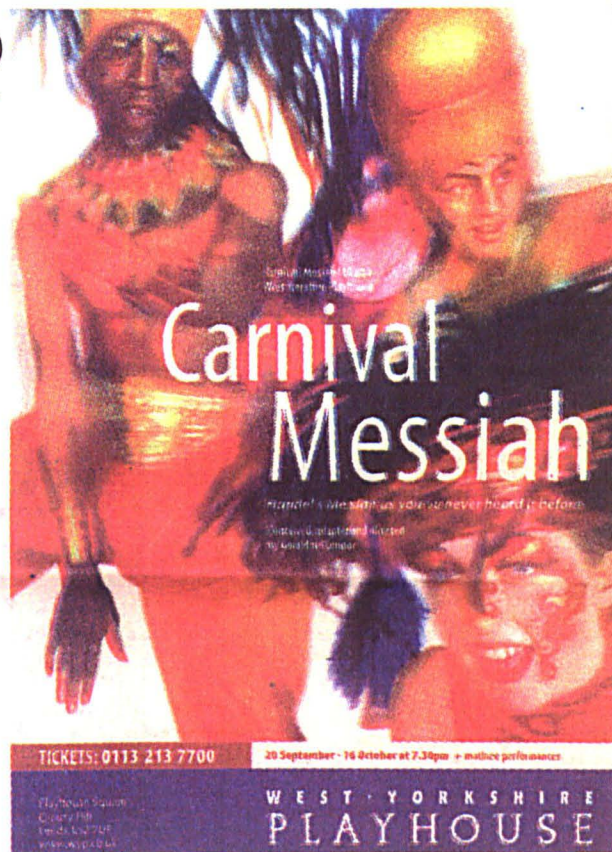
This is what Charles Hutchinson had to say about it in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*.

"*Carnival Messiah* scatters the exuberant pageantry of Trinidadian Carnival over the rich musical seed bed of Handel's 'Messiah'. A riotous blaze of colour blooms, not with the trim tidiness of municipal gardens, but something altogether exhilarating.

"If the mediaeval York Cycle of Mystery Plays is our city's pinnacle of community theatre, then *Carnival Messiah's* bang-up-to-date celebration of the life of Christ is the most thrilling, multi-cultural spiritual experience to be savoured on the eve of the Millennium: a show that puts Chapelton into the chapel while leaving *Jesus Christ Superstar* looking as Seventies as the Bay City Rollers.

"Conceived, adapted and directed by Geraldine Connor — who also wrote all the musical arrangements — the world premiere sprang from workshops at Wakefield Opera House in 1994 and the West Yorkshire Playhouse a year later. The 1999 version, brought to the stage by the Playhouse, Carnival Messiah Ltd and Bretton Hall College, is a magical roundabout of song, dance and Caribbean storytelling, performed by a company drawn from the world of theatre, opera, dance and the nightclub, complemented by a buoyant chorus of community players.

"Connor applies the ebullience of Caribbean pantomime to re-tell the story of Christ, with the aid of seven minstrels, led by Ram John Holder, Jean Binta Breeze's Mama God and a masquerade of more than 100 community performers, dancing and singing with abandon. How Busby Berkeley and Bob Fosse would love the audacity, epic scale



choreography.

"Clary Salandy's masquerade and costume designs are worth the admission price alone. In all, 1,000 costumes dazzle in a palette of colours that would make even a meadow of butterflies jealous. From temple headgear to magnificent winged creations to adaptations of club and street fashion, Salandy waves a magic wand to conjure a clothes show from somewhere over the rainbow: Paradise with a West Yorkshire postal address.

"If the costumes are the production's peak, the music makes your heart leap. Everything but the proverbial kitchen sink is thrown into the melting pot in a new handle on Handel's oratorio, with a community band, choir and steel band (for 'Hallelujah') playing their part. Twice Anne Fridal's Mary hits the operatic heights, and Brian Green's 'He was Despised' and Ronald Samm's 'I Know that My Redeemer Liveth' are breathtaking, but it is Connor's vibrant use of jazz, bhangra, calypso, reggae, soca, gospel, African, rap and hip ho that light up the night like shooting stars.

"This *Messiah* could be more focused, the storytelling is under-used and Tom Briggs-Davis's Storyteller is too like the Blues Brothers, but Hallelujah, what a night. Don't stop the *Carnival*

Handling the Messiah

RADIO Leeds presenter Geraldine Connor is wearing a £100,000 smile on her face at the moment.

That is the size of the Arts Council of England grant awarded to her to help make her vision of a community-orientated and multi-cultural stage show come true - a unique musical spectacular conceived by her called *Carnival Messiah*.

"It really is a dream come true and to be honest I am still in a state of disbelief," says multi-talented Geraldine - below - a larger-than-life personality who is musician, composer, singer-songwriter, university lecturer and a member of many organisations committed to the arts and culture in the community.

Within this hectic schedule, Geraldine finds time to present the station's Night Shift programme for West Yorkshire's Afro-Caribbean community (Saturdays 6pm-8pm).

"Although I have been a performer for as long as I can remember, it was a steep learning curve to learn how to present on radio, particularly when you can't see the audience," she said. "But I feel relaxed now and love the work."

Night Shift allows Geraldine to combine several elements which are important in her life - music, support for community initiatives and issues affecting the Black community in West Yorkshire and further afield.

"It is a fantastic mix and, judging by the feedback I get, it is listened to and appreciated by a wide age range of listeners," she said. "There are serious issues which need to be tackled and I don't shy away from asking controversial questions, but at the same time it is very important to report on the many positive things that are happening in our community."

In some ways this mix of music, art, community and cultural issues will be mirrored by *Caribbean Messiah* - albeit on a massive scale.

Celebrating the Caribbean's musical traditions, religions and culture through the melodies of Handel, it will reflect "the complexity of the historic colonial relationship between Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, and diversity and integration as black and white Euro-

peans move in unison towards the Millennium".

The concept had a trial run some years ago with the help of students at the Bretton Hall, University College of Leeds, where Geraldine is Senior Lecturer in popular music studies.

The grant will allow her to get the project off the ground and it will premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse next autumn, with a cast of more than 100. Some will be leading British and international musicians, dancers and actors but the rest will be recruited from West Yorkshire.

"The important aspect of the whole project is the unique opportunity it will give to local people to be involved in this kind of artistic venture," said Geraldine. "There will be a chance to learn new skills, exchange skills and receive training which will lead to formal certificates."

It is planned to take the production on a regional tour and then to London. In the longer term, it will tour Europe and America and eventually visit South Africa and the Caribbean, including Cuba. She hopes that it will become a commercially viable product as quickly as possible to help support the "hands on" involvement of communities wherever it is staged.

On the run:
Andrew Edwards gets in some practice for the New York Marathon.



BBC RADIO LEEDS
92.4, 95.3FM & 774AM

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HomeMaker

Guide to living in the millennium **2000**

CLASSIC CALLALOO



GERALDINE CONNOR

Geraldine Connor creates the perfect millennium gift for T&T

By RAYMOND RAMCHARITAR

THE IDEA of Carnival as a discipline as much as an art is one that's been gaining support from academics and artists over the last few years.

But apart from the successes of individuals like Peter Minshall, David Burder and Rawle Gibbons, no artist has yet managed to use the festival to its fullest capability to realise total theatre. Until now.

Geraldine Connor, a Trinidad-born composer and singer who lives and works in England, has managed to do what no other Trinidadian, or anyone else for that matter, has ever done: she has created a performance which uses all the elements of Carnival—music, dance, costuming, performance—and married it to a classic of Western culture, Handel's *Messiah*. The result: *Carnival Messiah*, a retelling of the Christian nativity and crucifixion stories using Carnival as the principal idiom.

For someone who got a five-star review in the *London Guardian*, and raves in the *Telegraph*, Connor is remarkably sedate. Sitting at the side of a small pool in a villa in Tobago, with her hair in short dreadlocks and wearing a look of healthy contentment in her sarong, she could be just another tourist.

She was invited to deliver a paper on the *Carnival Messiah* at the recently-concluded Carnival Conference in Trinidad, and took the time to catch up on some needed relaxation in Tobago.

"I'm surprised no one has done it yet," she says matter-of-factly of her accomplishment. "It seems obvious to me that such a thing should be done."

The idea came from Quincy Jones's *Soulful Messiah* using Black American music.

In 1994 at the University of Leeds, where Connor teaches, an opportunity arose where 80 students were looking for a project and a tutor.

"So I thought, why not? Let's try it."

The implementation was the

biggest theatre outside London, and then only for a few days.

But even then, she would have to wait before the opportunity to do an excerpt at the National came up.

"The response to that was so exciting that I thought we might be on to something here. It took three years of applications. I was turned down by the Arts Council of England the first time. But the next year I formed a new company and applied again, this time for a smaller grant—£100,000 instead of £500,000."

The production ran at the Yorkshire for 28 days, and the last two-and-a-half weeks were sold out, with people being turned away.

The story is told with six to eight pieces of music from Handel's *Messiah*.

INTERLACED with the music is dub, reggae, Bhangra, taasa drumming, gospel and a steel pan rendition of the Hallelujah chorus.

"Carnival is very visual, a thing of colour, shape and movement, so we used that. Minstrels were urban griots: they used a lot of humour and picing, we were quite irreverent."

To capture the indefinable spirit of picing, she used three West Indians: Ramjohn Holder (Pork Pie in the TV series *Desmond*) and Trinidadians Renee Castie and Brian Wong, along with Danish opera singer Ann Fridal and a number of Trinidadian actors and artists.

Wayne Berkeley did the sets.

and to Jim Wayne, pro

There were 120 performers and 900 costume changes. Carol la Chappelle did the choreography, Ella Andall did one of the main parts of the show, and Andre Tanker did the music.

"We have talents in Trinidad we never think about. In the annunciation scene Mary became possessed as in an Orisha feast. At the inn Mary and Joseph encountered a Ragga Hasidic Jew. Mama God was the Jamaican poet Jeani Binta Breeze, the Palm Sunday procession was a Phagwa procession."

These fusions, says Connor, might be things we take for granted, but in the first world, this is nothing short of shifting the orbit of the moon.

"Black theatre is on the fringe in England," she says. "People go to church, not theatre. I worked closely with Jude Sandy, the Director of the Yorkshire, for years to try to create opportunities for black actors and playwrights."

But her eye is on home too.

"This performance would make a brilliant millennium gift for Trinidad," says Connor. "I have already written to the Prime Minister asking him if he would underwrite the performance. Others, like BWIA and Republic Bank have already promised support."

"If we did this here, it would need a more elaborate space than is now available. The building would leave a legacy for the other theatre practitioners."

The projected cost is about TTS3-4 million.

Meanwhile, Connor has returned to England to take the production on tour. "I also have projects in the West End



Carnival Messiah

II.6 CARNIVAL MESSIAH LETTERS

1999

8

16 Fearnville Avenue
Leeds LS8 3DG

5 October 1999

Dear Ms. Connor,

Eat your heart out Michael Flatley! Whilst not wishing to detract from the wonderful performance of River Dance, I have to say that in my opinion Carnival Messiah is the most vibrant, colourful, witty, breathtaking, etc., etc., etc. productions that I have seen in a long, long time and more attention gripping than the Flatley production

I attended the performance at the Saturday matinee with my 88 year-old mother-in-law (full house), and the show yesterday evening (with a friend of my own age). Although the theatre was not full last evening, the atmosphere was equally electric as on Saturday and both my guests were enthralled by the production.

The costumes, lighting, music, singing, dancing and amusing minstrels were superb and we three found the production so enjoyable that I felt that I must write and thank you for such wonderful entertainment.

Yours sincerely,



Margaret J. Collins (Mrs.)

Ms. Geraldine Connor
C/o West Yorkshire Playhouse
Quarry Hill
Leeds



Yorkshire Arts

From Christopher Price, Chair of Yorkshire Arts Board

Geraldine Conner
West Yorks Playhouse
Cinabar Hill
Leeds LS2 7UP

9 Oct 99

Dear Geraldine

I saw the Messiah yesterday + thought it absolutely fabulous. I have never ever seen the Playhouse audience so gripped with wonder, joy + enthusiasm. A total triumph.

Good luck for the future: I'm sure you've lots more creations inside you trying to get out!

Sincerely,

21 Bond Street
Dewsbury
West Yorkshire
WF13 1AX

Phone 01924 455555

Fax 01924 466522

Minicom 01924 438585

Email info@yarts.co.uk

Web www.arts.org.uk

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

10 Leeds Old Road
BRADFORD
BD3 8HT

30th Sept. 1999

Jude Kelly
West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
LEEDS LS2 7UP

30th September 1999

My friend and I came to the Tuesday night performance of Carnival Messiah. I just wanted to tell you that we both thought that this was a truly magical experience. We have been visiting theatres together for many years now but have seen nothing to better this.

It is impossible to pick out any part of the production for particular praise, the colours, the costumes, the music and the wonderful enthusiasm of those taking part all contributed to the magic.

In short we just wanted to thank you so much for what was truly a marvellous night. We would very much have liked to thank every single one of the people involved but as this was obviously impossible perhaps you would pass on our thanks.

Yours sincerely,



Shirley Parkinson
Lyn Hedges

07788514340

10 Lake Terrace
Hunstet
Leeds
LS10 2JG

5th October 1999.

The West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
Leeds
LS2 7UP

Dear Sir/Madam

Please could you thank Carnival Messiah Limited for a really good performance. I came to see it with my English group from the St Bartholomews Centre, Strawberry Lane, on Saturday 25th september 1999.

I have been to the Playhouse before, but I must say at this performance I was really entertained. I cannot express enough how much I thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

Everything was lively and energetic. The music was loud and exciting. The clothes and the lighting effects were brilliant, and the singing was wonderful. The whole show was astonishing, I just couldnt take it all in. I never knew where to look next.

I was really pleased and I am hoping to return with some of my family and friends.

Could you thank all of the cast and the company for me, because they were great.

Yours faithfully



Miss G Wales.

**WEST YORKSHIRE
JOINT SERVICES
COMMITTEE**

*cc Geraldine
wypground*

The Chairman's Office
County Hall
Wakefield
WF1 2QW

Please reply to: Councillor G Clarke
Telephone No: 01924 305054
Fax No: 01924 305214
Date: 1 October 1999

Philip Meeks
West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
Leeds LS2 7UP

Dear *Philip*

Carnival Messiah

What can I say about Carnival Messiah? Simply the best show I've seen in a great many years. The colours, the costumes, the timing and the energy – if I could bottle that energy, I could sell it for a small fortune! My sister was quite breathless by the end, and she said I must write to congratulate the team who have obviously put so much enthusiasm into the show.

So well done Geraldine, the cast and everyone else involved.

With my very best wishes

Yours sincerely



Graham Clarke

The Playhouse Theatre
Playhouse Square,
Quarry Hill,
Leeds, LS2 7UP.

Mr.H.G.Serritt
7, Lakeview Court
West Avenue
Leeds, LS8 2TX

September 24th 1999.

Dear Sir/Madam,

It was our privilege to attend last night's performance of Carnival Messiah.

We would like to personally convey to the director Geraldine Connor, the cast, the dancers, musicians, the singers, and all who were associated with this production, our heartfelt thanks for a performance which will live on in our memory for many years.

We have attended the Playhouse as a subscriber for many years, and having criticised in the past, felt we must pay this tribute, on this magnificent production.

Yours sincerely,

H.G.Serritt (Mr.)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H.G. Serritt', written over a horizontal line.

cc: Geraldine
Wyprond.

ROBERT STURDY

Travel

34 MARKET PLACE, BEDALE, N. YORKSHIRE DL8 1ED
TELEPHONE 01677 424242/422189 ABTA 88670

26 SEP 99

Dear Ms Kelly.


Myself + wife have just seen
CARNIVAL MESSIAH, at your theatre
last night

I wanted to tell you that I was
completely 'blown away' by the
performance.

We have been to numerous shows at
the theatre over the last 7 years,
+ your choice, production + professionalism
is unsurpassed.

We started coming to the magnificent
at 'Incent' time + have continued
seeing things first season.
My wife was the leading critic in
Jordan for years, + was also taken
aback by last night's performance. Congratulations
from Mrs. Sturdy

ROBERT STURDY
34 MARKET PLACE, BEDALE, N. YORKSHIRE DL8 1ED
TELEPHONE 01677 424242/422189 ABTA 88670



01937 530021

8 Grimston Park Mews
Grimston Park
Tadcaster
N.Yorks
LS24 9DB
25th September 1999

Geraldine Connor,
c/o West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Playhouse Square,
Quarry Hill,
Leeds, LS2 7UP

Dear Geraldine Connor,

We went to 'Carnival Messiah' last night (Friday) and thought (no, felt) (no, knew) it was truly glorious. With the right publicity it could be as big as 'Riverdance' or 'Jesus Christ Superstar' - i.e. travel oceans and go on forever.

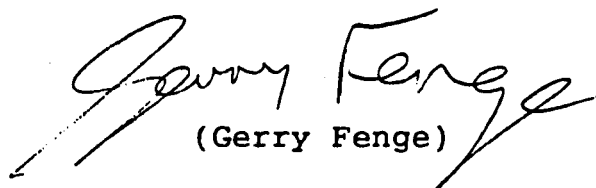
I'd be deeply jealous of your students if not too uplifted for such a base emotion. As it is I shall spread the word in our own centre of excellence (Leeds Grammar School). (By the way, we're teaching 'The Crucible' to fourth years right now, and it makes a quaint speculation to guess what the Salem judges would make of your show.) (And do about it.)

You have doubtless wondered about audience participation / audience as performers / audience on stage, and I can testify that if there were a 'I Want You To Get Up Out Of Your Seats' section at the end we (at least) would have been out there, inexpertly flinging the fat.

Talking of getting amongst the audience, the art bazaar in the foyer was a great complement to the show (and a great chance too, I imagine, for the artists to capitalise on punters in a mood of untypically uplifted generosity).

To write the show is one thing, to write the music is another, but to mobilise all the real people involved is something more. Doubtless you are too wise to accept 'Not Worthy' obeisances, so let me offer them to the wonderfully talented cast (from the keenest teeny-weeny to the unlikeliest body-bender to the awesome multi-talents and amazingly together musicians, chorus and soloists - with a special Wow to the man on the front-loaded sitar [does that instrument really exist?]).

Great show, great experience - and I'm sure the two bosses would love it (little boss Handel and big boss Jesus)!


(Gerry Fenge)

12 Claremont Place
Armley
Leeds
LS12 3ED

28th September 1999

The West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
Leeds
LS2 7UP

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to thank Carnival Messiah Ltd. On Saturday 25th September 1999, I came with a group from St. Bartholomews Centre, Strawberry Lane.

This was my first visit to the Playhouse. It was totally fantastic. I was dumbstruck by the performance. I could not applaud enough.

The music was lively and energetic. The costumes were colourful and vibrant. The whole performance was "Absolutely Fabulous".

It was that good that I am returning with several family members to see the show again

Once again could you please thank all the company that created and took part in the show.

Yours faithfully,

Miss J Wales

cc wj@p.uncol.

MRS P. M. HILEY
107 HAWKSWORTH ROAD
HORSFORTH
LEEDS LS18 4JJ
TEL. (0532) 591887
113 2

16/10/99

Dear Geraldine Connor,

Two words: Thank you: cannot really convey the enjoyment and uplift that I, and many others, received from your stupendous piece of theatre of Carnival Messiah. Please convey my congratulations to all concerned. I go regularly to the Playhouse, but I have never gone away from a performance and tried to encourage everyone I met to see the show as I did with this one. I must have been so successful, that when I tried again to see it, last night, I couldn't get in, and neither could many other disappointed people.

I do hope it will be put on again — it would certainly be the finest way to celebrate the Millennium — far better than all the other, commercial gimmicks, planned for that event.

Thank you, for bringing freshness and
spirituality back into the theatre, and
creating something accessible to all.
Good luck in your future career.

Yours sincerely

Pat M. Hiley
(MRS.)

14 Shadwell Walk
Moortown
Leeds
LS17 6EG
Tel. 0113-268 3475

13. 10. 99.

Dear Geraldine,

Last Saturday afternoon we had a double thrill - firstly to experience the FANTASTIC production of Carnival Messiah, and secondly to have had the privilege of speaking to you after the performance.

We both felt full of admiration for the whole thing, and don't really know which superlatives to use when telling others about it!!

So I told you then it is a wonderful achievement, even if it did take 6 years to come to fruition.

We do hope you'll be able to take it to London. The R.A.H. would be a marvellous venue. Good luck.

Now, when we got home we read your most impressive CV - along with the others in the cast, - and one name "jumped out" at me - Eric Bohner, your father.

When I was young and "the wireless" was the thing, my mother encouraged me in all things musical and we would often hear one Eric Connors singing, much to our delight. I feel sure this cannot be a coincidence, and that he must be your Dad.

Anyway, I just thought you should know that it brought back some very happy memories - to say nothing of the pleasure we had from your production on Saturday.

Please convey our congratulations and good wishes to all the cast, stage crew, etc etc. It was marvellous.

Good luck in all your future ventures. We shall look out for more.

Yours sincerely,

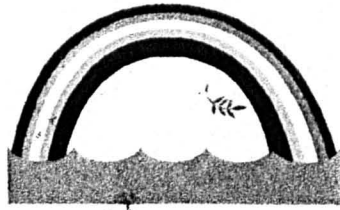
Marion & Ken Ward

Dear Ms Connor,

My friend & I attended last Saturday's matinee performance of Carnival Messiah & what a wonderful experience it was! Joyful, optimistic, colourful & exuberant & exhilarating performance that I shall remember for a very long time. The splendid balance of humour & poignancy were exactly right & parts of the performance were so beautiful it made one weep. What lovely voices & excellent musicianship — I shall always

think of The Haverlyan choruses
played on steel pans — when I
attend the more traditional/conventional
edition at Christmas. Please
to let everyone connected with
the production, ^{know} what pleasure it
has brought. With all very best
wishes for success of future performances
— surely it'll reach London at
least! — and again with
many thanks.

Esmeray Hoyle



PEACE COTTAGE STARBOTTON SKIPTON BD23 5HY
TEL. 01756 760837

7.7.99.

Dear Geraldine Connor,

Last year I heard you speak to the W.I. in Ripon on our 'Caribbean Capes' day, you told us the about your plans for 'Carnival Resplash' & I knew it was something I wanted to see. Last night, at last, I saw/experienced it and haven't enough words or superlatives to tell you how much I enjoyed the performance. I found it uplifting, moving, exciting & visually & musically stunning. I would like to see it again & again & again & feel that all the world should see this celebration of all that best that can be achieved by

Peter F Taylor
20 Nunroyd Road
Moortown
Leeds LS17 6PF
Tel: 0113-2931924

24th September 1999

Dear Ms Connor,

I spoke to you briefly at the end of last night's performance but I felt I should also write to say how much both my wife and I enjoyed it. It was a quite stunning production, visually, musically and emotionally, and not only shall we recommend it but we now hope to be able to come and see it again.

I am a retired teacher, a music teacher, and in that capacity I taught two of your cast, so they should at least have been familiar with 'Coconut Woman'. I also worked with Dudley Nesbitt, who started and ran the steel band at my school. I realised then what a superb teacher he was, able to start from scratch and produce a highly proficient band in an amazingly short space of time, but I had not appreciated until last night how gifted he is as a performer in his own right. He would always keep in the background, adding a little touch here and there, or take over a part if a child was missing, and even last night when thrust into the limelight, if not the forefront, he still kept his head down and concentrated solely on his playing. Also in the cast was Maxine, and her family, who, until her marriage was our next-door neighbour, so I felt a strong affinity with the performers.

I was for a number of years a member of a church choir, and have sung in 'The Messiah'. I have been familiar with it since I was a boy, and have several recordings, as well as one of 'The Young Messiah'. As I said I hope you are able to produce a recording of this. Although

Something would undoubtedly be long in terms of the visual, most of the music would stand, and entertain, in its own right. Or perhaps you should go the whole hog and produce a video. It certainly, in my opinion, compares very favourably with African Sanctus and, in terms of spectacle alone, with Rivardance. Obviously it is very much a Leeds based project, but I am sure it would be equally well received anywhere else.

May I finish by repeating my congratulations and wishing everyone involved every success for the rest of the run.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Taylor

01924.452391.

Dear Ms Connor,

May I say
'thankyou' for the—
brilliant, overwhelming,
exciting, powerful, fun,
evening you and your
brilliant cast and
backround staff provided
for me last night (Oct)
It was the most uplifting
theatrical presentation I
have encountered for
some time.

Thank you R. Donald

JULIA D ATKINSON
5 CHALONERS CRESCENT
DRINGHOUSES
YORK YO24 2TS

19/10/99

Dear Ms Connor,

"Carnival Messiah" was quite simply the most enjoyable musical production I have seen in twenty years as a regular theatre-goer. I would like to thank the entire cast and production team for an unforgettable night out. - "Carnival Messiah" deserves to be a huge nationwide success and I eagerly await the release of the Original Cast album!

Sincere best wishes,
Julia D. Atkinson

8/10/99

Dear Geraldine Connor,

Thank you so much for
Carnival Messiah! It was the most
exciting musical theatre I have seen
in 30 years. (Last time was when I
saw 'Häs' in its opening week)

There was so much life and
spectacle in your production. Just fantastic
to hear & watch! The singing was terrific—
as was accompanying music. I can't praise
it enough, I do hope you will have
the chance to take it to other parts
of the country.

Thank you & I wish you
continuing success —
Sincerely Autumn

3 Allerton Park
Leeds

L574ND

6th October 1999

Dear Geraldine,

My husband & I have had subscription tickets to the Playhouse for many years, dating back to the old theatre. So you will understand that we have seen many, many wonderful productions. Even so we thought our visit to see "Carnival Messiah" on Monday was exceptional.

The whole evening was pure magic. The costumes, the singing, dancing, music, & the jokes, were spectacular, the colours & the vitality were overwhelming. At the end we were so exhilarated we were breathless & quite exhausted by the constant movement. We couldn't believe that so much activity was crammed into so short a time.

Since we saw the production we've recommended it to everyone we've spoken to, whether on the phone or in person. It deserves universal acclaim. Many congratulations to you & to all the performers, technicians, musicians & wardrobe staff. Thank you for a wonderful evening which we will never forget.

Best wishes for further success.

Mary Stubbs

Geraldine, it was wonderful, stupendous, overwhelming, exciting, vibrant, intoxicating, redemptive, exhilarating, magnificent, majestic (the dash between "virtue" + "evil"), mesmerizing, fascinating, invigorating, scintillating - I've run out of adjectives! Thank you; and congratulations - *Janita*

Pomegranate, Box 6099, Rehner Park, CA 94927

Soldiers Dancing, c. 1942
Gouache, pen and ink with pencil on paper, 15 1/2 x 19 1/4 in.
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of the Harmon Foundation, 1967.59.162
© Smithsonian Institution

about the only person of whose you did not.

Paintings by African-Americans

WILLIAM H. JOHNSON (1901-1970) studied art in New York and lived in France, Denmark and Norway. Upon returning to the United States in 1938, he began painting images of African-American life, drawing on both his youth in rural South Carolina and life in New York City where he lived in the 1930s and 40s.



8th October 1999

Dear Geraldine,

I was at the performance of 'Carival Messiah' last night. Words almost fail me to adequately describe the experience of being part of that audience.

The music, the humor, the dancing, the flow of the whole production was just FANTASTIC - BEAUTIFUL - AWE-INSPIRING - the best I have ever seen.

Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Fireworks, Riojoku

Japanese woodcut, 360 x 246 mm

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM, CAMBRIDGE

CPC 35

✓ Congratulations to you (you're a genius) & you talented, energetic, mind-blowing cast.

Thank you - Liz Oxley

Printed at The Cloister Press

music/99_00/letters/

Our ref

Your ref

Date

6 October 1999

Ms G Connor
The Gate House
149 Commercial Road,
Skelmanthorpe
Huddersfield, HD8 5LE



BRETTON HALL

COLLEGE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

West Bretton, Wakefield
West Yorkshire, England WF4 4LG
Telephone (01924) 830261
Fax (01924) 830521

Please reply to

Direct line

Dear Geraldine,

I have just read the reviews of *Carnival Messiah*. It's a stupendous achievement - scarcely a reservation in any of them, and a generous recognition of your exceptional vision in creating the show. I know how hard you have worked on it and what a major part of your creative energies it represents. It looks very much as if it may have a future beyond the Yorkshire Playhouse. I do hope it will bring you even greater satisfaction and success.

I look forward to seeing it.

With very best wishes,

As ever,



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

PROFESSOR GORDON H BELL
MA DipPhiled FRSA
Principal & Chief Executive

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Bishop Eugene Owen, D.D. (Phillipines)
Bishop Varughese Mathew, B.A. (India)
Bishop D. Heward-Mills, M.B.Ch.B. (Switzerland)

5, Crimsworth Avenue, Manchester M16 0EB
25th October, 1999

Geraldine Connor,
C/O West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Playhouse Square,
Quarry Hill,
Leeds LS2 7UP

Dear Ms Connor,

It was my 71st birthday last week! To celebrate it, my wife brought me to the Playhouse on Saturday 16th October, to hear and see the "Carnival Messiah". I had wondered what we were going to experience; what would happen to the great man's music and lyrics?

I am writing now to say that the experiecene was, for us, probably the most wonderful that we have had for many years. We were absolutely entranced with the performance; the vitality, enthusiasm and sheer joyfulness of the whole cast. The music, the musicians, the young people, the vocal soloists, the choirs - we were just left absolutely uplifted. This note is really to say a big "thankyou" to you who made it possible for us to share in some hope for the future - you have made the world a better place to live in and given some encouragement to a couple of elderly folk like us!!

Our only regret is that the production is not announced for anywhere else so that we will not have an opportunity of seeing it again nor of encouraging others to see it! During the time you were performing in September & October, was a Video recording made? If so, I would be very grateful to learn where we might get hold of one.

In the meantime, once again, many thanks for making our pilgrimage from Manchester to Leeds such a memorable one.

With all good wishes; God bless,
Yours sincerely,

J. Watson

(PRESIDENT, I.M.C.G.B.)

93 Cecil Street,
Watford, Herts,
WD2 5AS England
Tel. & Fax: 01923 239266

Sol B. River
7 The Chandlers
The Calls
Leeds LS2 7EJ
Tel/Fax 0113 2470143
E-mail: Solr@aol.com

5th October 1999

Geraldine Connor
West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
Leeds
LS2 7UP.

Dear Geraldine

At last I have finally got a chance to type this letter. It has been a while since the press night for Carnival Messiah, although I have to admit that I did sneak in to see it again. After I first saw the show and arrived home I e-mailed Brian Heap. What I said to Brian in that e-mail best describes my feelings for the show on that particular night.

Subj: Carnival Messiah

Date: 25/09/99

To: bheap@uwimona.edu.jm

The e-mail concerns only 'Carnival Messiah.'

Last night I attended the press night. Even now, I don't know what to say. But what I will say is that it froze me. There were moments. There were more moments, and the power

Carnival Messiah is a tribute to everyone and anyone who should be lucky enough to witness the show.

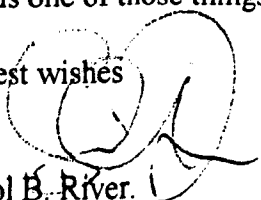
Love.

Sol B. River

Let me say thank you for such a show. Thank you, your cast and your crew. The show smelt of colour. It was both progressive and fascinating. It was also a great inspiration to me and I know it brings a genuine smile to face of the audience along with an education. The production was never obstinate in its narrative. I am proud to say that it is one of those things I will not forget

Best wishes

Sol B. River.



cc: Geraldine
Wg Proud ✓
10 Leeds Old Road
BRADFORD
BD3 8HT

30th Sept. 1999

Jude Kelly
West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
LEEDS LS2 7UP

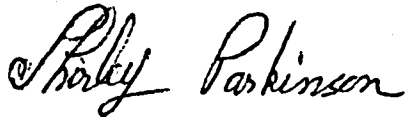
30th September 1999

My friend and I came to the Tuesday night performance of Carnival Messiah. I just wanted to tell you that we both thought that this was a truly magical experience. We have been visiting theatres together for many years now but have seen nothing to better this.

It is impossible to pick out any part of the production for particular praise, the colours, the costumes, the music and the wonderful enthusiasm of those taking part all contributed to the magic.

In short we just wanted to thank you so much for what was truly a marvellous night. We would very much have liked to thank every single one of the people involved but as this was obviously impossible perhaps you would pass on our thanks.

Yours sincerely,



Shirley Parkinson
Lyn Hedges

20 DERRY HILL MENSTON W. YORKSHIRE LS29 6NF

01943 872546

steve.dearden @ geo2.poptel.org.uk

Dear Geraldine,

I guess I must have sounded last night like I was going to Canada for good - you're not in such luck. I'm over there for three weeks, Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto, guest of their govt. to meet writers, set up links focussing on the fact that their mainstream is mately diverse!

I'm not a great after-show compleanter - even more so last night because I had such a complex set of emotions. What fantastic joy and discipline, so big and full and technically superb as well. Both Sheera, my partner, and I loved it and said how this was the reason we ever got involved in theatre.

this was the theatre we always hope/imagine
we'll see. Rarely do. Thank you.

But underlying that the sense of why did it take
so long? Of knowing the struggle it took. A
sense that alongside people claiming the stage,
there's ~~a sense~~ of people claiming what's on the
stage who have no right to.

But this is a salute - to a fantastic achievement,
a fantastic night that made even a WIP
audience jump. Thank you again - yes
let's talk when I'm back at the beginning
of November.

Yours ever

Steve

The Granary,
Manor Barn Cottages,
Ledston,
WF10 2AB.

28 October 1999.

Dear Geraldine,

As parents of Hannah Balmforth, a member of the grapefruit team within Carnival Messiah, we feel we must put pen to paper to congratulate you on a most wonderful production.

I have worked on several amateur and professional stage productions over the years, and currently my career in the travel industry involves the packaging/sales of theatrebreaks to the West End of London, and I can honestly say I have never seen such a vibrant, uplifting experience as Carnival Messiah.

Hannah's involvement has been a tremendous experience for her, one she will never forget.

Many congratulations once again and here's to a worldwide hit?

Kind regards

Yours sincerely



GRAHAM BALMFORTH.

RICHARD O WHITING
7 REDMAN CLOSE
FULFORD
YORK YO1 4NX
TELEPHONE 01904 623125

cc:
Geraldine ✓
Wyford

Dear Jude Kelly,

I am writing to say how much I enjoyed Carnival
Messiah last week. I am now in my eightieth ^{year} and
can remember many performances of this work espec-
ially in the Town Hall but this performance
conveyed to me a much more powerful message
than the original but above all it was vastly
entertaining.

I should also like to thank your box staff who
are always most helpful with a ready smile and
the same applies to the restaurant staff for a
delicious meal.

I left Leeds when I was in my thirties and
returned to the North to York ten years ^{ago}.
The Playhouse has given ^{us} hours of enjoyment but
above all it has given me a renewed sense of pride
in my native City.

Yours sincerely,

Richard O. Whiting

II.7 CARNIVAL MESSIAH PREVIEWS 2002

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
SCARBOROUGH EVENING NEWS
27 JUNE 2002

Take the family to carnival show

THE joyous sights and sounds of Caribbean Carnival return to West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, with the eagerly anticipated revival of Geraldine Connor's Carnival Messiah from now until July 27.

And we have a family ticket to see the show on Monday July 15 as the prize in this competition.

An electrifying musical combining song, dance and spectacle, Caribbean Carnival is a vibrant reinvention of Handel's celebratory oratorio and boasts a company of more than 100 performers (both professional and non-professional).

Geraldine Connor, who has conceived, directed and adapted the musical, has creatively



combined singers, musicians, masqueraders, dancers and actors with the music and spectacle of carnival and the inspiring melodies of Handel. Seven hundred enormous glittering costumes designed by Clary Salandy complement the action, including spectacular winged costumes (more than 20ft high) for the characters of, Mama God, Eshu The Dark Angel, The Dove Of Peace and Carnival Messiah.

The professional company, drawn from the world of theatre, opera, dance and mas-

querade, includes many who appeared in the original production which premiered at the Playhouse in 1999.

Geraldine Connor has also recruited 60 people from local communities to create an adult chorus of 43, a children's chorus of 20 and eight singers in the community choir.

Caribbean Carnival is supported by the Spirit of Friendship Festival, a national celebration of the Commonwealth Games and the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

To reserve a seat, call the box office now on 0113 213 7700. Tickets cost £9-£22 (concessions available) with £3 tickets available Mondays to Wednesdays for those aged 26 and under.

To be in with a chance to win a family ticket to Caribbean Carnival just answer the question in the coupon and send your completed entry to:

Carnival Messiah Competition, Scarborough Evening News, 17-23 Aberdeen Walk, Scarborough, YO11 1BB, by Friday July 5.

Carnival Messiah competition

Question: Who is the director of Carnival Messiah?

Answer.....

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Postcode.....

Daytime tel.....

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
METRO
9 JULY 2002

CRITICS' CHOICE

THE WEEK'S TOP FIVE THEATRE

1. Sweeney Todd

(Wed until Fri, pictured) Lyceum Theatre,
55 Norfolk Street, Sheffield. Tel: 0114 249 6000

2. Carnival Messiah

(Until Jul 27) Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire
Playhouse, Playhouse Square, Quarry Hill, Leeds
Tel: 0113 213 7700

3. Dirty Blonde

(Until Aug 3) Courtyard Theatre, West Yorkshire
Playhouse, Playhouse Square, Quarry Hill, Leeds
Tel: 0113 213 7700

4. Snake In The Grass

(Until Sep 7) Stephen Joseph Theatre,
Westborough, Scarborough. Tel: 01723 370541

5. Double Top

(Until Jul 27) Hull Truck Theatre, Spring Street, Hull
Tel: 01482 323638



Bloody: Sweeney Todd

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
THE GUARDIAN – G2
15 JULY 2002

Picks of the week

Carnival Messiah

This multi-racial, all-singing, all-dancing epic brings the spirit of the Afro-Caribbean carnival to the telling of the life of Jesus.

The entire thing is a riot of colour, African music and joy, as the story is given an entirely fresh sound and fresher slant.

West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Quarry Hill, Leeds (0113-213
7700) 7.30pm, Sat mat
2.30pm, £9-£22.

Lyn Gardner

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: THEATREWORLD INTERNET MAGAZINE
DATE: 1 JULY 2002

22 June - 27 July

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

BOOK BY GERALDINE CONNOR AND MARK TILLOTSON

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY GERALDINE CONNOR

DIRECTOR: GERALDINE CONNOR,

CO-DIRECTOR: MARK TILLOTSON,

PRESS NIGHT: THU 27 JUNE (7.30PM)

The joyous sights and sounds of Caribbean Carnival return to West Yorkshire Playhouse with the eagerly anticipated revival of Geraldine Connor's CARNIVAL MESSIAH from 22 June - 27 July. An electrifying musical combining song, dance and spectacle, CARNIVAL MESSIAH is a vibrant re-invention of Handel's celebratory oratorio and boasts a company of over 100 performers (both professional and non professional).

Geraldine Connor, who has conceived, directed and adapted the spectacle that is CARNIVAL MESSIAH, has creatively combined singers, musicians, masqueraders, dancers and actors with the music and spectacle of carnival and the inspiring melodies of Handel. 700 enormous glittering costumes designed by Clary Salandy complement the action, including spectacular winged costumes (over twenty feet high) for the characters of Mama God, Eshu The Dark Angel, the Dove of Peace and Carnival Messiah.

The professional company, drawn from the world of theatre, opera, dance and masquerade includes many who appeared in the original production, which premiered at the Playhouse in 1999. Ram John Holder (Minstrel) is known best for his role as Porkpie in Channel 4's DESMONDS. He has also appeared more recently in the film LUCKY BREAK alongside James Nesbitt. His theatre work includes GOD BLESS (RSC). Mama God (narrator) is played by Jean 'Binta' Breeze. Jean is a poet and performer of international standing. The professional company also includes Ella Andall who is one of the world's 3 leading female Calypso singers. She also recently appeared in YAA ASANTEWAA WARRIOR QUEEN at the Playhouse, as Yaa Asantewaa The Song. She has travelled from Trinidad to appear as Mother Earth in CARNIVAL MESSIAH. Ann P Fridal (Mary) is from Trinidad and Tobago. Now resident in USA, Ann is the first international opera singer to bridge the gap between Opera Calypso and the Steelpan.

Alyson Brown plays the Dove of Peace. Alyson is a lead masquerader for the International Carnival Designer Peter Minshall. Brian Green (Lone Disciple) and Ronald Samm (Voice of Truth) are both international opera singers. Also appearing are Tom Briggs Davies (Ragga Storyteller), Jeremy Dobbs (Minstrel), Kerry Frampton (Minstrel), Ayodele Jones (Dove's Attendant), Dave Mitchell (Evangelist), Benedicte Sieirup (Minstrel), Nigel Wong (Minstrel), and Michelle Scally-Clarke.

Performers new to the production are Paulette Morris (Ragga Storyteller's Assistant), Glenda McSween (Minstrel) and Ben Fox (Minstrel).

II.8 CARNIVAL MESSIAH REVIEWS 2002

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
YORKSHIRE POST
5 AUGUST 2002



Vibrant: *Carnival Messiah* is a "masterpiece of unification".

A shared experience of excellence

From: Ann Hogben, Bradford Road, Menston, Near Ilkley, West Yorkshire.

Sir, - I am writing in praise of *Carnival Messiah* which has just completed a long and successful run at the Yorkshire Playhouse.

The Playhouse is itself a remarkable choice of venue for this awesome spectacle of vibrant colour, movement, humour and dramatic

tension. The auditorium heightened the audience awareness of the shared theatrical experience as they became absorbed into a collective celebration of life.

Carnival Messiah has, as its artistic director suggests, brought Handel's oratorio 'kicking and screaming into the new millennium'. That is not to say that it subverts or undermines the original in any way. It has created a

fine and distinctive blend of the traditional with the contemporary.

The result, a masterpiece of unification which while arousing the senses, asserts the relevance of a multi-cultural history and heritage and which defines our existence today.

Congratulations to all those involved in this tremendous achievement - a work of continuing, evolving excellence.

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
THE GUARDIAN
1 JULY 2002

Carnival Messiah

West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Leeds

★★★★★

In the words of its creator, Geraldine Connor, Carnival Messiah is "a new cultural paradigm which establishes West Indian Carnival practice as a semiotic system of communication". Thankfully, it is rather better in practice than in theory.

To simplify, Carnival Messiah is the Bible to a calypso beat, a multicultural melee that snatches Handel's oratorio from the concert hall and sets it down in the middle of a Caribbean street festival. By the time word got round about how good it was when first performed two years ago, it was already impossible to get a ticket. Now there's no excuse for missing the party.

Feeding off the adrenaline of a huge mixed cast of professionals and community performers, Carnival Messiah is a heart-stopping surge of sound, sensation and colour topped off with a fine line in radical headgear. It is by far the best way to sample street carnival, with all the benefits of a good view and little chance of being caught up in any violence.

The musical preparation is exemplary. Purists who quake at the thought of Handel's work being performed by anything other than small forces on period instruments will undoubtedly have something to say about the steel band arrangement of the Hallelujah Chorus; but frankly, until you've heard the heavy dub version of *For Unto Us a Child Is Born*, you haven't lived.

Connor's direction turns the West Yorkshire Playhouse's huge Quarry stage into a teeming melting pot which frequently bubbles over into the audience. It is customary with Messiah for everyone to stand up during the Hallelujah Chorus. Here it is more a case of persuading people to sit down.

This isn't really a show about individuals, but Jean "Binta" Breeze brings her beatific presence to the role of Mama God and there are some excellent vocal performances from Brian Green, Nigel Wong and Ella Andall.

By the time Carnival Messiah comes to its explosive conclusion, the audience is on its feet and the cast virtually on their knees. You can't ask for much more than that.

Alfred Hickling
*Until July 27. Box office:
0113-213 7700.*

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: THEATREWORLD INTERNET MAGAZINE
DATE: 1 JULY 2002

West Yorkshire Playhouse presents

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

by Geraldine Connor and Mark Tillotson, music and lyrics by Geraldine Connor
now playing in the Quarry Theatre until 27 July

The sky may be leaden and the temperature unseasonably cool, but the West Yorkshire Playhouse is bathed in sizzling Caribbean sunshine when CARNIVAL MESSIAH is in full swing.

A dazzling, colourful mix of music, singing, dancing, drama and comedy brings the ambience of the world's best-known carnivals to the stage. Elaborate, skyscraper costumes and boundless energy from the many performers of all ages make this a breathtaking spectacle. Praise must go to costume designer Clary Salandy, choreographer Carol La Chapelle and musical director Michael Lovelock.

CARNIVAL MESSIAH celebrates the diversity and similarity of various forms of worship, focusing on Christianity and the life of Jesus Christ while reflecting on aspects of the Oresha religion of West African origin and Asian culture.

The production takes inspiration from Handel's Messiah - there is a wonderful interpretation of the Hallelujah Chorus on steel drums and a powerful rendition of "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" - combined with calypso, gospel, hip-hop and other musical styles. The singers, musicians and actors, and many are all three, are particularly talented and it would be impossible to single out specific performers, for the success of the show is the sum of its varied parts.

The music is interspersed with comic sketches and dramatic pieces, ranging from the nativity and a visually striking crucifixion scene to confrontations between Good and Evil (the very young may find the demons scary).

Despite its obvious accent on religion, CARNIVAL MESSIAH manages largely to balance both elements of its title and not stray too often into "happy-clappy" mode, keeping this an eminently entertaining piece of theatre with wide appeal to all ages.

22 June-27 July at 7.30pm

Matinees: 29 June, 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 25 and 27 July at 2pm

BSL-interpreted performance: 12 July at 7.30pm

Audio-described performances: 6 and 16 July at 7.30m, 11 July at 2pm

Tickets: £9.50-22, discounts available; £3 for people aged 26 and under, Monday-Wednesday

Reviews by **Bronwen Barber** for Theatreworld Internet Magazine

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: THE STAGE
DATE: 11 JULY 2002

Leeds

Carnival Messiah

Ever since its premiere in 1999 Carnival Messiah has been a buzzword among West Yorkshire Playhouse theatregoers. Fondly remembered for its spectacular fusion of the old and the new, the political and the entertaining, the sacred and the all-inclusive, the show became a new landmark in the evolution of theatrical genres that could only be referred to by its slightly oxymoronic title. Now Geraldine Connor's colossal, exhilarating creation is back in town and filling up the house again.

It is indeed a New Testament for the third millennium, digested by buffoonesque minstrels, with Handel's oratorio reinterpreted by the Trinidadians – all colourful

display, velvety singing and ecstatic dancing.

Truth be told, there are some seams showing between individual sequences in their juxtaposed moods and opaque narratives – a poignant rendition of The Last Supper leads to something out of the Rocky Horror Show and then the Crucifixion on stilts.

The 100-strong cast – mostly recruited from the local community

– features an impressive range of age groups and the ensemble performance is often decidedly non-hierarchical. However, Ella Andall's voice remains memorable, as does Ayo Jones' expressive movement and Kerry Frampton's comic timing.

Equally, Ronald Samm, Donald Edwards and Ben Fox distinguish themselves in singing, dancing and acting domains respectively. Most significantly however, the whole cast can do all three tasks simultaneously even when clad in Clary Salandy's costumes.

Best go and see for yourself and then wait for the steel band – you will not resist the standing ovation at the end.

Duska Radosavljevic Heaney

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: TELETEXT
DATE: 30 JUNE 2002

Carnival Messiah, Quarry Theatre (West Yorkshire Playhouse) until July 27.
Box Office on 0113 213 7700

On one side, you have several dozen local performers. A further melee of professional singers, dancers and actors, plus talented musicians and steel band players. Choirs and ensemble groups. To count them all is almost impossible. Contrast this vast number of people - surely the biggest cast ever assembled together on the stage of the WYP? - with the inventive genius of just one person, Geraldine Connor.

It is Ms. Connor's runaway and soaring imagination which both conceived and adapted and then produced Carnival Messiah, and in the front of the programme she gets prominent billing for having co-written the book, as well as writing and arranging all the additional music. As someone once observed to Noel Coward, "you're a right little Ivor Novello, ain'tcha!". The inspiration here is George Frederic [corr] Handel's Messiah, but the moving force behind this amazing, overwhelming, dynamic and totally mind-blowing night is Ms. Connor alone. Oh, and she also gets Artistic Director billing too. It is a general rule of thumb that when so much is done by one person, the result is almost inevitably a right old dog's breakfast. Remember how many movies have been written, directed and star one person? How many of those turned out to be memorable - in the favourable sense - events? Precious few.

But Carnival Messiah is an eye-boggling triumph not only for Ms. Connor, but also for the cast and the community as a whole. Spellbinding from first to last, it had a packed house cheering the room to the rafters as the final glorious scene ran its course. What you have here, in effect, is a strange mixture of the celebratory Caribbean (specifically Trinidadian) carnival and the most famous and best-loved of all Handel's oratoria, The Messiah. The first is traditional but is yearly as fresh as paint, swinging its uproarious way into the culture of the island with a succession of outrageous costumes and set pieces, and the second is one of the most familiar of all musical creations, first performed in 1742. And yet they both share several points of reference. Everyone loves Carnival - and The Messiah (whatever your religious inclination) surely has to be one of the international choral favourites.

Both carnival and Messiah are rooted in tradition, both are truly inspiration, both are celebrations of life and rebirth. It is not such an unlikely union as you first might believe. There is a natural bridge and cross fertilisation where the same tale can be told both believably and passionately through several apparently opposing artistic genres and by fusing so many musical styles. And in this production, it becomes one of the most tinglingly exciting nights in the theatre for decades. If the audience loved every second of it (and they did) the on-stage cast of musicians, dancers performers and participants look as if they are having the time of their lives. With the constant input that Carnival Messiah demands, what they will feel like in a few week's time is anyone's guess.

The other thing that immediately strains the brain is the sheer logistical arrangements that the show requires. Where does the parade of electrically-coloured costumes get hung and stored? You think you've seen everything that Clary Salandy [both corr] (the masquerade and costume designer) has to throw at you, and STILL it comes, each one more witty than

Handel with flair

Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah* has been revived by the West Yorkshire Playhouse, in Leeds. And, says Eric Roberts, it's even better.

TIME dulls the memory of the first time I saw *Carnival Messiah*, the reworking of Handel's oratorio to a largely Caribbean setting, but I was overwhelmed in 1999, and its creator, Geraldine Connor, has now proved that even inspiring and ground-breaking works can benefit from a little tweaking.

The atmosphere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, in Leeds, is buzzing from the time you come in the door, as a steel band plays and an exhibition of spectacular carnival costumes grabs the attention.

Once the show begins, you are carried away by the whole experience. Young and old, fat and thin, white and black performers join in joyous celebration in a Port of Spain setting, with terrific musicianship, vibrant dancing and strong performances from a cast mingling professionals and local community groups so effectively that you can't see the join.

Some of the costumes reach several feet above the heads of the performers – all is colour, light and spectacle. Music from cultures all over the world comes from a small orchestra above the stage, a gospel choir and a DJ in the gallery, and from performers who mix with the audience as well as filling the vast stage space.

One successful change is the introduction of an Asian dance sequence, featuring Jaymini Chauhan, for the Palm Sunday scene; it blends neatly with the accompaniment of the kora to the devastating vocal performance of Ronald Samm in *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*.

Handel's best-known works are also given fine interpretations by singers Brian Green, Ella Andall and Anne Fridal, while Connor uses the production as a showcase for both the



Above: The joyous *Carnival Messiah*. Below, left, David Hamilton and Ella Andall. Below, Lorenzo Thompson stealing the show.

Photographs: Keith Pattison.



best in professional talent in the region, from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, RJC Dance, Phoenix Dance, Bretton Hall College and East 15 stage school, and the amateurs.

When the show was conceived, it was the enthusiasm of the latter which carried it along; now, their contribution has been harnessed and choreographed so that it is no less effective, but if anything more tightly controlled. And young brothers Jordan and

Lorenzo Thompson are in danger of stealing the show with their mature moves.

As a break from the frantic activity, the band of minstrels, including the only performer to be anything like a household name, Ram John Holder, Channel 4's Porkpie, displayed superb comedic skills as they linked the scenes. They were also capable of taking the audience from hilarity to intensely moving scenes of power and resonance.

The appearance on a moving stage of a com-

munity steel band playing *The Hallelujah Chorus* draws a huge response from an audience which by the end is on its feet cheering to the rafters a performance they know is something really special.

Jude Kelly, the Playhouse's artistic director, has her farewell party next week; this show is the culmination of all she, and Geraldine Connor, dreamed of.

★★★★

● Until July 27.

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: REVIEWSGATE.COM
DATE: 23 JULY 2002

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

by Geraldine Connor and Mark Tillotson

Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse To 27 July 2002
Mon-Sat 7.30pm. Mat Thur & Sat 2pm
Runs 2hr 50min One interval

TICKETS 0113 2137700

Review Timothy Ramsden 18 July

An absolute joy, splendidly performed, from exuberant beginning to climactic end.

After the South African *Mysteries* 2002 offers a second culturally-diverse look at the story of Christ, here mixing Christianity, Yoruba and Caribbean religion and celebration. There's a hefty dose of reworked Handel too. Out of the mix comes a disparate myth held together by an outstandingly colourful staging.

It's a sign of the show's confidence that it opens with the kind of onstage explosion most shows would be happy to build to as a conclusion. Following a Creation-tree figure, who reappears cyclically, with two dancing attendants whose flowing headpieces, together with the liquid stream of accompanying steel-drum notes suggests a river-run, the crowd celebrations begin.

It's an inclusive occasion, with its ethnically diverse, celebratory crowds. And *Carnival* is as diverse in its theatrical expression. Human comedy is exploited in the Annunciation and the accommodation difficulties in Bethlehem - the sort of events we make amusing stories of in our own lives, though they didn't seem funny at the time. The punning use of luggage (open-and-shut case, case closed) reaches Vaudeville levels.

The vivacity is matched by dark intensity in the downbeat sections. The 40 days & nights temptation scene has a due, non-musical, aridity while the darkness at noon section which grows from Handel's 'He Was Despised', takes us from the Garden of Gethsemane narrative into a more abstract depiction of the good v evil struggle, with two massive-winged creatures battling it out in movement patterns. Here too, the stage is filled with the kind of black, crawling figures that might have kept Coleridge's Ancient Mariner awake at night.

Sheer decibel force soon uses up its impress-you quotient; surprise and unexpected restraint are also part of Connor's performance armoury. Nowhere more than in the inevitable moment of any Messiah-derivative, the 'Halleluiahs Chorus', which is introduced, almost out of the action, by a sober-dressed steel band wheeled on for this single occasion. By contrast, the show's final ten minutes, leading into the curtain-call, are an explosion of joy to set the heart leaping as well as the ears ringing: I'd defy anyone to sit through them and not feel glad to be alive.

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
YORKSHIRE EVENING POST
8 JULY 2002

REVIEW

Costume drama with a spectacular difference



CARNIVAL MESSIAH WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

A host of Caribbean carnival, costume and colour with "made in Leeds" stamped all over it is on stage at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. With an impressive 125 strong cast full of local talent as well as professionals, the singers, musicians and dancers combine gospel, jazz, calypso and rock with a contemporary twist – bringing the story of the bible bang up to date. It is filled with fire, passion as well as wonderful costumes and an impressive set. The show is inspired by Handel's celebratory oratorio which has been re-invented by director Geraldine Connor. She conceived the original idea for the show which premiered in Leeds in 1999. More than 700 fabulous costumes – made by carnival designer Clary Salandy – are mixed with strong singing, movement and performances which are – at times – electrifying. There are also several spectacular winged costumes of more than 20ft high adding to the high drama and carnival atmosphere. At the interval I was exhausted in the nicest

possible way. At times the quick-witted script is extremely funny particularly when Mary gives birth to baby Jesus. Actors include Ram John Holder who plays Minstrel, best known for his role as Porkpie in Channel 4's *Desmonds*. He has also appeared more recently in the film *Lucky Break* alongside James Nesbitt. Dancers include David Hamilton, the founder of both Phoenix and RJC Dance Companies. As well as professional performers, more than 60 people have been recruited from local communities to create an adult chorus of 43, a children's chorus of 20 and eight singers in the community choir. There is also a fabulous steel band on stage to complement the whole thing. Set Designer is Wayne Berkeley – one of the world's leading carnival designers. He has designed carnivals and exhibitions across the world including the Miss Universe Competition. The experience makes a great night out for all ages. ● Until July 27. Tickets on 0113 213 7700.

ALISON BELLAMY

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
WEST RIDING POST
5 JULY 2002

THEATRE - CARNIVAL MESSIAH

by Sophie Hazan

AN EXPLOSION of colour, dance and song, the energy and positivism of *Carnival Messiah* revitalises the audience in this post-modern production of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A 125-strong cast and breathtaking costumes make Geraldine Connor's boisterous interpretation of Handel's 18th century oratorio, *Messiah*, a huge success. A sell-out on its debut appearance at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1999, this continues to redefine Handel's epic as a celebration of life through the electricity of the Trinidad carnival.

Carnival dates back to the great feasts of Ancient Greece. It is an event in which social order is capsized, the excesses of behaviour are enjoyed and the people take control.

Traditional Caribbean, calypso and folk, contemporary jungle, raga and funk, interspersed with snippets of the original overture, fuse into a pastiche of sound to complement the face-lift

given to the age-old biblical story. Music, dance and costume star alongside the clichéd humour of the main cast in eclecticism typical of *Carnival Messiah*.

Enacting the New Testament's miraculous conception, Joseph returns to Mary to be told that she is pregnant. "But we only got married yesterday," he protests. "It's God's child," Mary proclaims. As the deceived modern-day lover, Joseph retorts: "I don't want to know his name!"

Carnival Messiah tells the same story through diverse genres. It combines the European, Asian and African aesthetics of the past 400 years to celebrate the cultural diversity of Britain.

Described on the night as 'fantastic', 'extrovert' and 'jam-packed', the performance deserved its standing ovations and the tremendous wave of applause. *Carnival Messiah* runs until July 27. Contact the box office on 0113 2137700.



CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL COSTUME

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
BRADFORD TELEGRAPH & ARGUS
28 JUNE 2002

Hallelujah – it's a heart-stopper

REVIEW

Carnival Messiah

West Yorkshire Playhouse

The sights, sounds and spectacle of Carnival Messiah climbed so high last night that the audience rose to give the cast a standing ovation.

This is a mind-bendingly

frenetic and sumptuous piece of theatre combining cabaret, drama, dance, song and heart-thumping carnival.

Its energetic cast, who number what seems at least a million, swamped the playhouse audience and made us feel part of this extraordinary production's beating heart.

Creator Geraldine Connor

has taken Handel's Messiah and turned it into rocket fuel. Its passion and power match its sparkling humour.

Just some of the surprises included Jesus on stilts, a fight between good and evil and a skin-crawling display of hell and damnation.

A small rag-tag bunch from Nazareth move on the narrative of the story of

Jesus the Messiah using comedy and song while the carnival continues around them with breathless costumes, hypnotic rhythms and the occasional recognisable portion of Handel.

The climax was an original idea of playing the Hallelujah Chorus on steel drums.

A Divine experience.

Rosey Hamilton

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
YORK EVENING PRESS
28 JUNE 2002

Review



Carnival Messiah,

West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Leeds, until July 27. Box office:
0113 213 7700

BOTTLE the energy of the Leeds or Notting Hill Carnival; squeeze the Olympic Games opening ceremony inside a theatre; give the York Mystery Plays a club re-mix for the Ibiza generation; revive It's A Knockout in the Caribbean; and praise the Lord to the highest high, with wings on.

Add a twist of sublime Handel, and out bursts Carnival Messiah, a show so sunshine-bright you might be advised to wear sun-block.

Geraldine Connor's new revival is even more dazzling than her first version of two years ago when there was a slightly-indulgent desire to please everyone who had volunteered to take part in the ground-breaking community production. Carnival Messiah 2002 has more sense of direction to go with the glorious purpose, pounding bare feet and surging power of flamboyant expression.

The community chorus and children's chorus still play a high-energy part in this rainbow pageant of theatre, opera, storytelling, dance, costume design, DJ mixing and Caribbean masquerade, but now wholly in tune with progressing the Messiah story – and still the show nudges three hours in its desire to cover all corners and have a party.

A single voice, Mother Earth (Trinidad calypso singer Ella Andall), opens the show, picked out in white in an auditorium doorway. The stage is soon packed for an overture that spreads and spreads like a carnival does, but still no sign of baby Jesus. The minstrels, led by laid-back Ram John Holder, the comic gifts of Ben Fox, Benedicte Seierup and Kerry Frampton, take care of that business, most memorably in a Nativity Play with the spirit of both Playschool and Monty Python's Life Of Brian.

Spectacle builds on spectacle: the clash of the 20ft winged wonders, David Hamilton's Eshu, the Dark Angel and Alyson Brown's Dove of Peace; the Last Supper scene recreating the da Vinci/Tintoretto paintings; Jesus and the robbers on stilts for the Crucifixion Adagio scene – that was just the first half.

The second begins with How Beautiful Are The Feet, taking the gospel to the world in the style of a sporting ceremony, flags and all, with banners of Gandhi, Mandela and Luther King. Wondrous, and so too is the bass singing of Ronald Samm and kora playing of Seikou Susso for Handel's Redeemer. The Whoopi Band medley outstays its welcome but a steel band rendition of the Hallelujah Chorus takes Carnival Messiah into joyous overdrive. Hallelujah, what a show!

Charles Hutchinson

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
METRO
1 JULY 2002

METROLIFE



Exhausting and exhilarating: Different cultures meet in a glorious retelling of the life of Christ in *Carnival Messiah*

Testament to a holy riot

THEATRE REVIEW

Carnival Messiah ★★★★★

Geraldine Connor's extraordinary fusion of Trinidadian Carnival and Handel's *Messiah* is a glorious blend of cultures that met through colonisation. The traditional Trinidadian Carnival, on which London's Notting Hill version is based, takes place over three days: Dimanche Gras, Lundi Gras and Mardi Gras, which represent Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Connor uses this pattern to create a three-act show. Part song, part narrative, part dance, its main focus is as Handel's was: to offer a retelling of the New Testament.

The link between diverse cultures (and the formal requirements of an 18th-century religious oratorio couldn't really be much further from 10ft costumes in fusia pink and black) is established in the prologue, whose music is inflected with the rhythms and melodies of Handel's work – passed through a Caribbean sensibility.

A riot of drag artists, little blue devils, clergy, thieves, birds, Jezebels and one-to-one combat fighters recreate the hedonism and exuberance of a carnival. There is little narrative here, and it is not until we get to the second act that there is a significant change in

mood. Travelling players – who seem to have walked straight out of the Cambridge Footlights – engage in a visceral and witty revue-style narrative of the life of Christ. There are also excellent turns from a community cast that blends with the professional element seamlessly.

This is a high-octane evening, exhausting, exhilarating and occasionally rather evangelical, but certainly worth a look. *Liz Ekstein*

Until Jul 27, Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Quarry Hill, Leeds, 7.30pm, mats Jul 6, 11, 13, 18, 20, 25 and 27 2pm, £9 to £22, conc available. Tel: 0113 213 7700

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PONTEFRACT & CASTLEFORD EXPRESS
11 JULY 2002



**Carnival Messiah – West
Yorkshire Playhouse**

THE Playhouse was brought to life with an astonishing array of sound, colour and movement, in this triumphant return of Geraldine Connor's take on Handel's oratorio.

Switching between extravagant chorus scenes and more intimate minstrel episodes, Carnival Messiah

tells the story of the Gospel with panache, humour and celebration.

It mixes musical and dance genres, from calypso and folk, mixing African derived percussion, along with modern styles like ragga, hip-hop and funk.

The cast is in danger of being upstaged by the show's spectacular costumes, some of them 20ft tall, and while the minstrels provide humour

and light relief, the large-scale set pieces are uplifting and at times quite dark in tone.

Many of the cast were drawn from the community but there was no hint of amateurishness in their performances, while the Hallelujah Chorus on steel drums was a revelation, in all creating a show the entire family can enjoy.

TRISH ELLIS

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
BBC LEEDS ONLINE
10 JULY 2002

Halleluiah!



Carnival Messiah. Photo: Keith Pattison

Carnival Messiah is most definitely a new experience in theatre-going.

This is a revived production of Geradline Connor's Carnival Messiah following it's original sell-out run at the Playhouse two years ago.

This stage event transforms Handel's Messiah - a glorious celebration of the life of Christ - into a musical combining song, dance and spectacle with the spirit of Caribbean story-telling.



It's a mixed bag of styles, from joking travelling minstrels to dark, disturbing dancing devils

and a steel band playing Halleluiah Chorus.

The action takes place all around the audience, using the geography of the Playhouse to full effect as characters slide down rails, sing from balconies and literally dance in the aisles.

With a cast of hundreds, many of them members of the local community who have taken part in workshops and rehearsals, and a vast array of beautiful carnival costumes the production is an amazing spectacle.

The overall effect is a feelgood, party atmosphere which had the audience on their feet by the end of the show.

Layla Painter

We speak to **Clary Salandy** who designed the costumes for Carnival Messiah.

Carnival Messiah is at the West Yorkshire Playhouse until Saturday 27 July.

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: ITCHY MEDIA
DATE: 10 JULY 2002

A celebration of life could not be more passionate and glorious than the West Yorkshire Playhouse's Carnival Messiah. Amalgamating Handel's Oratorio 'Messiah' with 'contemporary Caribbean carnival performance' is most certainly an energetic experience - for performers, producers, audience and all. For those of you who aren't in the know-how Handel (also known as Georg Friedrich Handel) was a composer of church music and 'Messiah' is one of his most famous works. And if you didn't know or couldn't guess 'Messiah' tells of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Carnival Messiah has two different levels - one of a religious and ritualistic nature and the other simply aesthetic. Further dimensions are created through the exploration of Roman Catholicism, the celebration of Lent, the practice of Carnival in Trinidad and the use of Caribbean historical experiences.

The carnival atmosphere is communicated through creative use of movement and dance, theatre and masquerade. The West Yorkshire Playhouse is committed to educating those with an interest in arts and thus the steel band and chorus featured in Carnival Messiah are members of the local community who have participated in skills workshops that aim to build creative potential.

Not only is Carnival Messiah an amazing visual feast it is a highly educational production and a wonderful experience that fully deserved the standing ovation it received.

Debbie Moxey

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: WHATSONSTAGE.COM
DATE: 3 JULY 2002

Carnival Messiah (Leeds)

Venue: [West Yorkshire Playhouse](#)
Where: Leeds
WOS Rating: ★★★★★
User Reviews: [Read Others](#) | [Add Your Own](#)

Does it really matter that Geraldine Connor's [Carnival Messiah](#) is at bottom Jehovah-Lite, with the Son of God as a bit of a music hall turn? Well, if it does to you, then stick to Handel's oratorio and don't mess with this joyous cross-fertilisation with the Trinidad Carnival, for in this mix of Roman Catholic liturgy and Caribbean celebration of life the sheer size, colour and noise of Carnival sweep all before them.



Not that they are entirely unstoppable. The storyline from hilarious Annunciation through knockabout Nativity to Resurrection is carried in blessed little oases of calypso and physical comedy by [Ram John Holder](#) with just a guitar and a small band of minstrels. These are moments of relative calm which bring both laughter and narrative clarity to proceedings which otherwise rely on a barrage of largely undifferentiated sound.

For the rest, all is colour, extravagant costumes with massive wings and headdresses, hugely amplified rhythm and voice, energy and dance - both solo and by a brilliantly

drilled community chorus. It's like a sanitised (but not spayed) distillation of Notting Hill, or Leeds's Roundhay, squashed into the Playhouse's Quarry (i.e. larger) theatre, where it uses entrances, aisles, balconies and vomitories to spread its message of colour-blind inclusiveness and universality. The basic culture may be black but WASPs have equal opportunities here and grab them with enthusiasm - if a tad more self-consciously and arthritically than their sisters and brothers. Indeed, the community steel band which plays the 'Halleluiahs Chorus' - a disappointingly muted moment for the great Handelian climax - is predominantly white.

The fetish for inclusiveness leads to a few questionable excursions. There is a gratuitous Bollywood moment, complete with sitar accompaniment, which doesn't appear to have much relevance either to Carnival or to the Messiah; melding 'Hare Krishna' into 'Halleluiahs' seems to be missing a point somewhere; and I do wonder about the taste involved in grafting 'Jehovah' lyrics on to the Hasidic 'Hava Nagila'. And what are we to make of the invocation of universality when it leads to a parade at the start of the second half momentarily recalling the old music hall act which claimed only to "fill the stage with flags" - not only the flags of all nations, but the five linked circles of the Olympic Games too?

But at the end of a very long night, you forget the quibbles and go with the flow: the most sublime moment of the evening comes with some delicious kora playing by [Seiko Susso](#), but for the rest it's simply a matter of the louder (noise and colour) the better.

Review by Ian Watson

SUBJECT: CARNIVAL MESSIAH
PUBLICATION: DINE DIRECT.NET
DATE: 11 JULY 2002



Carnival Messiah
West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

Marvellous, Musical Messiah! Colourful, Caribbean Carnival!

It is difficult to find enough expletive adjectives that put into words the terrific spectacle that is at the West Yorkshire Playhouse until 27th July. Carnival Messiah is an explosion of joyous noise and colour as the 125-strong cast bursts on to the stage. Because of the large cast, the big budget and performance space needed, the WYP is one of the few theatres that is able to put on Geraldine Connor's interpretation. Carnival Messiah which had a sell-out run at the WYP two years ago, has singers, musicians and dancers combining gospel, jazz, calypso and rock.



I have sung in Handel's celebratory oratorio many times and also watched other original performances at either Christmas or Easter, but this is something totally different. Geraldine Connor, director of this production recognises the roots of the Millennium in the Christian faith, whilst celebrating the multiplicity of faiths in Britain today.

The main item that stands out immediately in this revived production is the breathtaking costumes. These are truly spectacular and, as I say, words alone cannot describe these. Forty-foot high wings on the angels and devil alone are enough to take one's breath away. They really have to be seen to be believed! The costumes are by Clary Salandy, a designer that specialise in carnival and masquerade dress. Clary recently helped co-ordinate over 5000 people involved in the Golden Jubilee carnival in the Mall. She also owns the only carnival shop in the country and trains both street performers and costume makers. Clary says "There is a spiritual theme to the production we are using many aspects of different festivals".

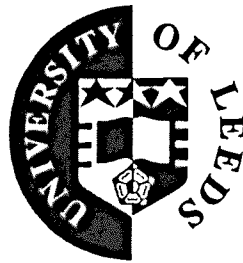


II.19 CARNIVAL MESSIAH LETTERS

2002

11

cc Geraldine.



From the Pro-Vice-Chancellor

Professor David A Sugden

University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

Fax 0113 233 3988

Direct line 0113 233 4176

E-mail: d.a.sugden@adm.leeds.ac.uk

Thursday 25th July

Dear Maggie,

A short note to thank you for the tickets you arranged for last night's performance of Carnival Messiah. The whole evening was perfect, the show, the singing, costumes etc were brilliant. We were all most impressed. At the end when everyone was standing up singing and jiggling in the aisles - my friend from the USA said "And we thought the British were reserved".

Many thanks again
with all good wishes

David



Mrs S Farrar
55 Ivy Street
East End Park
LEEDS
LS9 9DF

25th July 2002

Ms Geraldine Connor
West Yorkshire
Playhouse
Quarry Hill
LEEDS
LS2 7UP

Dear Ms Connor

I am writing to ask that you seriously consider doing a another performance next year of 'Carnival Messiah'. I was absolutely amazed by the singing, dancing, acting and the costumes. If I could have got hold of more tickets I would have certainly attended another showing along with my nieces and nephews, my aunt was thinking of taking her daughter and a colleague of mine has been twice already this week.

We go to see 'Joseph and His Technicolor Dreamcoat' at the Grand Theatre every year and it is always a sell-out, in fact we paid £17.50 for our tickets and only paid £6.50 to see 'Carnival Messiah' my words to my aunt at the end of the show was I would be willing to pay as much as I do to see 'Joseph.....'

It would be a crying shame not to have any more productions of such a fantastic show, in fact it should go on tour around the country and CD's could be made and sold of the music.

Yours sincerely

S. Farrar

July 25th 2002

Dear Geraldine,

Re: Carnival Messiah

You have no doubt received numerous similar letters, but I just wanted to write to say CONGRATULATIONS on Carnival Messiah!

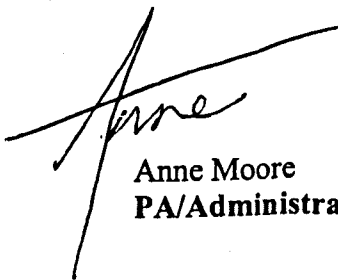
I've been to see it twice in the last two weeks and can honestly say it is one of the most impressive spectacles I have ever seen.

I found it an amazing spiritual journey and the powerful effect it has on the audience is breath-taking; it is impossible not to get swept along by the infectious energy and enthusiasm of the cast and the audience leaves feeling totally uplifted and buzzing with an overwhelming sense of hope and joy.

I know that Dharambir Singh has been in discussions with you about the possibilities of staging a similar show based on South Asian themes – having seen Carnival Messiah, I do hope that such a project will come to fruition, as I believe that the sounds and colours, dance and music of South Asia would lend themselves beautifully to such a large-scale spectacle.

Congratulations once again, Geraldine, on a fantastic show!

Best Regards,



Anne Moore
PA/Administrator

SAA-uk

South Asian Arts-uk
Yorkshire Dance Centre, 3 St Peter's Building, Leeds LS9 8AF
Tel.: 0113 244 5523 Fax.: 0113 244 1315
Email.: info@saa-uk.org.uk Website.: www.saa-uk.org.uk



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Caroline R. Beckett

M.B.R.A.

Reflexology Practitioner



24th July 2002.

Dear Geraldine,

An enormous thankyou
and many congratulations on
Carnival Messiah! We were with
you on Friday last - completely
absorbed, mind blown by the music,
costumes & sheer beauty of the
whole production. It made our
spirit's soar & tears ran!!

You may well be tired
& in need of a boost by the
end of the week?!

I enclose my brochure
and offer you a treatment
on me, as a tiny thankyou

29 Beechwood Grove, Horbury, Wakefield WF4 5JG
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Home visits accommodated

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Dear Geraldine,

I would like to thank everybody involved in preparing & presenting "Carnival Messiah", which I so much enjoyed seeing last Saturday. Their energy & commitment were quite outstanding. I have never seen anything before on such a scale, combining such vivid colour, music & movement, & drawing on so many & varied traditions.

It is really heartening to know about the educational side of the project & the opportunities given for people to discover new interests & skills. The "Hallelujah Chorus", played by an

almost white steel band, was most moving. I believe this multicultural event is very good news in our increasingly multi-faith society, where the media tend to focus on the negative aspects of community relations. I hope that, in time, you will be able to take such news out beyond heads!

Thank you for what you are doing, Geraldine. I praise God for the vision & inspiration given to you. And I send you very best wishes for your future work.

Sincerely,

Katharine Cheney

17 Lepper + Poles,
Leeds LS17 8ET,
West Yorkshire.
9th July 2002

Dear Miss/Mrs Connor,

I saw Carnival Messiah
at last Sat's Matinee and don't know
if I can remember seeing a show
as good for years. Many many
congratulations.

I missed the first production
in 1999 but this year being fit and
well I consider myself very lucky
to have been there.

What energy, wonderful sing-
ing and dancing and as for the Community
Steel Band they were marvellous. As for
the costumes - I'm speechless!

You were all so wonderful
that I have run out of words adequate

enough to express the way your show
came over. Sorry my pen ran out of
ink!!!

In conclusion, there is no doubt
in my mind that your show would
be a hit wherever it plays and
although normally I would say
'Break a leg' there is absolutely
no need to wish you all the best
of luck, as it would not be required!

Here's to your next success

Best wishes to
you all

Stella Couplan
x x x



KEITH PATTISON

Carnival Messiah

NEW INTERPRETATIONS of classical works appeal to me, so it was with real delight that I experienced what was billed as “A radical reinvention of Georg Friederich Handel’s oratorio *Messiah* for large scale stage and theatre.”

Premiered at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, *Carnival Messiah* is a truly multicultural production, combining cabaret, drama, dance, and song in the colourful setting of a Caribbean carnival and can be appreciated on many different levels – spectacular, musical, spiritual, political and cultural. With adult and children’s gospel choirs, a small orchestra and a steel band, Handel’s choral music rubs shoulders with jazz, calypso, gospel and rock, and the vibrant dance includes Indian Kathak and Spanish Flamenco. The spectacular costumes have to be seen to be believed - some of them are over 20 feet high.

Geraldine Connor, *Carnival Messiah*’s creator, born in Britain of Trinidadian parents, was schooled equally in Britain and the West

Indies. She has African, Portuguese and Scots blood in her and believes her Irish surname was probably the name of a slave-owner. Since education in the West Indies in the 1960s was totally *British*, she describes herself as “more British than the British!” and, although surrounded by her own culture, she was never taught about it at school.

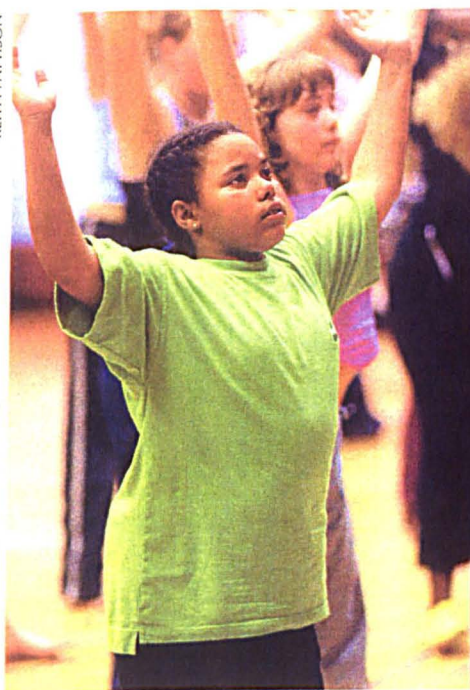
Why *Carnival Messiah*? Coming from an Anglican background, as a musician Geraldine had taken part in Handel’s *Messiah* innumerable times. It was part of her. But she had come to question its relevance, particularly the relevance of ‘a blue-eyed Jesus’ to black people. Trying to understand her own identity with its colonial experience, she began to explore her own culture. With a particular interest in carnival (the theatre of the Caribbean) as part of her West Indian culture, she decided to take the life of Jesus and traditional musical elements of *The Messiah*, but to tell the story through the medium of carnival, using different aspects of other cultures and religious prac-

tice that are all found in Trinidad and thus in carnival.

Here, too, was an opportunity to celebrate the multiplicity of faiths and peoples found in Britain today and to give ordinary people an intercultural hands-on experience, learning about and sharing in other cultures as well as their own through music, dance and drama. In a company of over 100, comprising actors, musicians, sound and light technicians and wardrobe assistants, two-thirds were drawn and auditioned from the local community via community groups, centres, clubs and newspaper adverts.

With ages ranging from seven to seventy were African, Asian, Chinese and Jewish, as well as white and black British people. A number were disadvantaged, coming from broken homes and deprived areas of West Yorkshire. Some were youngsters doing badly in school. Here they found a safe place with no preconceptions, where they were free to be with their peers in a new environment and to make new friends. They

KEITH PATTISON



learned that the important thing was not where they came from but how they could get along with others.

Preparing over only five weeks, and trained by professionals, each of whom was both teacher and role model, the community members developed many new skills in theatre, dance, drama, masquerade, mask making, costume making and steel band. Theatre is very much about time keeping, concentration and hard work, and the discipline of involvement engendered confidence. Although some already had jobs, as a result of taking part many others were able to move out afterwards into a variety of occupations with full personal references, having learned that they could achieve, and take their place in society with new skills. Problems were dealt with by talking, advising and discussing on all levels and in all places, night and day, in theatre, rehearsal room and bar.

There was opportunity to explore belief too. A number had not had any Christian experience or made connections between the religion they practised and the Christian faith. Thus the *Messiah* story and theology proved to many to be something completely new in a 'post Christian' society. Resurrection is, after all, about moving from enslavement to freedom. Others discovered the free-

ing of their own spiritual identity, like the young schoolgirl who became reassured that to be Hindu was nothing to be ashamed of. The coming together of the company was a living example of the gospel message, which is about friendship and inclusiveness, and the unique importance and identity of each individual.

Carnival Messiah is not just an exhilarating colourful musical. It has been an important educational, social, intercultural and inter-religious experience for those taking part, celebrating cultural diversity in Britain today. Nor is it just a contemporary version of the life of Jesus. As well as presenting the life and passion of Jesus, Handel's *Messiah* also includes profound theological statements on Christian redemption. At times the script is very amusing, as when Mary is startled to learn that she is pregnant. To hear and see a large black tenor sing "I know that my Redeemer liveth" is very powerful. We are not used to hearing it sung by a man. And to see and hear the Hallelujah Chorus

Opposite page: The trumpet shall sound; above: Hallelujah!

played by a 20-strong, all white steel band is moving beyond words – and a true example of the crossing of cultures.

In its own way, *Carnival Messiah* had as much impact on me as the Oberamagau *Passion Play*.

If you are not one of the 27,000 people who saw it at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, don't despair – because it's hoped it will get to the West End, possibly with a full professional cast – but preferably with even more community involvement than ever.

Katharine Cheney with thanks to Geraldine Connor and members of the company

CD *Carnival Messiah* (£18) available from West Yorkshire Playhouse, Quarry Hill, Leeds, LS2 7UP
Tel: 0113 2137700 www.wyp.org.uk

CARNIVAL MESSIAH ★★★★★
West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds
 until July 27 (Tel: 0113 213 7700)

Handel's *Messiah* gets the Caribbean treatment

By **MARISSA BURGESS**

"The point of doing the show is to try to reach a wider audience. It's about allowing people to get an opportunity to see the art form."

So enthuses Clary Salandy about the West Yorkshire Playhouse's carnival-style production of Handel's *Messiah* for which she is the costume and masquerade designer.

The production has its second outing at the WYP, after the larger-than-life singing, dancing and operatics of the original 1999 show proved so successful. The show takes the

plot (charting the life of Jesus) and traditional musical elements of the *Messiah* but tells the story through the medium of carnival. The result is a production which "uses different aspects of other cultures and other religious denominations to make it more contemporary".

Caribbean-style carnival already has a strong history of multi-culturalism and there is much social and political history to be found in the carnival elements of the show.

Drawing on European, African and Asian culture, the festival first came about around the time of the emancipation of the slaves in the mid 19th Century. "There are several different interpretations as to where carnival comes from but it is thought it's from the French *Mardi Gras*, their carriage processions and masked balls," explains Salandy. To this the newly freed slaves added the rediscovering of their African roots. They emphasised the use of masks and created the Calypso who would sing about what was going on to a barely

literate society – thus continuing the African oral tradition of communication. Then with indentured labour came the Indian influence, bringing with them their chiffon, sequins and drums.

"A full steel orchestra plays a beautiful piece of music ... It's very moving"

Take any large-scale carnival event in this country and you can bet Trinidadian-born Salandy has had a part in making its costumes. She has been involved in the Notting Hill Carnival for many years, organised many different carnival groups for the Golden Jubilee and runs the country's only carnival shop, Mahogany, in London. But for the indoor adaptation of a classical piece of music a slightly different approach had to be taken.

"The story dictates a lot of what we have to do but then we put a Caribbean interpretation on it," says Salandy.

Not all the costumes are large-scale, as lighting is used to create additional atmosphere.

Instead, it was certain characters, like Mama God, the Dove of Peace and Eshu the Dark Angel, whose 'scale' was emphasised.

Within the outfits the production employed both professional and amateur actors from the community auditioned by the WYP to be in the chorus. Of the lead actors, Ella Andall one of the world's leading Calypso singers, travelled from Trinidad to be in the production.

One of the more memorable moments for Salandy, perhaps surprisingly, is not to do with costuming but with the use of a steel band in the piece.

Steel drums were played in the Caribbean after skin drums were banned. The skin drum produced such a rhythm and attracted such crowds of people it became uncontrollable.

"But during the war, ships arrived with oil drums on board and they couldn't stop people from using them as drums because they didn't have a skin," points out Salandy.

"It's become our national instrument. There's a section of the show where a full steel orchestra plays a beautiful piece of music. At that point a lot of people in the audience get very tearful. It's very moving."

Which is, of course, thoroughly in keeping with Handel's original intention.

HANDEL'S MESSIAH
 - CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL STYLE.

Classic carnival

THE LIFE OF STUFF ★★★★★

The Wardrobe, Leeds – July 2
 (Tel: 0870 241 6120)

The latest play in the *First Tuesday* strand at the Wardrobe is ProActive Theatre's take on Simon Donald's rough tough tale, based in an Edinburgh nightclub.

Drink, drugs, drills and, er, eczema all have their part to play in this lively production.

POPCORN ★★★★★

Liverpool Playhouse – until July 20 (Tel: 0151 709 4776)

Ben Elton's blunt parody of Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* is fatally weakened by Elton's total misunderstanding of the original movie. Nevertheless it's a witty and gripping media satire, as a filmmaker is held hostage on the night of the Oscars.

THE DISTANCE FROM HERE ★★★★★

The Lowry, Salford – July 2-6
 (Tel: 0161 876 2021)

The latest play from the superb Neil LaBute (*The Company of Men*) is a portrait of American youth on the brink of revolt.

LaBute dissects the lives of six young Statesiders as they collide in a suffocating web of anger, deception and violence.

THE LAVENDER HILL MOB ★★★★★

Crewe Lyceum – July 1-6
 (Tel: 01270 537 333)

Crewe Lyceum's successful run of Ealing comedy adaptations continues with one of the all-time greats of the age of silver-screen Britcoms.

Victor Spinetti and Clive Francis are the small-time crooks who turn gold bullion into souvenirs with catastrophic comic consequences.

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

Photography by
Catherine Gillo

by Hafeezar Khan

I thought I was in heaven when I heard the Mariottes Chorale sing Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*, accompanied by the Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra. Nobody could top that. All those fancy opera people could keep their Pavarotti and their Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. This is the way to feel the passion, the Trini way.

When I saw Geraldine Connor's folk opera *Carnival Messiah*, something different happened. I thought: "I want to go home." I want to go and see Green Corner, where all the steelbands used to clash, in the chill of the dawn on J'Ouvert. I want to go back to my childhood and peep through tightly shut eyelids at our neighbour, Mr Frank, who used to transform himself into a terrifying Midnight Robber. I could hear the silver whistle blowing; I could see the skeletons and the mini-graveyard on top of his huge black-and-silver sombrero. I could hear the Robber's sinister threats of mass murder and his menacing alliteration and rhyme, belled out in a voice Mr Frank certainly didn't have in everyday life. This is the J'Ouvert I remember. This is the J'Ouvert that *Carnival Messiah* wanted to reproduce.

So how come *Carnival Messiah* begins with J'Ouvert? What do pierrot grenades, moko jumbies (stilt walkers) and red devils have to do with Handel? Say "Handel" and you think of a German guy in a curly wig. When he wrote his *Messiah*, it was called an "oratorio", to be performed at Easter, in the style we now refer to as "classical music". The idea of the *Messiah* was to celebrate the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Christian belief of redemption, in a most joyous fashion. You might wonder what possessed Geraldine Connor not only to do a cover version of *Messiah* in Carnival

style, but to take the performance to Leeds, in West Yorkshire. Yorkshire! (You think of Geoff Boycott, I know, but there is more to the place than bad-tempered ex-cricketers



and salt-of-the-earth farmhouse stereotypes.)

Our Geraldine decided to use a Trini J'Ouvert as the overture, to introduce the story of *Messiah*. Now, if you're talking about celebrating in a joyous fashion, it would have to be J'Ouvert, not so? It makes perfect sense to West Indians, but would it baffle the English audience? What would they make of the Orisha worshippers, catching power and beating up on the floor? Wayne Berkeley, famous for "pretty mas" costumes, made the presentation unscary for the English people. No threatening animal sacrifices, bell-ringing or burning candles. The J'Ouvert morning overture didn't have a whiff of tala grease or a smear of black mud, blue

dye or sailor powder. And since they don't beat rusty hubcaps and Crix biscuit tins in Leeds, Geraldine gave the audience the more recognisable ethnic music of Indian tassa and tabla and African drums.

The West Yorkshire Playhouse was packed with spectators who had come from as far as London just for the performance. The man behind me had come from his estate in Glastonbury. There were dignified, elegant spectators eve-

rap, gospel, jazz, funk, nearly anything you could imagine as well as those you couldn't. Even the *bele* dancers seemed majestic, swishing away as gracefully as any company of ballerinas. By the time the *Hallelujah Chorus* came, the Leeds audience were clapping their hands and singing along with the callaloo music. What they thought was "the epilogue" was a real Trini Las' Lap that went on and on, but nobody seemed to mind at all.

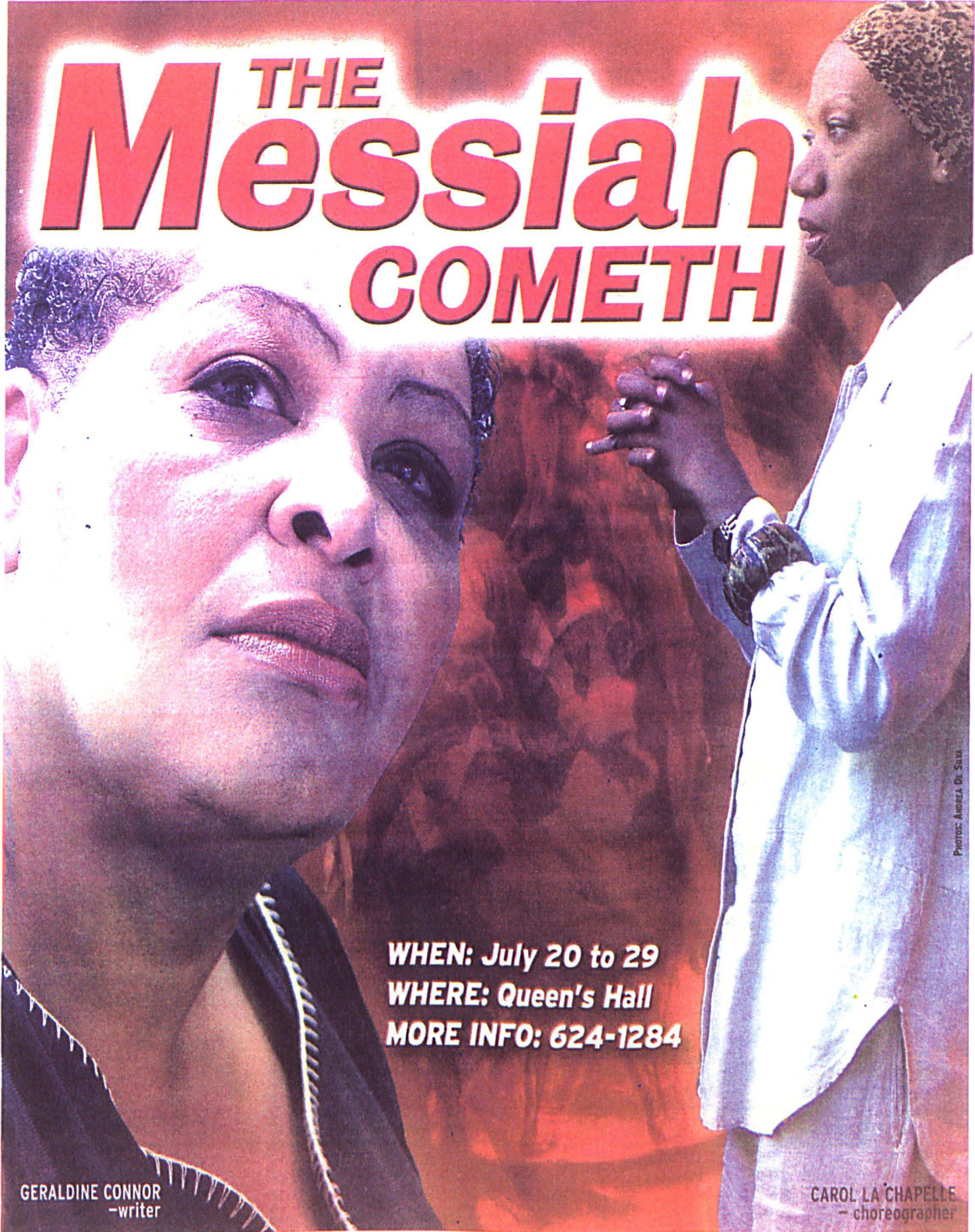
rywhere, commenting in their Leeds accent. If they were baffled or bewildered, they shrugged it off and lost themselves in the performance. And what a spectacular performance it was! The massive, twirling butterfly wings of the Dark Angel and the Dove of Peace brought back memories of Peter Minshall (apologies to Wayne Berkeley). Who can forget Peter Samuel in the *Papillon* costume? Geraldine had her own Peter Samuel there on stage, along with Trinidadian opera singers, a classical Indian dancer (Kathak style) and an African musician in traditional dress, playing the *kora*. As if that wasn't enough of a callaloo, the story was told in a mixture of styles: old-time calypso, raga,

The verdict from the ladies' room, the lobby, the café and the bar was summed up by the eloquent gentleman sitting next to me. This interpretation of *The Messiah* is "legitimate theatre", he said. It is every bit "as valid as the numerous interpretations of Shakespeare." The only difference was that *Carnival Messiah* leaves you exhausted, emotionally drained and astonished at what a handful of Trinidadians could do. I want the whole world to see this, but even more than that, I want Trinidadians to see this. I want them to feel the pride, the sense of accomplishment that you could borrow from the performers, as if it were your own. In a way, it is your own. ■

II.10 CARNIVAL MESSIAH PREVIEWS 2003/4

THE main event

THE Messiah COMETH



PHOTOS: ANDREA DI SILVA

WHEN: July 20 to 29
WHERE: Queen's Hall
MORE INFO: 624-1284

GERALDINE CONNOR
-writer

CAROL LA CHAPELLE
- choreographer

"It is our Messiah, Trinidad and Tobago's Messiah. The whole of the story

SUBJECT:
PUBLICATION:
DATE:

CARNIVAL MESSIAH
YORKSHIRE EVENING POST
23 MAY 2003

CARNIVAL MESSIAH EXPORTED TO TRINIDAD



BY PAUL JEEVES

THE electrifying Leeds-born Caribbean musical, *Carnival Messiah*, will return to its true roots this summer, when it will be staged in Trinidad.

Geraldine Connor's West Yorkshire Playhouse production, starring Donald Edwards and Michelle Scally, left, sold out when it premiered at the theatre in 1999, returning due to popular demand in 2002.

The lavish production will now be performed at Queen's Hall in Trinidad from July 20 to 29 to launch the annual theatre season there and will be the largest staged theatrical performance the island has ever seen.

Geraldine, who was born in Trinidad but now lives in Huddersfield and is an associate director of the Playhouse, said: "This is the most significant day of my life. To say that I am overwhelmed would be a serious understatement. That *Carnival Messiah* can come home to Trinidad is simply a dream come true. I am very honoured."

Links

Ian Brown, Artistic Director of West Yorkshire Playhouse said: "The cultural links that will come from these performances will be invaluable in our continuing relationship with all kinds of artistic diversity."

Seventy non-professional performers from Trinidad and Tobago are now being recruited through auditions, and will appear in the production's chorus line. They will perform alongside internationally renowned singers and actors including Ann Fridal, Ella Andall, Alyson Brown, Glenda McSween, Nigel Wong, Brian Green and Ronald Samm, all of whom appeared in the original Playhouse production.

TALK OF TRINIDAD

with ANDRE ALEXANDER

Queen's Hall theatre season opens with 'Carnival Messiah'

"CARNIVAL MESSIAH", devised by Geraldine Connor, creator and artistic director of the production, will officially open the Queen's Hall theatre season on July 21.

The two-hour musical, which first came to the stage in 1999, was launched on June 25 at Queen's Hall.

Carnival Messiah will feature a cast of over 250, most of whom are based locally. Approximately 35 key members of the cast and production team are from London, New York, Paris and Germany. The overseas members of the cast and production team have been arriving since mid-June. In addition to their work on the production, there is a programme of workshops and technical knowledge exchange that forms a part of the legacy of the production.

The production, which depicts aspects of T&T, such as multi-culturalism, racial and religious diversity, creative talents—pan, drama, rapso, calypso, tassa, soca and drumming—will be presented from July 21 to 29.

Among the local artists involved are Carol La Chapelle, choreographer; Alyson Brown, performer; Wayne Berkeley, set designer; Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, Ataklan, and Brother Resistance.



GERALDINE CONNOR, artistic director, *Carnival Messiah*, shares a warm moment with GISELL LARONDE-WEST, corporate communications manager, Angostura Ltd.



ALYSON BROWN, third left, back row, with members of the cast. PHOTOS: ANDRE ALEXANDER

Friday, July 4, 2003

The



SPOT

entertainment guide



WELCOME
'MESSIAH'

Local audiences will be blown away when they witness the opening of *Carnival Messiah* on July 20.

That's the prediction of creator Geraldine Connor and choreographer Carol La Chappelle.

Described in England's *Guardian* newspaper as a heart-stopping surge of sound, sensation and colour, topped off

with a fine line in radical headgear, *Carnival Messiah* promises to be a grand spectacle, never before witnessed on a local theatrical stage.

"It's a piece based on "Handel's Messiah", starting with the birth of Christ, his death and resurrection. The universal story of the Bible is in there," explained Connor who pointed out that while the 18th century oratorio is the inspiration, the production is more Caribbean in concept.

"It is our Messiah, Trinidad and Tobago's Messiah. The whole of the story is based in the Caribbean, in the concept of Carnival," she said.

"People need to recognise the Carnival aspect of it," interjected La Chappelle, one of the eight people on the committee overseeing the production.

That is not to say *Carnival Messiah* will be a blasphemous portrayal of the sacred with the profane, of Bibles and crosses intertwined with thong bikinis and lusty gyrations.

"Carnival is on many levels. It's our blood, sweat, slavery. We are not dealing with the superficial, people wining in a bikini, we are dealing with the root of Carnival, the essence of it," said Connor.

Connor got the idea to create *Carnival Messiah* when she heard Quincy Jones' "Soulful Messiah" done using black American music alongside "Handel's Messiah".

"I am listening to this and I get vex actually. We have something better than that, we have Carnival. I said, 'Let's put it in that context'."

Born in Britain to Trinidadian parents, Connor, lecturer at the University of Leeds of Caribbean Music Studies, put the production together during the summer of 1994, as a project for 90 students.

Carnival Messiah was born during those five weeks and was staged in 1999 at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, to rave reviews. The *Daily Telegraph* called it a "sumptuous piece of theatre".

The production continued to play to sold-out audiences throughout England and featured the works of Andre Tanker, Carol La Chappelle, Wayne Berkeley and artistes such as Anne Fridal, Ella Andall and Alyson Brown among the mainly British cast.

The Trinidad leg of *Carnival Messiah* will feature many more locals in the cast. The seven Minstrels, the lead characters of the production, will comprise mainly Trinidadians, among them comedienne Donna Hadad and Maxine Williams. Other notables in the cast are: Brother Resistance, Ataklan, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, veteran Midnight Robber Brian Honore, the National Steel Orchestra and La Petit Musicale.

The staging of *Carnival Messiah* to mark the opening of Queen's Hall's theatre season will be the first time the production is staged in Trinidad and Connor is understandably excited.

"People would never understand what it is to come home and do this work. This is my heart, my child," she said.

- LAURA DOWRICH

based in the Caribbean, in the concept of Carnival"

LIFE



Geraldine's Messiah

LAURA DOWRICH

TUESDAY NIGHT. Nineteen more days before *Carnival Messiah* debuts before local audiences, and the mood is light at rehearsals.

"That almost sounds like the dancehall version," Geraldine Connor, the brain behind the musical, quips as the large groups sitting before her sing the word "Miracle" for the umpteenth time.

Sit long enough and one realises the lightheartedness is just a respite. There is no time for play here.

"I need silence for thinking," Connor reprimands shortly after, as voices in intimate conversations crescendo from the mostly young crowd.

The challenge before Connor is great and she is understandably demanding. She and her creative team, including choreographer Carol La Chapelle, have had to teach the entire production from scratch to the almost 80 per cent local cast. The rest comprises original cast members from England, where *Carnival Messiah* was first staged.

"It's a major challenge. It's always like that, but our creative team, we know the show, we have methods of teaching that cuts down a lot of time-wasting," she said.

One problem she said they have so far, though, is regularity and attendance, primarily because many of the cast members have day jobs.

But Trinidadians are talented and learn fast, she said. Watching them go over their moves, the thirst and eagerness is evident.

"The rehearsals are excellent. We thought there would have been a dropout rate but people are coming out on a daily basis, even from Tobago," said La Chapelle, who was invited by Connor to sit in on an interview at Queen's Hall last week.

"They are inspiring us," said Connor. "We have been rehearsing since June 2 and every day we work them harder, every day they give us more."

This "more" can be attributed to the merging of the English cast with the local one.

Connor said because she has been teaching intercultural exchange, the people who worked on the production back in England know about Trinidad and Carnival.

"They have been absolutely possessive

and they have boosted the attack and awareness of our performers, they have brought out the best in our local cast," she said.

Seeing her baby come alive on these shores is a dream come true for Connor. The production will be staged at Queen's Hall for the opening of the theatre season.

"This is a break with the norm. It's a sign where Queen's Hall is going in terms of a space for the artistes. It should be applauded. All this hard work, suddenly it comes to fruition, we are stunned," she said.

On secondment from Leeds University to the West Yorkshire Playhouse, where *Carnival Messiah* was first staged, Connor said she has spent her life flying the flag of Trinidad culture.

Born in England, Connor, the daughter of Trinidadian folklorist and musician Edric Connor, came here at the age of eight and took private piano lessons. She returned to England at 16 where she worked with the Trinidad Folk Singers with Florence James and Bernice Ward.

Connor attended the Royal College of Music for four years where she studied

opera with Anne Fridal. "Our fathers were best friends, from Mayaro," she said.

On her return to Trinidad, Connor taught at QRC for eight years. She and Michael Steele of Holy Name Convent formed and ran a joint choir called the HNC QRC. They later formed the Family and Friends choir for those who graduated and wanted to continue singing. Most of the people in the Lydian Singers and Marionettes choirs, she said, were in the Family and Friends choir.

Connor also played pan with Invaders for eight years and in the final two years, became the first woman to arrange for Panorama. "I did London Panorama in 1983 and won it," she said.

Connor's rich life included working with Leslie Palmer, who was instrumental in changing the face of the Notting Hill Carnival, at the Brent Bratt Music Coop. There, Connor, said she got a lot of recording experience, working with acts such as reggae band Aswad.

When she returned to Trinidad in 1988, Connor taught at Malick Senior Comprehensive, worked for Carifesta and did a concert in 1989 called *Journeys of*

a *Lifetime*. She returned to England in 1990 and in 1992 began her foray into musical theatre. Since then she hasn't looked back.

Among her productions was a Ghanaian musical called *Na Na Yaa Asantewaa (Warrior Queen)* which featured Adzido, a Ghanaian dance ensemble. Melanie Hudson and Ella Andall were part of that production, which toured England and Ghana.

"More recently I am working on a project with Brian Green and Ataklan called *Street Opera*. We hope to produce it next year. And I've been asked to direct West Yorkshire Playhouse's Christmas production *Blues in the Night*," said Connor.

Before that, in September, she travels to Haiti to work on a production called *Voodoo Nation* which goes on tour in England in April.

Carnival Messiah is:
A two-hour musical based on Handel's 18th-century oratorio "The Messiah". It comprises a Carnival element and features pan, drama, rapso, calypso, tassa, soca and drumming.

PHOTOS: ANDREA DE SILVA

"They are inspiring us. We have been rehearsing since June 2 and every day we work them harder, every day they give us more."

GERALDINE CONNOR

Queen of the Carnival Messiah

by BEVERLEY-ANN SCOTT

Handel's Messiah, Caribbean style

SHE is the "Queen" of the *Carnival Messiah*, a woman with a passion for art and music, song and dance; a creative genius who has been using art to heal, empower and build up people for over 30 years.

Geraldine Connor has spent her life flying the flag of Trinidad culture. I caught up with her last week at Queen's Hall and got a sneak preview of some of the costumes being used and performers taking part in the much-publicised theatrical masterpiece, *Carnival Messiah*, which was written and directed by Connor herself.

An impressive figure with a deep voice and piercing eyes she openly shared with me her passion for her work and the reason she believes that the message of the *Carnival Messiah* is not just a Caribbean message but one that the whole world must hear.

In her father's footsteps

Born in England to Pearl and Edric Connor, Geraldine was raised by her grandparents in Port of Spain from the age of eight and made frequent visits to her parents in England.

At the age of 16 she returned to England where she followed in the footsteps of her father, a Trinidadian folklorist and musician in his own right.

Connor attended the Royal College of Music for four years where she studied opera.

She returned to Trinidad and taught music for several years in various schools including Malick Senior Comprehensive.

Her longest tenure was at Queen's Royal College. Together with Michael Steele of Holy Name Convent, she formed and ran a joint choir called the HNC QRC.

They later formed the Family and Friends choir for those who graduated and wanted to continue singing. She returned to England in 1990 and in the summer of 1994 *Carnival Messiah* was born.

Carnival Messiah is Connor's reinterpretation of Handel's *Messiah*, Caribbean style. It was first performed in England in 1999 at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. It has always been Geraldine's dream to produce *Carnival Messiah* in Trinidad. In fact she had hoped that *Carnival Messiah* would be performed in Trinidad in 2000.

The dream has finally come true three years later, with the help of chief sponsor Republic Bank Limited. *Carnival Messiah* is set to mark the formal reopening of the newly refurbished Queen's Hall and if Geraldine has her way it will play before audiences in every country in every part of the world.

Cultural callaloo

The original production of *Carnival Messiah* featured a mainly British cast but also incorporated the works of Andre Tanker, Carol La Chapelle, Wayne Berkeley and artists such as Anne Fridal, Ella Andall and Alyson Brown.

The cast for the third staging of the *Carnival Messiah* is predominantly local with some of the same artists who performed when the play was first staged in Leeds.

The cast is 80 percent local and is truly a reflection of the multiethnic society that is Trinidad and Tobago. "We have all kinds of people of every race in this show; rich, poor, black, white, old and young," says Geraldine.

The play incorporates all aspects of Caribbean/Trinidad culture: pan, calypso, tassa drumming and rapso.

Creative team

She has a number of truly talented artists on her creative team including choreographer Carol La Chapelle and set designer Wayne Berkeley.

There are almost 200 persons working together to produce *Carnival Messiah* and in the space of two hours, the 1200 costumes being used in the

performance will all be worn.

It sounds like a logistical nightmare but for Geraldine Connor it is simply "a challenge" - one of the many challenges she has had to face while putting on this production. But she is a woman of stern stuff; accustomed to hard work. With her commanding voice she says, "I've been working 18 hours a day all my life. I would work in the day and work in the night."

Paid her dues

Recalling the days when she worked in the day as a music teacher and at night in her music and drama, she argues that the only reason she was not able to enter into theatre full time back then was because "I knew it couldn't pay a mortgage". But Geraldine has paid her dues and feels proud of her accomplishments as an artist. Now as a lecturer of Caribbean music studies at the University of Leeds, she can work full time doing what she loves best.

"If you could have an arts practice in this country where you didn't feel that you have to be a teacher to make a living and you could practise your art all day that would be wonderful!" she exclaims. She knows that dream seems utopian, but thinks that in Trinidad, artists are not given enough respect. It pains her that local artists are not seen as people with legitimate professions who work hard.

Expressing a Caribbean voice

"*Carnival Messiah* is about our voice. *Carnival Messiah* talks about the Jesus story using Caribbean culture. It is not a straight translation of the Jesus story; it is about our interpretation of it," she says reflectively.

"*Carnival Messiah* for me is about my voice, my language, who I think I am," she adds. She believes that as a Caribbean people for too long we have waited for other people to legitimise our talents and creativity before acknowledging their worth.

"In terms of professional theatre we have had to work against the greatest



Geraldine Connor

odds. We have also been hampered the fact that we use a European model deal with our Caribbean theatre. We been using all kinds of other people's voices and body movements. We took long time to get to where we are now understand that what we have is valid. We should be pushing it. I unique, it is different and it is our voice she says fiercely.

For this reason she insists, "I can't and I won't write European theatre in so much as it can help us to express ourselves." She lauds the creation of Best Village competition because it only encouraged local talent and creativity but also essentially acknowledged tremendous value.

A global message of love and celebration

"Integration, freedom, celebration this is the message of the *Carnival Messiah*." It is a message Geraldine insists is not only for the Caribbean people. The message of *Carnival Messiah* is one of love, celebration and about coming together.

"It is a global message. I'm saying to the world," says Connor. *Carnival Messiah* is hospitable in the sense that it accepts and portrays all religions, cultures and is a reflection of the sharing and hospitality of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Carnival Messiah is also about celebrating the beauty of our culture,

● Continued on page 15

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Messiah comes home

Imagine a darkened stage, with a towering white-winged figure swaying gracefully to the harmony of plucked strings. The Redeemer sings at the centre of a swirl of light, the pores on your skin stand up, your eyes fill with tears, and you too want to be redeemed.

Many people are familiar with the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. The choir rises, and glorious sounds pour from their throats as they sing out their praises to the divine. It is one of classical music's most stirring spectacles. But thousands of people are now also familiar with what sounds at first like an enormous incongruity: Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, a retelling of Christ's story, from birth to resurrection, using a combination of Handel's music and the imagery and energy of Trinidad Carnival.

The combination is perhaps not so unlikely: Trinidad's famous street festival is, after all, the precursor to the Christian Lenten period, and there are obvious parallels between celebrations sacred and profane. Connor herself, an ethnomusicologist by trade, is something of a hybrid, born in Trinidad but brought up between the divergent cultures of Britain and her home island. But in *Carnival Messiah* she has gone far beyond merely updating Handel's creation for modern audiences. She has, in her own words, "created a new space, indeed a third space, by drawing on the power of the European 'classical' tradition . . . and fusing this together with the contemporary musics of Carnival, as well as traditional and contemporary African diasporic syncretic material." It may sound slightly intimidating, but her production captures its viewers' interest from the start, with elaborate costumes, haunting music, and beautifully rendered vocals. And, finally, four years after its British premiere, *Carnival Messiah* is triumphantly coming home to the source of its inspiration.

The prologue starts with an "Orisa Libation", an invocation and blessing of the space, and from there on it embraces Trinidad and Tobago's many cultural influences. There's a lilting Indian raaga, soaring arias, steelpan, and a joyous, scandalous J'Ouvert scene set at Port of Spain's Green Corner, and nothing seems out of place. As in Carnival itself, there's so much going on that you may not catch it all in one viewing: policemen chasing a "tief", a blue devil from Paramin . . . as Connor says, "it's what Handel would have written if he'd been living in Trinidad."

Messiah is very much Connor's creation, the result of ten years of writing, planning, plotting, and a whole lot of sweat, but many names well-known to Trinidadian audiences contributed to the British production: the late André Tanker, Wayne Berkeley, Carol La Chappelle, Clary Salandy, Ronald Samm, Brian Green.

First staged in 1999, *Messiah* met immediate adulation. Alfred Hickling, reviewer for the UK *Guardian*, later wrote that "by the time the word got around how good it was when first performed . . . it was already impossible to get a ticket." But despite enthusiastic reviews and sold-out houses, it was another two years before *Carnival Messiah* again saw the light of the stage. But the impetus of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, and the prospect of an international audience in north England, opened the door to much-needed funding. Staged at the West Yorkshire

Playhouse in Leeds, *Messiah* played to standing-room-only audiences for its entire run, with many people coming more than once.

But however wonderful the production, for a long time it seemed unlikely it would ever be staged in its spiritual home country. The logistics of a production of this magnitude — multiple dance numbers, set changes, costume changes — are overwhelming. But it seems the universe's good forces were conspiring. The success of the Leeds production; the fact that many Trinidadians had either seen it while travelling or heard about it from friends, and were eager to experience *Messiah* at home; the reopening of Port of Spain's landmark Queen's Hall, entirely refurbished — suddenly possibilities were rife.

A major corporate sponsor, BP Trinidad & Tobago, came aboard, and the next thing anyone knew, local auditions were taking place. According to Connor, the wealth of talent walking in literally off the street was unbelievable. Singers would be asked to do a classical piece, and then, say, rapso, and the Trini performers had no problem shifting between genres.

The Trinidad version will include members of the English cast, but this new production will be a larger undertaking altogether, with up to 200 people involved. There will be a bigger choir and steelband, plus cameo appearances from local performers of note. But many members of the Leeds cast and crew will be familiar faces: Allyson Brown, spreading her wings; the towering voices of Brian Green and Ella Andall; magnificent sets designed by veteran mas-man and stage designer Wayne Berkeley; divine costumes by Clary Salandy; masterful choreography by Carol La Chappelle. The smallest details have been tweaked, adjusted, agonised over — it all has to be perfect for *Carnival Messiah's* grand, long-awaited homecoming. Connor and her associates won't be satisfied unless their audiences spring to their feet, singing Ha-lle-lu-jah!

Carnival Messiah runs from 21 to 29 July, at Queen's Hall, Port of Spain

Natasha Ramnauth



CATHERINE GILLO

on the stage

LOVE AND KINDNESS LEAVE NO REGRETS

● LOVE from Page 4

mate. We always tried to go to bed having solved our differences. We tried to make up before daylight," she said in accordance with the Scriptures. Describing her husband she said: "He's okay, he's the type that wouldn't prevent me from going anywhere I want to go because I've been all over the world. He wasn't the jealous type."

The Singhs were glad to mark three celebrations — their 50th wedding anniversary, their 60th and 65th. Rampersad, 86, and Phagmania Singh, 82, were married on July 1, 1938.

At their home in Indian Walk, Moruga, family gathered for (Hindu) prayers. The Rampersads were also planning a get together, pending the recovery of Mr Rampersad who recently suffered a heart attack.

When Phagmania visited her husband at the nursing home last Tuesday, she was happy to hear of his improvement. "He tell me he feeling better and want to come home," she said.

Though their marriage was arranged, the Singhs boast of "unity" and "living good" with each other for 65 years. "I born and grow up in Moruga Road, St Mary's village and come to live in Indian Walk. My husband was a cane-farmer and I was a housewife... Long ago people used to say marriage was 'cat in bag' because yuh never meet anybody, no boys coming and going and you going out with them. I grew up in a strict home. I didn't get to see my husband until the day of the wedding. And then for three days I had a lokhani, a big ole lady with meh," Phagmania remembered.

The couple has 10 children, nine girls and one boy. The oldest is 69 years. They have 34 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren.

Phagmania doesn't regret her life course. She loves her husband, she said, simply because he's "very kind and loving."

Mohanlal and Shirley Madhoo of Orange Field Road, Carapichaima have been married for 38 years. They celebrated their wedding anniversary on June 20. Their five children and three grandchildren commemorated the occasion with prayers in a small gathering. "We're still happy," said Shirley, 58. Her husband, a retired clerk of Caroni Ltd is 60.

She described him as a "quiet person. We met at a Kirpalani's store I used to run when I left school and he used to come in and buy records. He used to sing in a band at the time."

Shirley recalled their early years at Ravine Sable, Caroni, where they lived. "We didn't have lights and water, we had what they called Delco and we made out," she said.

The secret to a happy marriage she said: "We understand each other. We argue a little bit but we don't let it go too far."

She looks forward to many more years, she said, with her loving husband.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism & The Board of Management of Queen's Hall in association with Republic Bank Limited present

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

Created by Geraldine Connor

★★★★★
UK Guardian

The spectacle of music, dance and drama inspired by Handel's celebration of the story of Christ uses the traditions of Trinidad Carnival and folklore to create an electrifying musical.

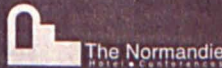
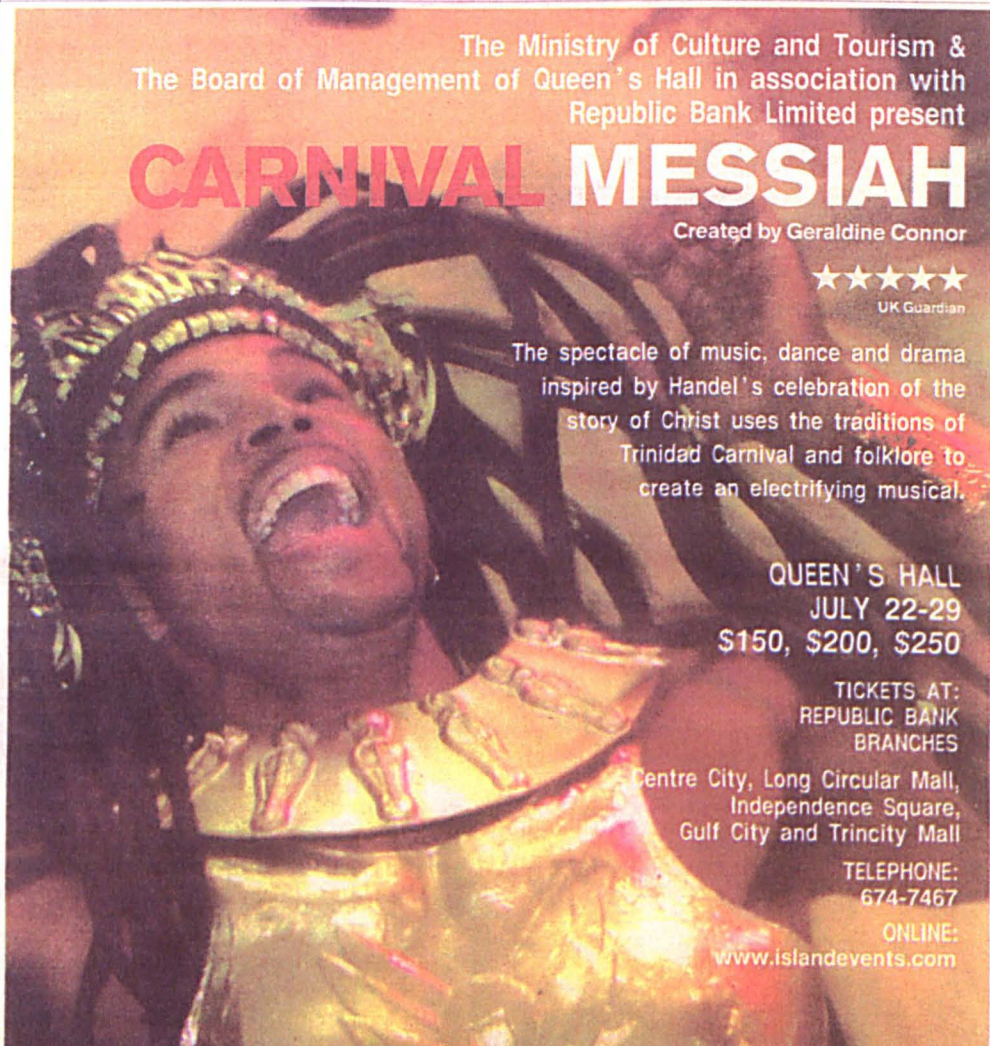
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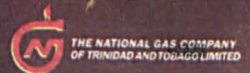
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People

ENTERTAINMENT

OVER →

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

By ANNE HILTON

RAVE REVIEWS in the UK hailed it as a triumph, new, vibrant, exciting. In the Queen's Hall on Monday night most of the black tie audience rose to give the cast of *Carnival Messiah* a standing ovation. Indeed, after three hours of drumming, singing and dancing the result was a feeling of stunned amazement at the

sheer energy and professionalism of a mixed cast of local and UK actors, singers, musicians.

However, ears unaccustomed to songs belted out in the higher registers and tenor pan amplified at disco decibels found it extremely difficult to hear the voices of Ann Fridal — or Jeanine DeBique singing "For Unto Us" and "Hosanna" in the Nativity scene.

Pentecostal church members

should be warned that while the Orisa Shango Aye (The Annunciation and Visitation) is treated with due solemnity and reverence, the christian story of the Angel Gabriel, the stable, the shepherds, the temptations in the wilderness are treated as knock-about farce with touches of calypso tent humour.

Drumming, Orisa priestess Ella Andall, Leah Gordon and attendant "Alter Egos" strike a dra-

matic note in the prologue before the Overture as mas' breaks out in the exuberance of J'Ouvert — complete with the whole gamut of Carnival characters including police and tef and Dames Lorraine weaving their way up and down the auditorium.

Handel's original is first heard with a Bele dance to the aria "He shall feed His flock" that soon becomes soca as J'Ouvert revellers resume wining and chipping, filling the stage, spilling into the audience.

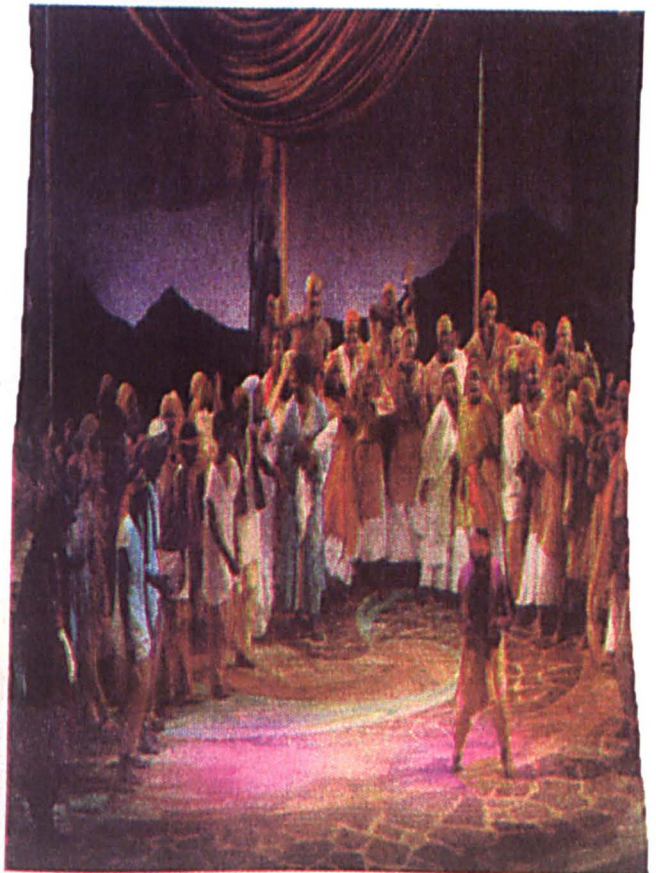
Act One opens in the Orisa tent with Ella Andall centre stage, Ronald Samm orchestrating the ceremony and white clad devotees catching the

spirit. Slapstick comedy followed with the Minstrels — Glenda Thomas and Maxine Williams as the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel, respectively, Ben Fox as a bewildered Joseph, Llewellyn Macintosh as his brother, Nigel Scott as the Innkeeper and Nigel Wong as — among other things — a most athletic sheep.

"For Unto Us a Son is Born" is sung in celebration in the Bethlehem Market Place involving what looks like the entire cast singing gospel style with plenty of vibrato.

Palm Sunday has an Indian flavo with dances, tassa drumming and t

● MESSIAH continues on Page 15



A SCENE from Carnival Messiah. (PHOTO COURTESY JEFFREY SHOOK)

ENTERTAINMENT

A POTPOURRI OF MEDLEYS

● MESSIAH from Page 14
chorus waving palms coming down through the audience.

The Minstrels tell the tragic story of the Last Supper, Gethsemane (with, curiously, coconut palms rather than olive trees — but why not?) and the most moving “He was despised;” Christ before Pilate, the crown of thorns, scourging and Way of the Cross, the Crucifixion all done with due reverence — and all Hell breaking loose in a chorus of demons with fantastic, frightful masks reminiscent of the last Act of Mozart’s Don Giovanni.

After the Intermission there is the road to Emmaus, taking the Gospel to the World (to a *Carnival Messiah* version of “How beautiful are the feet”) with the flags of all nations, a US Style TV evangelist and a setting for international peace with portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and could it be Che Guevara? Surely not.

For the Resurrection Ronald Samm’s “I know that my Redeemer liveth” is as balm to the ears of those who appreciate Handel in the original.

Then comes the showstopper — the Whoopi Band Medley continuing the theme of taking the gospel to all the world with the chorus dressed to suit and a potpourri of songs with words adapted to the story.

The medley begins with the Russian “Katinka,” switches to Country and Western, La Bamba (in Spanish) an hilarious Elvis imitation — including pelvic gyrations — and — “Istanbul not Constantinople” is all one can remember of the words for that old song.

In the UK the audience always stand for the performance of the Hallelujah Chorus.

The National Steel Orchestra’s performance deserved that — and more — as well as the standing ovation they actually got for a magnificent performance.

phobic would be well advised to shield their eyes from the brilliant spotlights flashing intermittently as they swung to and fro roving over the auditorium in the Las’ Lap sequence. Maybe I’m unduly photophobic?

I experienced a physical, stabbing pain in my eyes for a second or two after the first two flashes, and thereafter shielded my eyes with the pro-

gramme. The final tableau may best be described as a Minshall spectacular, or rather, a spectacle a la Minshall, since that internationally recognised son of the soil isn’t listed in programme.

Only Wayne Berkeley could have designed the sets — in particular the J’Ouvret set of old houses that once lined Independence Square. For the rest, simplicity

was the keynote: white drapes for the Shango tent, a simple background of stones for the desert, red drapes framing the tableau setting of the Last Supper . . .

A cabin trunk, a case, sticks, canes, the occasional bowl, flags — seem to be the sum total of ‘props.’ On opening night the choreography was excellent, even the youngest and tiniest member of the cast per-

forming with as much aplomb as the adults.

Costumes are both lavish and basic — depending on the action onstage — and in the auditorium.

Comment on the music is beyond the competence of this reviewer who, despite the levels of sound, nevertheless appreciated and enjoyed the performance. To single out any one of the

Minstrels, whose polished, professional performance carried the main action, would be unfair to the others.

For the rest, *Carnival Messiah* was splendid, a first-rate theatrical experience.

Our special thanks to Platinum sponsor Republic Bank — and heartfelt thanks to all the other sponsors who have made possible this production in the

Queen’s Hall. Two final thoughts.

One wonders what the West Yorkshire Playhouse audiences made of the Orisa sequence — and, in view of a half-hour of speeches preceding the gala performance lauding the international fame of the piece, has *Carnival Messiah* been produced in the West End of London, on Broadway . . . ?

GIZELLE MORRIS

Messiah gets thumbs-up at red carpet affair

"AN EXCELLENT feast of the senses." This was how actor Oba Babatunde described Friday's opening performance of Carnival Messiah at Queen's Hall.

Babatunde, who acted alongside Denzil Washington in John Q, was one of several personalities from the US movie and theatre industry to attend the red carpet affair.

High-powered local personalities included Education Minister Hazel Manning, Legal Affairs Minister Danny Montano, Tourism Minister Howard Chin Lee, Prof Selwyn Cudjoe, Wendy Fitzwilliam and designer Peter Elias.

Describing the musical as a beautiful production, Babatunde said Carnival Messiah was a feast for the eyes, ears, spirit, soul.

"We loved the show, it was fantastic. We are from Los Angeles and are here to help get this play to the US," said Ernest Dillihay.

Dillihay's group included City of Los Angeles protocol officer Elga Sharpe, investor Bernard Kinsey and theatre managers Anisa Dillihay and Shirley Kinsey.

Glamorous film, stage and television star Hattie Winston, known for her roles in Crosby, Beverly Hill Cop III and Jackie Brown, was also part of the Los Angeles posse.

New York press agent Sam Rudy — a first-time visitor to Trinidad — said he learnt much about T&T's culture by looking at Carnival Messiah.

Impressed by the production, Rudy wished that more people could have seen the musical.

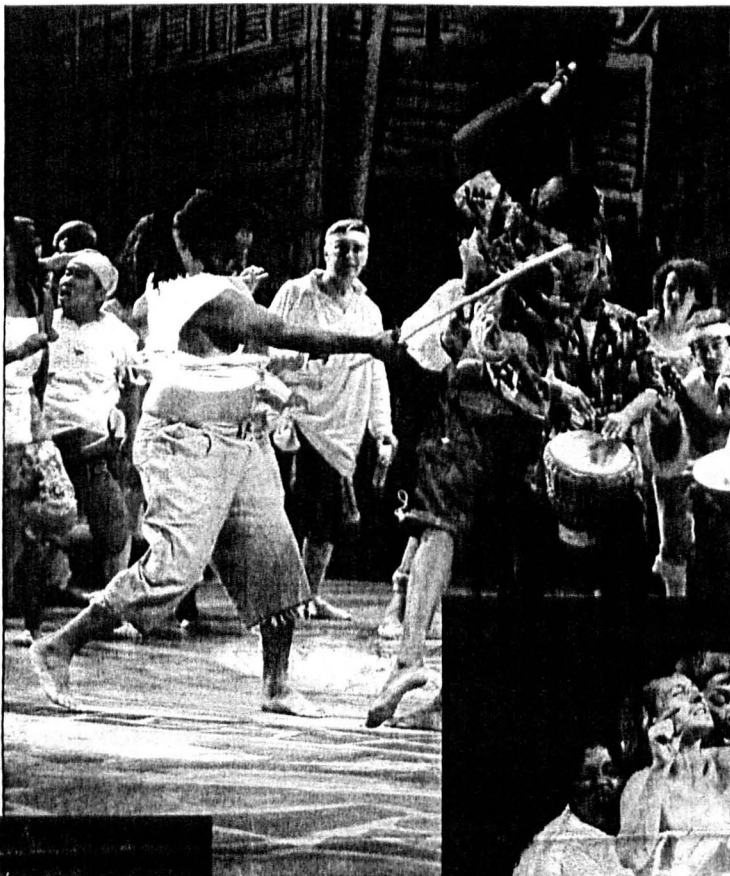
"In New York, we think we have the best and brightest talent, but these kids have amazing talent," he added.

Theatrical producer Richard Frankel and Clear Channel Entertainment programme director Philip Brohn both gave the show two thumbs up.

Friday's presentation of Carnival Messiah differed somewhat from the production which debuted in Trinidad last year.

There were less actors on stage and a few new faces, including Melanie Hudson-La Barrie as a minstrel in the cast.

Whataps! A stickfighter collects a blow to the waist in Carnival Messiah's J'Ouvert at Green Corner, Port-of-Spain. ▶



Despite being pared down, Carnival Messiah was still awfully long and the music overwhelming loud.

But the first act "Shango Aye," featuring the soulful voice of Ella Andall and the loud chaotic joy of the "Las Lap," retained their awe-inspiring power.

After the play, the VIPs drifted out into a specially prepared area where they experienced Island People's fete, Girl Power, which was being held at Queen's Hall car park.

Drinks and finger food were in no short supply as red and orange confetti fell like snow on the VIPs and the plush red carpet that covered the area.

In addition to performances from Destra Garcia, Denise Belfon, Machel Montano and other top artistes, VIPs were treated to a display from half-naked members of the Laventille Rhythm Section.

A buffed male masquerader in a winged costume that left sculpted cheeks exposed had the women lining up to sneak a squeeze.

The show and party ran smoothly except for a mishap at around 11.30 when fireworks ignited pieces of material hanging off a tree in the car park.

Music was stopped for several minutes as fire officers scrambled to extinguish the blaze which climbed the tree.



A SCENE from Carnival Messiah, Act I: the Temptations and the Miracles. The musical opened Friday night at Queen's Hall, St Ann's. ▶



A SMALL fire caused by a fireworks mishap burns some of the decorations on a tree in the car park of Queen's Hall on Friday night. A Carnival character swings on a nearby branch. ▶



Trinidadian CARL BOODRAM (left) parties with MYRNA COLLEY-LEE while his friend actor OBA BABATUNDE (right) gets a hug from a friend at the Carnival Messiah opening. ◀



City of Los Angeles protocol officer ELGA SHARPE, left, investor BERNARD KINSEY, theatre manager SHIRLEY KINSEY, ERNEST DILLIHAY and his wife theatre manager ANISA DILLIHAY and actress HATTIE WINSTON. ◀

Carnival Messiah – pure artistry

DEAR EDITOR: Please permit me a space in your newspaper to express my views about *Carnival Messiah*.

"Go make disciples of all men" – this is the message of our Messiah, the Christ, which should become the message of all of us who saw and experienced *Carnival Messiah*.

Having sat through the birth, life and death of our Lord as well as the birth of the Christian Church in a setting that was typically and splendidly Trinidadian and full of overwhelming spectacle, we are now inspired to go out and continue this glorious work.

Geraldine Connor and the entire cast of *Carnival Messiah* exuded sheer charisma as they artfully portrayed the age-old story in a new, zesty and colourful manner that any true Trinidadian person would embrace.

The production encompassed the cast, musicians and the audience as masqueraders, minstrels and mankind merged into one.

The music and set transformed the auditorium as it transported us back into the primal sounds and rhythms of Mother Earth, into the mesmerising pulses of our African and East Indian forefathers and then led us forward into the cadences of our unique modern Caribbean music.

Within this tapestry of creativity the strains of Handel's *Messiah*, like a leitmotif, was woven in its delicate threadlike pattern throughout this artwork – *"how beautiful are the feet of Him."*

Geraldine Connor's creation embraced all our varied races" in an imaginative yet apt re-creation of this age-old oratorio in the life-like scenario of Carnival. The "all ah we is one" philosophy rang out through the performance as we were all lifted into the realm of pure aesthetic artistry.

What is the message of our Messiah, Jesus, the Christ?

Let us applaud the composers, the cast and all those who were responsible for the production of *Carnival Messiah* for carrying on the tradition of Christianity and proving that indeed *"I (we) know that my (our) Redeemer liveth"* in His many guises in the hearts of all. And we can walk away after such a thrilling performance and still be touched and inspired by the life of one man retold in a "true-true Trini" style.

The production of *Carnival Messiah* may have come to a close here in Trinidad but its nuances will live on as long as art, music and drama, and most of all mankind's undying faith in God, remain alive.

"The trumpet shall sound and He shall be raised." Amen.

DARIA MITCHELL-SORHAINDO, St Joseph

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Mama, dat is Messiah!

CAN Geraldine Connor walk on water? Oh there are rumours... of angels round her bed; of pigeons pausing from pecking up the scraps of the city to soar spirals over her head; of the great trees gracing the Queen's Hall yard wading through the dirt to gather in a reverent ring, then bending down to pay her homage.

In the end, I was heartened to meet "just a woman" — a woman like I might be: living the dream; not somebody else's, but of my very own making.

Thus, even if the *Carnival Messiah* (CM) production doesn't convert everybody to its fan-club, it serves as saviour surely to at least one person in all the world: its mother herself, Geraldine Connor — who is not something else, but the damn thing self!

"It's been quite a journey," Connor declared to the scores of cast and crew members encircling her an hour or so before the closing showing of CM, at Queen's Hall last Tuesday.

A journey which, for some, was several month's in the making; for others, several years (perhaps seeming eternal) of blood, sweat, tears; and for still others, just the one night short, sitting in the audience, being moved for good or ill by what they went there to see...or not to see.

Comments on the show were extreme: love or hate, seldom in-between. Which is apt, actually. It is that sort of show; inspiring "no ifs, ands or buts," only to feel, only to know what you feel.

"The Queen," one of the younger, British musicians called Connor; and be it Elizabeth or Latifah, I'm always gladdened to hear any woman sincerely called queen — not for fairness of face or softness of countenance, but for strength, ability, achievement, grace.

The triumph of Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, then — whether you love it or leave it — is a triumph for every woman, every artist, every person who has built something from nothing.



choreographer, Carol La Chapelle, before the final show, and waited while she made like "Queen" bee amid the frenzy of her hive.

There was time for but a few questions and answers.

Q: Good, bad, ugly, are you surprised by the reactions to *Carnival Messiah*?

CONNOR: I did wonder why the media was so silent to begin with. They asked no difficult questions, and that made me suspicious. But Trinidadians never surprise me. There's a lot of inside jealousy; far more guarded and open viciousness.

Just as the crime wave has changed the landscape, the jealousy has taken its toll on artists. I'm ashamed of my artistic fraternity friends.

Q: Starting over, with hindsight, what would you do differently?

CONNOR: I wouldn't do anything differently. We've broken the mould. *Carnival Messiah* is not European. We're doing Caribbean theatre. It's not Best Village. We've refined it. People loved it because they recognised the language.

What some are vex about is they didn't think of it before.

LA CHAPELLE: Or else they couldn't achieve it. Who else can claim what Geraldine can? They're not living the artistic life Geraldine is. She's living and working in grand theatre.

CONNOR: I'm currently doing my PhD on *Carnival Messiah*.

Q: What do you say to younger artistic folk like myself who are



leave this country to do anything with our lives and talents?

CONNOR: Well, I left. The fact is, being an artist anywhere in the world is difficult. Only, people don't look down their noses at you for doing it outside. To do theatre and live comfortably in England, I have to do the day job. Fortunately, I'm teaching along similar lines.

All the nuances we take for granted, all that we hold came with us on the slave ship and was developed. I'm living that.

Q: What next for Geraldine Connor?

CONNOR: Broadway. I'm going to Los Angeles to meet with a large theatre production company. American Growth Institute for the Arts. I'm meeting producer August Wilson and two major writers. They've seen the show three times.

Q: With the success of such movies like *Moulin Rouge* and *Chicago*, do you see potential for *Carnival Messiah* on the silver

CONNOR: Yes. But the stage show first, then the movie musical.

I've broken tradition. Whenever you have change, there's dissent. But people are voting with their feet. Joe Public loves *Carnival Messiah*.

Q: What were the trials of merging different cultural artistes?

CONNOR: No trial at all. The two cultures were both brought up on many cultures. We all have it in us. We express it in different ways.

For myself, it's always been difficult not to express myself that way.

LA CHAPELLE: My dance instructors abroad used to tell me, "You dance like an eel." Here, they say I'm doing ballet.

Q: What has Geraldine the woman given up to remain Geraldine the director?

CONNOR: I don't see any separation between the two. I don't feel I've given up anything.

about it. I have one broken marriage, and no children. I don't regret either. I have hundreds of children all over the place through *Carnival Messiah*. Family, love, friendship: I've done that! My parents flew in to see this show on a Trinidadian stage. I'm happy.

Q: Closing statements?

CONNOR: I'm overcome by Trinidad. I bring love and came expecting love. I only bear love.

LA CHAPELLE: There are young people who took part in this who will carry this experience for the rest of their lives, all because of Geraldine's magnanimosity.

She's responsible for the largeness of *Carnival Messiah*. I hope we learn to live with ourselves and be less destructive. Without the Geraldine's of the world, we wouldn't be able to do it.

Come good.

Tomorrow's Brew:

LETTERS

Standing ovation for Carnival Messiah



A SCENE from *Carnival Messiah*.

THE EDITOR: I saw *Carnival Messiah* on Wednesday, 30. I was accompanied by three friends, each of us paying \$200 for our seats. This is the highest price I have ever paid to attend any event in this country. Suffice it to say my friends and I agreed it was worth every penny.

I take issue with Terry Joseph's critique that the show lacked a story line. The story is one of the oldest, if not the

oldest, ever told. Terry also suggested that "High Mass" would have been a wise addition to the music and that Eddie Cumberbatch would have been a better choice for the solo.

WRITE TO:

 Newsday,
 Chacon Street,
 Port-of-Spain

These are personal opinions which, to my mind, one can take or leave. They do not affect the intrinsic value of what we enjoyed.

Peter Minshall's review is something

else entirely. It seems he went out of his way to be vicious, to show petty jealousy and to gratuitously insult the producer, Geraldine Connor; one of his own faithful crew, Allyson Brown and Carol La Chappelle.

What was Allyson's crime? Is it that she dared to perform in a production that he Peter, was not part of?

So she did things that (he claims) she learned at Chaguaramas! Big deal! I am sure that many of the creations that Peter has produced have had their genesis in some past exposure to others' works.

No, Peter, you have done yourself a great disservice with that review. The headline "Raw sewage" can better be used to describe your review rather than *Carnival Messiah*. The standing ovation it received the night I attended was thoroughly deserved.

MERVYN E TELFER
 St James

'Carnival Messiah' was great

THE EDITOR: I want to say to Trinidadians and Tobagonians that *Carnival Messiah* was the best theatrical musical I have ever in my life witnessed. It was an absolute pleasure seeing so many people on one stage and all performing at the same time.

The lighting was exquisite, the singers were awesome, the settings were absolutely beautiful, wonderful, the entire cast were good. I loved it. Thanks to you, Dian, for taking me to that gala Saturday night show.

The Queen's Hall setting was so wonderful. For a moment there I felt like I was in another world, and stepping off the ramp on that lush red carpet was the best, and hanging with you with also the best i.e. after all these years. I felt like I was at the Academy Awards, girl. The evening is one I shall never forget. Getting lost in Morvant topped the evening. Allelulia.

C WILLIAMS
 Morvant

The Arts

Carnival Messiah Meditation on the life of Christ

PART TWO

Review by TRICIA DIAZ

IT'S not strange to be still reading commentaries and articles on the meditative musical production *Carnival Messiah*. The play gave us an opportunity to meditate on the life of Christ while we reflected on our own attitudes, and behaviour.

ACT I

The first act led us from Jesus' birth to his Last Supper. We saw the first three Joyful mysteries, (Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity), the second and fifth Luminous mysteries (Wedding of Cana and Institution of the Eucharist), his temptations and other miracles and Palm Sunday.

The Hosanna chorus from the Palm Sunday celebration still plays sweetly in my head. Actors emerged from the wings of Queen's Hall, waving palm branches as they danced and rejoiced to a catchy but mellow tassa drum rhythm. Their pink tie-dyed-like clothing was reminiscent of our Phagwa festival.

ACT II

In Act Two, we witnessed all five Sorrowful mysteries - his Agony in the Garden, Scourging, Crowning with Thorns, Carrying of the Cross and Crucifixion. There was also the Transformation, which can be compared with the Transfiguration, the fourth Luminous mystery; both show a glorious Christ who has conquered sin.

An element of contrast that really struck me was during the Carrying of the Cross - when three moko jumbies appeared in their costumes. There they were - bare, tortured and moving in pained, haunted steps. When I saw them I wondered what was going on and questioned their role. Little did I realise that the high art of Carnival was transforming actors and transporting viewers into a past realm and making it a present reality. There, on stage, existed not one real cross but three persons nailed to their crosses. It's only when they came to a standstill and formed a line did these bare moko jumbies make sense.

"Right, that's Jesus in the middle," I exclaimed. Yes, it was he, now with outstretched arms, alongside two others, all being crucified. Upon his death, intense drumming was heard. The battle between good and evil had begun, as two massive butterfly-looking characters challenged each other in a series of swift sways, swirls and spikes. Both were straight and tall, yet fragile and flexible. Their wings and movements were impressive. The red and black Dark Angel danced his last dance, as the majestic white Dove of Peace conquered him.

ACT III

In Act Three, we experience four Glorious mysteries - the Ascension, Pentecost, the Assumption and the Resurrection. But it was around 10.30 p.m. that I heard the most enchanting music - heavenly kora strings, drum and percussion that beckoned the *Voice of Truth*, Ronald Sam and his rendition of *Redeemer*. "Emancipation, resurrection, love, love, love," he chanted. Applause resounded. During that piece, the Dove of Peace had returned with a

Dvette, both dancing in beauty, elegance and grace.

Then there was the National Steel Orchestra playing Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*. They made a smooth entrance on a moving stage. The ragga storytellers were tremendous. "HAH LEH LUU YAH!" shouts the first ragga storyteller. "Feel it in the belly."

The second ragga storyteller, Brother Resistance, who looks regal in white, then joins Ataklan, who is dapper in his red and black cowboy styled outfit. By now, the stage is covered with carnival masqueraders, who sing and dance to a host of styles thanks to the mixing done by a DJ.

The ethnic rhythms, among them African, Indian, Arabian, all return to Handel's original version, where the cast freezes for a moment.

Finally, a golden yellow, sun-like Dove of Peace appears. This carnival costume is radiant and symbolises the resurrected Lord. It is the *Carnival Messiah*. It's "las lap" time and everyone is jumping and singing through the streets in town or rather every aisle and wing in Queen's Hall.

Carnival Messiah is a true sign of hope and an experience of grace. Both local and international news have recorded many negative events this year. Yet Trinidad has been blessed to also record and experience really powerful art - Hinkson's *Christ in Trinidad* and now, Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*.

At this final show, Geraldine Connor then went onstage to introduce her creative team and to "publicly thank them for their wonderful talent and vision". They included Wayne Berkeley, Carol La Chapelle, Clary Salandy, Mark Tillotson, Roy Johnson, Michael Lovelock and David Hamilton. The show was dedicated to the Caribbean pioneers Edric Connor (her father), Beryl Mc Burnie and Andre Tanker whose creativity, dance and music continue to live on through many others. May their gentle souls rest in perfect peace. Amen.



Christ in Trinidad

Everyone loves a winner

EVERYONE loves a winner, and I am sure that right now all Trinbagonians love George Bovell Jr. He literally swam his way into people's hearts after winning four medals, two gold and two silver, at the Pan American Games in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

There's a special kind of excitement which is generated while viewing these games, especially when our local athletes are competing in the events.

You look at the line-up of the various foreign competitors, you think about the track record of our own athletes, and you say, "Hey, we're in with a fighting chance man." So immediately you start a chant, "Go Ato, go Darrel, go Markie, go Shannon, go Georgie, go Fana, go Kertson."

I for one reached the edge of my seat singing my chants regardless of the position of the local athlete in the particular event. And when George swam his way to those medals, well boy, I was in my element.

Viewing the swimming events was really something else. From the time the swimmers walked out with the officials, almost as though they were in some kind of procession, to their designated places to begin the race, my excitement began to build. It increased some more when the

competitors' names and the countries they represented were announced. Excitement, anticipation, just hearing "from Trinidad and Tobago."

I begin to smile, feeling good. And then they were off, swimming, moving like fishes in the water. Breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle, individual medley, all generating the excitement.

See me at the edge of my seat,

"Come on Trinidad and Tobago." I myself cannot swim a stroke. I'm still trying to master the "doggy paddle". But it did not diminish my enthusiasm. And when George Bovell mounted the podium to receive the medals, especially the gold when the country's national anthem is played, the sense of pride in the athlete's achievement is immense. By the way, why don't they play the entire thing?

In his interview after winning the first gold medal, George expressed the sentiment that the medal was not for himself but for his country and all who supported him. So you know, that medal is part mine!

Seriously though, therein lies the factor which motivates these athletes who represent our country at the various international events. Though striving for personal records, etc. they all acknowledge that first and foremost they want to make their country proud. And based on the number of negatives that seem to be plaguing our country, these ambassadors are truly proving that good things can surely come out of Trinidad and Tobago.

Even those who are not part of the medal finals put their best foot forward, so to speak. There are two groupings for the finals, Final A, the medal event, and Final B, the non-medal or complementary event, the latter event establishing the "best of the rest".

George Bovell's brother, Nicholas, finished third in his Final B event, while Shannon Duval won her event. Though not in the medal event, they both performed so well, they certainly have a promising future ahead of them.

I really appreciate TV6's coverage of the Pan American Games. It gave the sports enthusiasts something to look forward to, but more than that, it showed our young people that there were avenues present for them to channel their skills and talents, especially those athletically inclined.

And even for those who are not thus inclined, it could be used as the motivation needed to strive to do their best in their own particular field of endeavour. It is really pleasing to see our young people coming into their own, performing with excellence and, more importantly, doing it for their country, Trinidad and Tobago. Isn't that what it's all about?

TV REVIEW

by
Juliana
Valdez



Catholic Radio & TV

SUNDAY, AUG 24

7.00 a.m. Faith Alive
7.30 a.m. Divine Mercy - Fr Reginald Hezekiah
8.00 a.m. Holy Mass - Live
9.00 a.m. Renewed by the Spirit
10.00 a.m. Trinity Special
11.00 a.m. Krik Krak

MONDAY, AUG 25

6.00 p.m. Holy Hour
7.00 p.m. EWTN Holy Mass

8.00 p.m. Trinity Special

TUESDAY, AUG 26

6.00 p.m. Holy Hour
7.00 p.m. EWTN Holy Mass

8.00 p.m. Ask Why?

- Live

WEDNESDAY, AUG 27

11.00 a.m. Trinity Update - Live
6.00 p.m. Holy Hour



communications network
cable channel 10

7.00 p.m. EWTN Holy Mass

8.00 p.m. Trinity Update - Encore

8.30 p.m. Divine Mercy - Fr Reginald Hezekiah

THURSDAY, AUG 28

6.00 p.m. Holy Hour

7.00 p.m. EWTN Holy Mass

8.00 p.m. August Special

FRIDAY, AUG 29

10.00 a.m. News and Views - Live

6.00 p.m. Holy Hour

7.00 p.m. EWTN Holy Mass

8.00 p.m. Footsteps - GANG - Live

SUNDAY, AUG 24

6.15 a.m. Inspirational Radio 730 AM:
Catholic Forum - Fr Peter de la Bastide, CSSp

6.30 a.m. TV6 and 7.00 a.m. EWTN and TCN (Ch 10):

Faith Alive - Fr Ferdinand Warner and Fr Urbin Hudlin

Faith Insight - Catholic Education in Trinidad and Tobago

WEDNESDAY, AUG 27

4.45 a.m. NBN Radio 610 AM and 91.1 FM: Morning Devotions - Bernadine Walters

THURSDAY, AUG 28

4.45 a.m. NBN Radio 610 AM and 91.1 FM: Morning Devotions - Sheldon Haynes and John Johnson

Holy Mass - Living Water Community

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

12.00 noon Inspirational Radio 730 AM:

SATURDAYS - 8.45 a.m.

SUNDAYS - 8.00 a.m.

10.00 a.m. Power 102 FM (delayed broadcast)

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL RADIO

DAILY: Awake with God - between 4.30 and 5.30 a.m. - Inspirational Radio 730 AM

SUNDAYS: The Voice of the Poor - 1.00 - 2.00 p.m. - Inspirational Radio 730 AM

THURSDAYS: The Church Today - Thursdays - 5.00 a.m. - 5.45 a.m. - Power 102 FM

Presenter: Winston Mathura

High mas



ALYSON BROWN as the pierrot grenade in a J'Ouvert street scene.



Above: LEAH GORDON as MAMA GOD is flanked by her Alter Egos.

Right: The Minstrels - GLENDA THOMAS, from left, LLEWELLYN MACINTOSH, MAXINE WILLIAMS, NIGEL SCOTT, BEN FOX and NIGEL WONG.

PHOTOS: DAVID WEARS



LISA ALLEN-AGOSTINI

FROM J'Ouvert to las' lap, *Carnival Messiah* was as intoxicating as a good mas: vibrant and spectacular, carnal and spiritual, funny and poignant.

The superlatives needn't stop there; writer/director Geraldine Connor is a genius to so brilliantly marry European classical tradition with the best of our own traditions, birthing a whole that is pore-raisingly good.

There were few empty seats at Queen's Hall on Sunday night when Connor's *magnum opus* was previewed before its opening tonight. Hundreds of people had lined up that morning at the St Ann's venue for free tickets to the preview, a full dress rehearsal for the show which was produced by Queen's Hall.

Actor and dancer Leah Gordon, in an introspective turn as Mama God, a narrator for the show's form, set the standard for the rest of the production.

Wearing a majestic collar of florescent fan coral over a floor length velvet gown, she was both theatre and mas. Gordon was flanked by two dancers in headpieces like ropy dreadlocks, whose satiny undulations spoke highly of choreographer Carol La Chapelle's work over the last two months.

The late musician Andre Tanker, to whom the production is dedicated, would have been thrilled by the fine performance of the orchestra.

Perched in a balcony upstage, they presided over the show with percussive power that rama-jayed with a live DJ's mixes of hip hop and dancehall.

The result was a savoury new stew that owed as much to Trinidad as it did to Africa, Kingston and New York.

Oh! but Europe wasn't left out. Soprano Anne Fridal, reprising her role as Mary from the UK production, soared in her operatic vocalisation of Connor's conception of Handel's Baroque oratorio.

In any other production Fridal would have been the high point. In this one, she was one of a marvellous many.

Ella Andall's performance of the annunciation as a Shango possession made visceral the link between Christianity and Orisha, the old world and the new.

Tenors Ronald Samm and Brian Green also excelled, particularly Samm in his solo "Redeemer," sung to the music of Seiko Susso's sublime kora. The African stringed instrument sounds like a harp, and, with Alyson Brown swirling across the stage as the Dove of Peace in 12 white wings, the piece was a vision of what love and joy can be.

Huge musical numbers tumbled across the stage for the three hour show, and finally it was clear why Connor used a cast of 200-odd performers. There's no way to show Carnival with a small cast. By the finale you felt you'd been in the middle of the m el e yourself and had loved every sweet, sweaty minute of it.

The story of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ was carried by the Minstrels, played by Nigel Scott, Maxine Williams, Nigel Wong, Ben Fox, Llewellyn "Shortpants" MacIntosh and Glenda Thomas.

This rollicking Greek chorus was a slapstick, sing-along gang. They could go from revellers at the inn, to sheep in a pasture in seamless changes full of the worst puns you've ever heard. Their timing, and the sheer audacity of being so ridiculous while telling *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, made their performances remarkable, fresh and roll-in-the-aisles funny.

Underlying the whole magnificent production was the idea that our theatre can be great. With the exception of about 20 per cent of the cast, everything was indigenous — sets were designed by Wayne Berkeley, and costumes by Clarinda Salandy — and outstanding. This is the bar and now that we've proven that we can meet it, how do we blithely return to our comfortable mediocrity?

The superlatives needn't stop there; writer/director Geraldine Connor is a genius to so brilliantly marry European classical tradition with the best of our own traditions, birthing a whole that is pore-raisingly good.

Messiah our souls!

"Messiah: an exalted or hoped-for liberator of a country or people."

OH my God!

Fitting words, for I woke Monday morning yawping, "I must have music!" and proceeded to make it so.

I threw down Putumayo's *Women of the World, International*; and as the mellifluous melody of Nweti's "Amoya" set me to magnetic, heady kindling, I swung "de ting" and remembered the music in me.

See, for almost a month now, I've had no music in my apartment; part of the sense of deprivation I'm putting myself through (no music, no meat, no men) in an odd reverse self-psychology to get my fiction juices fuh-lowing fast again.

However, after feasting full on last Sunday's first run of Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, you bet I changed my tune.

"I must have music!" And Angélique Kidjo stroked "Logozo" all along my watchtower.

Fitting, I say, as it's really the music of the production that's the thrust of the show, setting itself against your senses like the sweetest sharp sword that ever did rive a soul in two.

"Inspired," a co-worker said; and yes, *Carnival Messiah* is inspirational, and no, I don't mean like it helps you find Jesus or anything; though surely, surely it gave me back to the God-inventive aspect of my Self.

I stand inspired, and hot to create. That's capital H-O-T, thank you, if you missed it the first time.

After my piece last Monday, you



JAYE-Q'S
BREW

must realise what it means to me to feel stimulated again.

Recently, I've been so hungry, but inert; accidie covering over me, my words, my ability.

Sometimes, lately, I've overlooked the storyteller I've always wanted to be; simply waylaid into the media to keep making a buck, to keep on eating, to keep on writing.

Only it backfired, and the very thing intended to give me the means to persist in that tricky balancing act has turned to throwing down my balls instead.

My brain's so tired all the time, all the time; and the fiction suffering, the fiction foregone. My novels, now, began, but seldom completed, if even continued.

I'd deserted my art. I'd forsoken myself.

Ironic, then, that something as quickening as *Carnival Messiah* would serve as a *memento mori*, revealing how I was conspiring with my work to murder my craft; and passing it off as empowerment.

"The margin between collusion and respect can be narrow," advanced UK Le Guin in her latest novel, *The Telling*.

Indeed!

I envied every man-jack on that stage Sunday: "Oh woe is me! Why not me?"

So Monday, I had music! Shimmymy on "Mind Adventures" with darling Des'ree.

With every swing of hips, *Messiah* came to me - treading on my mind's watercourse, making me

move and want to move people.

I see a lot of sex offers for the cast in the future. Everybody's going to want to sleep with someone from that show; including that rambunctious little lad with the ubiquitous quality.

Sex dances on the heels of desire, not so? And, Jesus! It feels I've not been inspired to any desire for so, so long.

Sunday's show was, in all honesty, overlong; the fault of early show jitters-induced late cues, perhaps.

There were elements bordering on the inessential: a flag scene which came off like the march of nations at Gay Pride parade meets Christ-

ian Olympics, especially as that sequence was upstaged by the subtle eloquence of the scene ensuing - the Minstrels walking off from a spiral formation, proclaiming, "God is good!" and so forth, in a roundelay unification of different languages.

Muuu-sic!

Except, by the time the song "Picture" came up for me, I was beginning to be disturbed by the fact I couldn't stop bathing myself.

For a long, long time, I remained in the shower, washing my arms, legs, back, breasts, face. I couldn't seem to stop.

When the waters pooled around my feet, I felt I was standing in

blood...and skin. Where was this cleansing going? For I was cleansing myself deeper than with water and soap.

I was cleansing myself to go into the world; making room on me for when the world came on and clung, or stoned, or turned me to stone.

I stood under that fall of water and understood the despair of too much art, and not enough room, scope, support: the truth of this country.

And *Carnival Messiah* merely reminded me of where we've been and where we're not.

Care to know what I'm speaking of? Join me tomorrow, then. Come good.



**Ironic something as quickening as *Carnival Messiah* would serve as a *memento mori*, revealing how I was conspiring with my work...
to murder my craft**

Ex

'Carnival Messiah' a wonderful attempt at fusion

THE EDITOR: I want to comment on some aspects of the concept underlying Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*, which I was privileged to see last Friday night.

Carnival Messiah is an intensely post-modern work as the extract from Ms Connor's thesis in the programme makes clear. Unfortunately, few are conversant with the ideas or unique vocabulary of post-modernism, so that extract does not particularly help the theatre-goer to deconstruct this complex work.

On the surface, *Carnival Messiah* is about the mingling of European classical culture as represented by Handel's oratorio and Caribbean and African origins of culture as embodied in Carnival. Much of the theatricality of the piece comes from this mixture in terms of dance, movement and music. But basically it is the story of the Messiah and Ms Connor has artfully and cleverly appropriated some of Handel's music and some of his section titles to the format of her work.

She has, in fact, pulled off a major feat by turning colonialism on its head by appropriating European culture. *Carnival Messiah* uses the European form for its own ends and for her own objectives in the glorification of Caribbean-Trinidadian Carnival culture. The end-product of this process of transformation is the creation of a "third space" that combines both cultural elements. This process yields more than a cultural fusion—it results in a new way of exploring historical realities while at the same time utilising to the fullest all the wonderful elements of performance art.

The production opens with an Orisa invocation to Eshu—the Yoruba protector of the crossroads. One of its earliest and most dramatic scenes is the incantation to Shango. How must we relate Eshu and Shango to the Christian Messiah? These scenes, I

believe, make a critical point that the Yoruba deities are to be equated to the Christian Messiah, even to Jesus Christ.

Both of these religions are placed on an equal footing and the point is made that the Orisa are as sacred as the Messiah. This is indeed a daring manoeuvre for a show playing in a country where half or more of its population reveres and venerates Christianity and its legends! Using the minstrel format, the play tells the story of Jesus Christ and even treats his birth with typical gentle Trini humour. Far from trivialising Christianity, as a recent commentator has suggested, aspects of Christianity have been Trinidadianised!

Carnival Messiah rejects the derogatory construction of the "other", whether that is defined as Jesus Christ, an Orisa deity or a grossly overdone Dame Lorraine. One of its many levels of meaning is the celebration of the "other". Everyone mixes and merges in this production and the large cast, while sometimes looking a bit overcrowded on a limited stage, nevertheless symbolises the equality of the multitude and the total rejection of the concept of the marginalised "other".

It reminds us that in his day, Jesus Christ was considered the "other" just as today, many still marginalise African, Indian and other forms of religious expression.

The production is not perfect and there are a few elements that do not work but in my many years of theatre and opera-going in many countries of the world, I have yet to see a perfect work perfectly performed! I was, however, deeply impressed and often moved by the conceptual profundity of this work and, as well, of course completely enjoyed its visual splendours, drama, and total theatricality

DR FRANCES HENRY

NOTE: Letters will not be published unless a valid name and address are provided, even if the use of a *nom de plume* is requested.

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LETTERS

Carnival Messiah is tremendous theatre

THE EDITOR: I must add my comments to those already written. *Carnival Messiah* is tremendous theatre and is comparable to shows I have seen anywhere. It was a masterpiece. Several of the people who saw the show when I did, were impressed at so epic a work of art.

If one reads the advance publicity about this production, one would not fathom what the show would be like. And some of the reviewers were particularly harsh at a fellow creative. I am indeed glad that I saw the show. Ms Connor may or may not be a Christian, but she surely has a command of what theatre is all about. If one looks at this production through the eyes of a Christian, one could take offense at some of the non-Christian infusions around the most important person in the life of us Christians.

But looking at the production through the eyes of the theatre goer, one could not help but be impressed by the interweaving of the characters; the truly Trinidadian flavour of the story line; the deft mixtures of drama and comedy. It was looking at the ministry of Jesus the Christ through the eyes of the Trini.

Of course if Jesus had been born here, his birth would certainly have been announced in the middle of Jouvèrt. I personally thought Ms Connor could have shortened the Jouvèrt scene. But say what. Whoever painted that truly remarkable backdrop deserves an Oscar.

As to the body of the show. The lighting was tremendous. The backdrop were awesome. The dancing was exciting, invigorating and well choreographed.

The singing was terrific. Of special mention — one of the most amazing baritones I have ever heard sang “I know my Redeemer Liveth” and his accompaniment was heavenly. The mingling of rap, hip hop, pop, robber talk, sailor dance, beautiful solos, wonderful sopranos, caused my spirit to cry out for a National Theatre for the Arts immediately, with a stage and auditorium befitting this production. Although a marvelous work was done to the stage, Queen’s Hall should be renamed Queen’s Haul.

While to the Christian, Shango was a worrisome aspect, it was pure theatre. Like it or not, it is part of our culture.



The dancing was excellent, and the banners proclaimed the presence of the Lord.

The anger of the demons was impressive. The Crucifixion scene was handled with taste and dignity. It was very touching and poignant. And where did Ms Connor find those five characters. Although I would have liked to see Maxine as Mary and Verne Guerin as the calypsonian. And possibly Conrad or Robadiri as Jesus.

The Annunciation was outta sight. And the retelling of those miracles must have made the Lord himself smile. He’s got a great sense of humour, you know. The inclusion of the children and their solo-performances were heart warning.

The finale was indeed triumphant. The huge mask should have shown the Christ in glory and would have achieved a more dramatic effect. The Messiah (Christ), is a triumphant King and should be depicted as such. But in its own way it was striking.

The whole company singing the Hallelujah chorus after that scintillating rendition by the steel orchestra was enthralling, and if the “reviewers” did not see or get the significance of Hallelujah being sung in the carnival setting, then they don’t understand the omni-presence of Almighty God. Jesus walked among the common people and became a part of their culture, so much so that He had to be pointed out to his executioners.

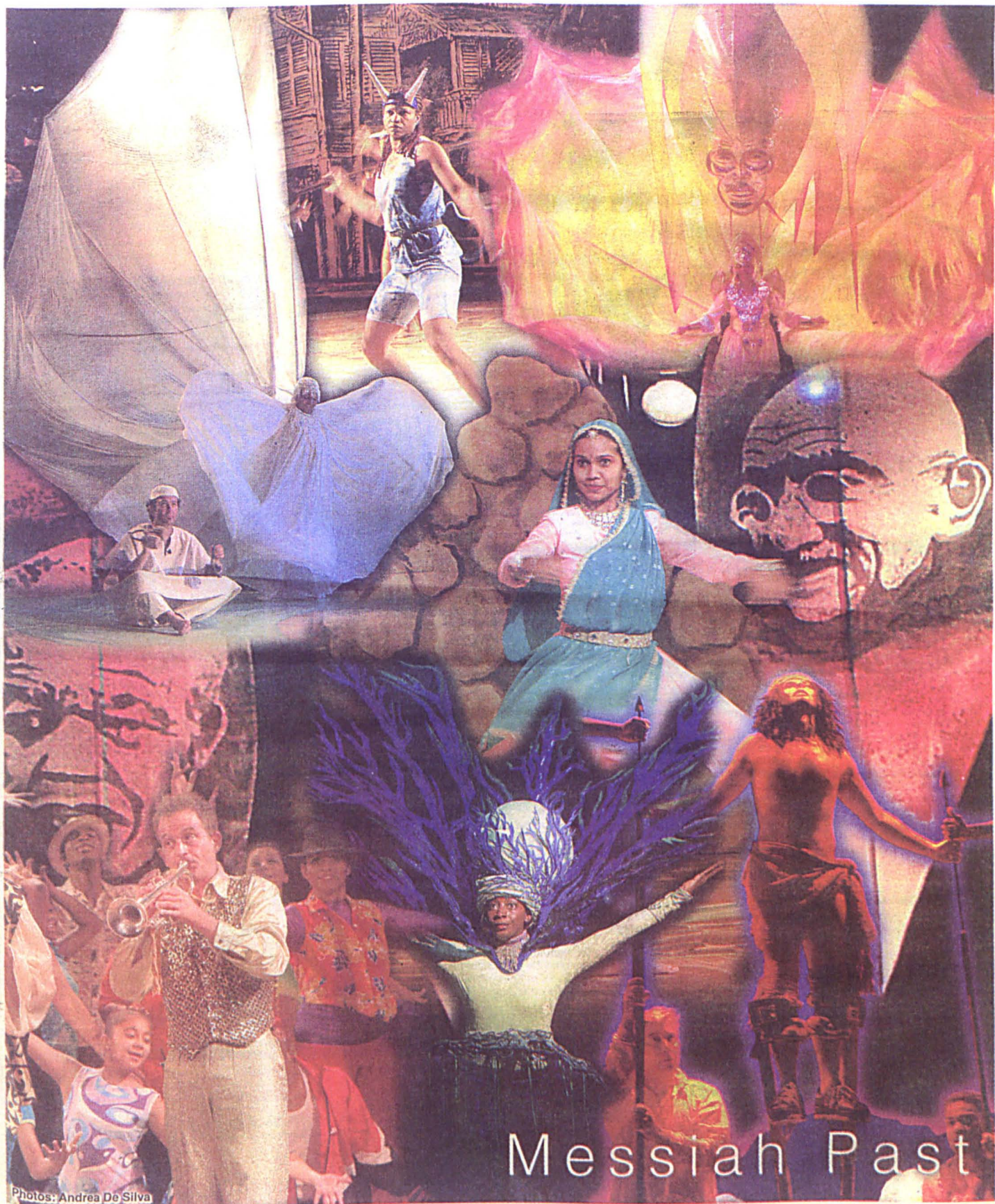
And finally my Christian brethren, the Messiah is indeed Lord — Lord also of our Carnival. Warmest congratulations Ms Connor.

Now on up the islands and on to Broadway. A few changes here and there, (that alternate name for Jesus gotta go!!) And you have a stupendous production. It was stunning and totally enjoyable. Almost too short.

**EUTRICE HOPE AND
MARTINA COWIE**
Petit Valley

WRITE TO:





Messiah Past

Photos: Andrea De Silva

Queen of the Carnival Messiah

● From page 8

beauty of Carnival, which according to Connor "is a fabulous showcase and a celebration of freedom".

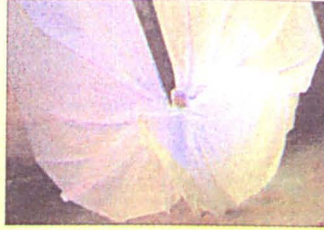
An excellent piece of theatre

She is not too worried about what people will think of her interpretation but is confident that the performance if nothing else will be one of the highest standards of theatre that Trinidad has ever seen.

"Not everybody will agree with me and I have no problem with that. People either like it or they don't. But that's how I see it. It is the Jesus story, which is about Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

"We use different persons to portray Jesus but the character is not as important as the story. The show is told in our language which is very often the language of picong."

Anybody who comes to see the show, she feels, will not be seeing anything new. They will just be seeing what we do; what is uniquely Caribbean/Trinbagonian elevated to the point where it becomes an excellent piece of theatre.



A healing performance

Carnival Messiah takes theatre into new realms. It breaks down barriers. It is also about empowerment.

Artistically she thinks it's a good show with the quality of performers that will ensure that the standard of the performance is high.

It is her hope that the play will truly inspire people and make them feel better about themselves.

As she says thoughtfully with a distant look in her eyes, "This country needs some inspiration. It needs healing and one of the things that *Carnival Messiah* does is heal. I am hoping that on all the other levels, people will leave Queen's Hall feeling empowered and strengthened and healed."

T O D A Y



The 'Messiah' is here

THE highly-anticipated *Carnival Messiah* had its gala opening last night at Queen's Hall, St Ann's, before an audience of specially invited guests, government officials and prominent public figures. The Geraldine Connor play had its first public showing at a preview on Sunday night, but last night's

performance marked the first in its Trinidad stint.

Carnival Messiah is the largest theatrical production, beyond Carnival itself, that Trinidad has ever hosted. The musical combines the story of the birth, life, death and rebirth of Christ with the different phases of Carnival including

Dimanche Gras, Jouvett, Carnival Tuesday and Las Lap. In doing so, according to Connor, it exposes the social and spiritual harmony that exists between the various religions, classes and ethnicities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Connor's stock description of the work says *Carnival Messiah* is "a new cultural paradigm which establishes West Indian Carnival practice as a semiotic system of communication". To simplify, *Carnival Messiah* is the core story of The Bible set to a calypso beat, a multicultural meleé that snatches Handel's oratorio from the concert hall and repositions it in the middle of a steelband and calypso jam.

It is a huge production with a cast of over 80, a choir, and a steelband orchestra. Its sets have been designed by Wayne Berkeley, and costumes have been designed by Clary Salandy. The production replaces the original characters of the *Messiah* with traditional mas characters like Minstrels, Dragons and Midnight Robbers, all with their part to play in the interpretation of the well-known story.

But *Carnival Messiah* is more than a festival type jam. It embarks on a few musical adventures that may raise eyebrows on purists who quake at the thought of Handel's work being performed by anything other than small ensembles playing period instruments.

They will undoubtedly have much to



Photos: JEFFREY CHOCK



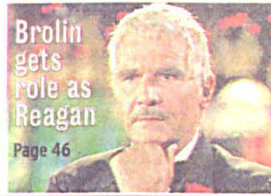
SCENES taken from last Sunday night's preview of *Carnival Messiah*.

say about the steel band arrangement for "The Hallelujah Chorus", not to mention a heavy dub version of "For Unto Us a Child Is Born" and several other fresh approaches to well known pieces.

But then, there will be much to say about *Carnival Messiah* on the whole, as would likely be the case with any attempt to interpret deeply religious stories through carnival or other traditional arts except, of course, the principals perform miracles.

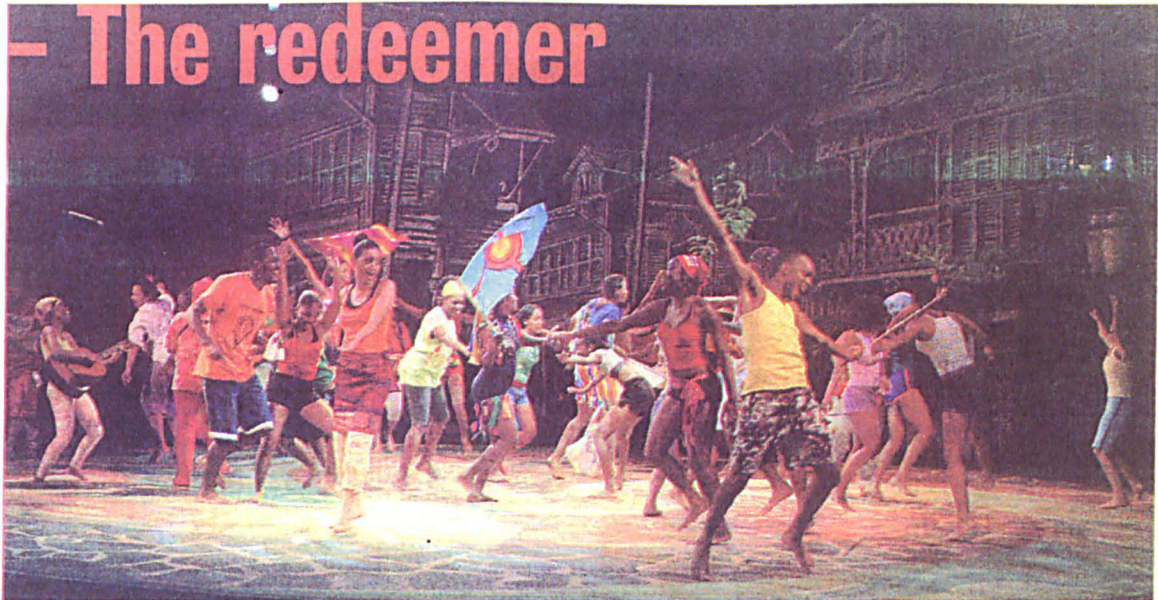
"I think we're fully prepared to do everything the work calls for," Connor said, "so I hope our critics judge us by that and no one expects us to walk on water."

The show will continue nightly at Queen's Hall.



Carnival Messiah

The redeemer



J'OUVERT in Port-of-Spain, at Green Corner, opens the story of *Carnival Messiah*. PHOTOS: DAVID WEARS

WHEN square pegs are placed in "wrong" holes, especially for an event as significant as the gala premiere of the most elaborate musical to be staged at the nation's most prestigious concert hall, some things are bound to go awfully awry. This was exactly the case at the official opening of a new and improved Queen's Hall, celebrated on Monday night with the gala performance of Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah*.

For starters, with the country's highest officials and dignitaries invited to the Republic Bank/platinum-sponsored premiere, protocol seemed to have been suspended for the night. It appeared that President George Maxwell Richards, his wife Dr Jean Richards and daughter Maxine suddenly decided to drop in on the event, as there seemed to be some degree of unpreparedness for their arrival.

I get all uncomfortable when actors, or late-arriving personalities in the arts, get perilously close to my Prime Minister and President. I don't care if the toing and froing in front of them is written in the script, or if unpunctual guests have to use the back door to get into the auditorium. I am sure that both men, their wives and guests, must have been quite uncomfortable when an amply padded Dame Lorraine stood in front of the Prime Minister, raised "her" skirt and flashed "her" bottom in his face.

In these perilous days, one must be eternally vigilant and remember John Wilkes Booth's assassination of US President Abe Lincoln in a theatre.

I don't care how good a security man is, unless he is as fast as *The X-Men's* Nightcrawler, there's no way he could prevent an explosive-strapped Dame Lorraine from blowing up PM, Pres and half of Queen's Hall.

But, we're an "oh shucks people," and only take decisive action after the fact. One just has to look at the ongoing pussy-footing by those in power with crime, the drug trade and the runaway streak of lawlessness in the land.

One "oh shucks" faux pas was the omission of mention of Chief Justice Satnarine Sharma by every speaker on Monday night, with the solitary exception of Republic Bank



chairman/MD Ronald F deC Harford. And to think, His Lordship was seated right there among the VIPs.

Seating protocol also went out the window as it's the only way I could explain those responsible for seating guests and placing the Anglican Bishop and his wife almost in the last row in Queen's Hall, even behind a predecessor and lesser religious officials.

I understand that officials of the National Drama Association (NDATT) are justifiably miffed over being ostracised from Monday's gala. But, I also overheard Patrons of Queen's Hall members whispering behind cupped hands about the manner in which they were treated as well.

But, to get to the actual production, I was lifted emotionally by the sheer magnitude of the production. It is not an easy task by any stretch of the imagination, co-ordinating and moving over 200 bodies on and off stage, not to mention queues for lighting, music and changes to set. But, sound designers Helen Massam and Frank Agarrat succeeded in achieving this Herculean feat, as well as light engineer Robert Ryan, and the stage management team.

The production design by Wayne Berkeley for *Carnival Messiah* was breathtaking, especially the three-dimensional one used for the J'Ouvert Overture, set at Green Corner, and the scene in Act II in The Garden of Gethsemane.

Musically, Ella Andall was outstanding in The Annunciation and Visitation, "Shango Aye," and in the Hallelujah! finale. The segment in Scene I was awesome as Andall, the chorus, actors and dancers took guests as close as one can get to actually being immersed in an actual Orisa rite.

Also making a profound impact musically were former Three Tons of Fun member Ronald Samm, rendering "My K...semmer Lives," and the National Steel Orchestra's playing of the "Hallelujah Chorus."

The Minstrels (Nigel Wong,

Maxine Williams, Nigel Scott, Ben Fox and Glenda McSween) were also perfectly rehearsed, displaying beautiful harmonies and witty lines.

I feel that Connor and her musical team could have dug deeper to add a few more poignant local compositions to those performed.

In the music department I was also impressed by the Kora playing of Seikou Susso, from the Gambia, Africa. His input on this traditional African string instrument, as well as the embellishments by British-based pianist Dudley Nesbitt, made the stylised "Hallelujah Chorus" that more enjoyable.

On the down side though, there were times when the sound overwhelmed the lines delivered by actors, and in the finale, Babel was almost achieved at one time.

Under the heading of acting and dance, I was fascinated by the raw and natural talent of nine-year-old Jonathan Bishop. This former 12

and Under star, whose ambition is to enrol at Julliard's, is one to watch for the future. The choreography of Carol LaChapelle was flawless, a fact articulated by multi-casted Alyson Brown, particularly as "The Dove of Peace." I wasn't too enthused or keen on the Whoopi Band Medley, what sounded like barn dance music and an extract from the repertoire of "Fiddler on a Roof."

All in all, Geraldine Connor's *Carnival Messiah* is huge and comes at a time when Trinidad and Tobago is in dire need of something positive, good and wholesome to lift the dark veil of evil which has consumed our nation this past year. A testimony of T&T and Caribbean genius, creativity and talent, *Carnival Messiah* is the redeemer and deliverer.

(Contact Pulse at bloodline@tbt.com)

Memories and messages

PEOPLE are still talking about the recently held "Memories and Messages" concert held by the Ethnic Jazz Club at Little Carib Theatre.

The programme featured several classical hits by some of the country's best loved composers including the late Andre Tanker, Kitchener and Merchant. It showcased Moyenne, led by the multi-talented Chantal Esdelle, and Contraband, Tanker's band, doing its first concert since his passing.

Show producer Esdelle said she deliberately set out to draw focus on Contraband. No doubt consciously still mourning the loss of Tanker like so many other musicians, she said: "The concert was focused more, at least that was my intention, on Contraband."

"Terry and Dougle (Redon) explored the music a little in a way that did not interfere with the original style. 'Morena Osha' and one of his more recent calypsoes stood out for me as two good examples of how well that worked."

"Contraband said that they felt good about the performance." Beside Esdelle on keyboards, Moyenne comprises Duvonne Stewart [tenor pan]; Junior Noel

[percussion]; and, Tamba Gwindi [percussion]. Esdelle said her band enjoyed every aspect of the night's programme.

She added: "I found that the balance and interplay between the two percussionists was really good. Duvonne was electrifying and I actually played out a lot, especially during the originals [and that is rare for me]."

Crop Over activity

BARBADOS is bubbling with Crop Over activity and next week a large contingent of locals are booked to join the fun. Some will be playing mas, others will be providing some musical input, while the majority will be there to simply suck up all the action and excitement. Among the locals participating in Crop Over 2003 are DJ Hurricane George and Laventille Rhythm Section. They represent the Trini force in the annual showdown ("Bajan-Trini Bashment 5"), to be held by Friends on August 2. The party, one of the best in all of Crop Over, will be held this year at Kendall Sporting Complex, Carrington, St Philip.



Dedicated to the memory and work of artistic pioneer Errol Hill, Connor said that *Carnival Messiah* was Queen Hall's gift to Trinidad and Tobago and her gift to the artists of Trinidad and Tobago.

MESSIAH from previous page

teaching," she sighed. "So I've left. I'm moving on. What is that dream? That dream is *Carnival Messiah*. I am on the road. I have made up my mind that this thing must succeed."

She implored that corporate entities contribute to the project.

"We need financial support. If we're going to have the dedication of these artists and their talent we have to pay them. We have to pay for rehearsal spaces. We have to pay for the tutors. We have to pay for the costuming. If we want quality and high standards we have to pay that too."

Dedicated to the memory and work of artistic pioneer Errol Hill, Connor said that *Carnival Messiah* was Queen Hall's gift to Trinidad and Tobago and her gift to the artists of Trinidad and Tobago.

Culture and Gender Affairs Minister Joan Yuille Williams so believed that the production was near mandatory experience, two performances of the show were bought last year.

She proudly defended the action once it was revealed.

"Facilitating cultural organisations and cultural events," she said, "is a part of the mandate of any government. Culture permeates all aspects of our lives, not for a particular ministry. It's for everybody."

She added: "Yes, the ministry came forward, we bought two shows so that I could have allowed the people in the community who would not have had an opportunity to see that to come forward. We gave them the tickets, we gave it to them free of charge. I can tell the media that. We also facilitated by giving them the transport to come here."

Yuille Williams said that such an opportunity and the opportunities they brought, could never be paid for.

Revealing future plans for the performing arts in this country she said: "We need to move forward in Trinidad and Tobago. We have plans for an Academy of the Performing Arts right there on the Princess Building Grounds. We have plans for a Performing Arts Centre right out there on the Foreshore. We have a vision. We are going to move towards that vision."

II.12 CARNIVAL MESSIAH OPEN AUDITIONS

**Portfolio of supporting material
Reviews & Programmes**

Carnival Messiah

Two cherished traditions – one spectacular show



OPEN AUDITIONS

Sunday, March 7th, 9.00am

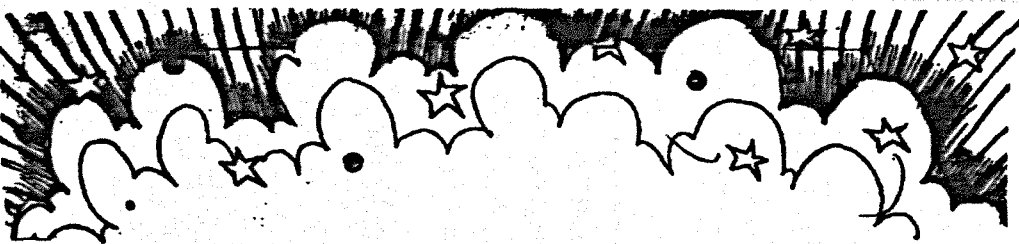
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II.13 CARNIVAL MESSIAH BRETTON HALL PROGRAMME 1994 15

Portfolio of supporting material
Reviews & Programmes



Devised and performed by

Bethan Atberton: Sarah Atkin: William Barker: Louise Barrett: Hannah Bloom: Samantha Black: David Carter: Alison Carthy: Natalie Casson: Barry Chambers: Daniel Davies: Sandra Duplessis: Jennie Deorpsey: Jane Earley: Shelley Williams: Isabel Watts: Kathryn Eisby: Kerry Frampton: Allan Gibbons: Amanda Goff: Peter Goldner: Rebecca Greenwood: Lisa Hack: Kate Hall: Sue Huggins: Caroline Jessup: Rajvinder Kaur Bolla: Amy Lamb: Paula Landsbury: Karen Lee: Andrew Legge: Paul Lewis: Cally Lyons: Jennifer Macro: Andy Mason: David Matthews: Michael Molden: Ceri Morgan: Sally Robinson: Alice Smith: Catherine Smith: Michelle Thomas: Paul Vickers: Vicky Widdows: Deborah Wigg: Jenne Ward: Susanna Ward: Julia Williams: Shelley Williams: Nicky Woodcock: Lorraine Downes: Isobel Watts: Gill Saunders:
Sara Jenkins

Musicians

Samuel Bell: Ian Cotterill: James Docherty: Dmitry Fedotoll: Benjamin Girling: Iyare Igiebon: Gavin Barden: Andy Michel: Richard Wright

Costumes

Faye Arnold: Anthony Baker: Victoria Binns: Amy Dauding: Melanie Rodgers:
Lucy Simpson: Phil Web: Louise

Costume and Masquerade, design and construction

Nicolas Boisselle

Stage Management

Tanya Roat-Moye: Jane Holloway: Lucy Sampson: Phionah Ford

Lighting: Jonathan Clark

Set: Matthew Penlington

Pre-recorded sound: Gavin Bardon

Live sound: Kevin Lord

Artistic Direction

Geraldine Connor: Chris Lomas: Mark Tillotson

Master Percussion

Sam Bell

Musical Direction

Geraldine Connor

Tenor Pan

Dudley Nesbitt

Devised Script

Mark Tillotson

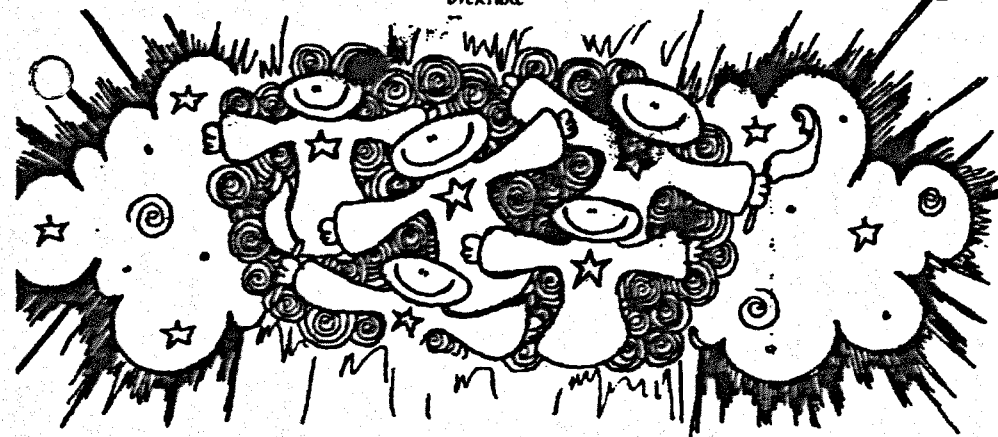
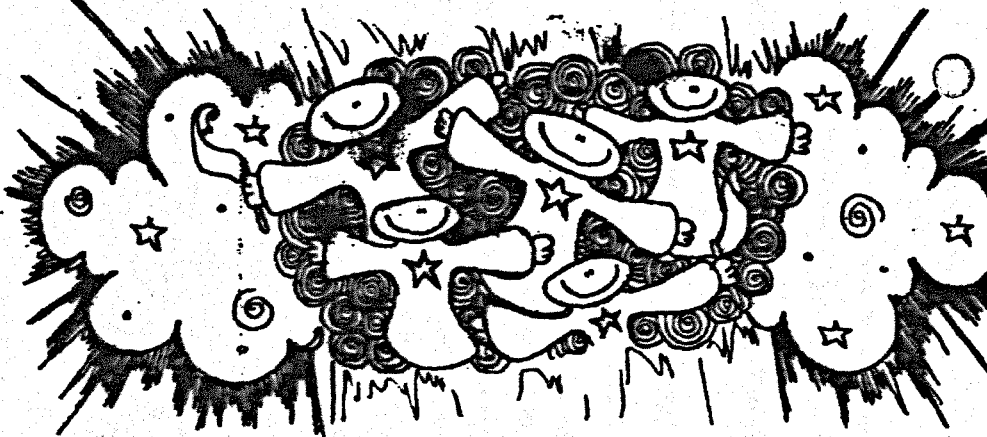
Movement & Choreography

Chris Lomas

Over-all concept

Geraldine Connor

With special thanks to Barry Russel for his musical contribution to the arrangement of the
overture



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CARNIVAL MESSIAH

WAKEFIELD OPERA HOUSE

Saturday, 19th March 7.30p.m.
Tickets £4.00/£2.00

The final *coup-de-grace* is The Carnival Messiah, devised, conceived and directed by Geraldine Connor-Crawford with assistance from Barry Russell, David Bromley, Christine Lomas and others in a major event will feature mask, sound systems, dance and theatre in a radical reinterpretation of Handel's Messiah in a contemporary Black American Gospel musical idiom. It will mark the end of five weeks of work from a large group of students gathered from all of the disciplines in the Performing Arts Faculty.



FUENTE OVEJUNA

by Lope de Vega

Monday, 14th March 7.30p.m.
Thursday, 17th March 7.30p.m.
Tickets £4.00/£2.00

Lope was the most prolific, and one of the greatest, playwrights of the Spanish Renaissance (the 'Golden Age'). Written in 1619, *Fuente Ovejuna* ('The Well of Sheep') dramatises historical events of 1476, when the inhabitants of a village in Andalusia rose in rebellion against their feudal overlord.

Rich in ideas, and epic in its historical vision, the play is unusual for its period in expressing unswerving sympathy with the peasants' aspiration to justice and decency in a cruel and unequal world, and respect for their courage in refusing to play pawns in somebody else's game.

Its combination of startlingly modern political ideas (particularly concerning the role of women) with the characteristic verbal and theatrical extravagance of the Renaissance has made it a favourite with twentieth century audiences.

The translation is by the great Hispanist and poet, the late Roy Campbell.



THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

F.G. Lorca

WAKEFIELD OPERA HOUSE

Monday, 14th March 7.30p.m.
Wednesday, 16th March 7.30p.m.
Tickets £4.00/£2.00

This is the most artful and the most disciplined of Lorca's works - nearer to the forms which have been considered as typically Spanish. It is a drama of women only, combining through a rare mystery the greatest contention and dramatic tension is born out of a clash of wills - the domineering will of the mother, Bernarda Alba, upheld by the forces of tradition, and instincts of the deaf and invincible will of the daughters, dragged by their thirst for living and by impulses and instincts which clash with each other in their turn. The world with all its harshness passes before their windows in visions full of fury or drunk with dirty eroticism. These are the visions which burned the Poet's imagination as a child, and which he now recasts in a defined scheme, sure and palpant with truth.



11.14 WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE PROGRAMME 1995

16

CARNIVAL Messiah

13 & 14 March 1995

WEST • YORKSHIRE
PLAYHOUSE
.....

CARNIVAL Messiah

D'Ouvert

Birth The Joyful Mystery

But who may abide the day
of his coming

For unto us a child is born
He shall feed his flock

Death, The Sorrowful Mystery

He was despised
Hades and Gethsemene
O Death, where is thy sting,
O grave thy victory

Rebirth, The Glorious Mystery

I know my redeemer liveth
How beautiful are the feet
Hallelujah

D'Ouvert

Before anything else existed, there was the word
And the word was Christ, the Messiah
He has always been alive and is himself God.
He created everything there is -
Nothing exists that he did not make.
Eternal life is in him, and this light
Gives life to all mankind
His life is the light that shines through darkness -
And the darkness can never extinguish it.
From the darkness came the early light of morning.
The first sounds of dawn, the awakening.
D'Jeuvet, the preparation for the carnival.

Birth

And Christ became a human being
And lived here on earth among us,
And was full of loving forgiveness and truth.
And some of us have seen his glory - the glory of the
Son of the Heavenly father.
All were required to return to their ancestral home
Joseph, being of the royal line of David, returned to
Bethlehem.

Death

About noon, darkness fell across the land,
Jesus called out in a loud voice
Eli, Eli, lama sabach'tani,
My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!
[The veil in the temple split apart]
Father I commit my spirit to you!
And with that he died.

Hallelujah

It was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die
And rise again from the dead upon the third day.
This message should be taken from Jerusalem to all the nations.
Forever and ever I will sing about the tender kindness
Of the Lord.
Young and Old shall about your kindness are forever,
Your truth is as enduring as the heavens.

A definition of Mas pronounced "Marse"

Mas as it exists today is a living folk art. As an expression of a people it encompasses the traditional, oral, sociopolitical and contemporary. The basic unit of carnival is the "masque" band which can be made up of any number of masquades, from two to three thousand.

"Masque" indicates that the masquerade band members wear costumes that have been designed based on a main theme or idea which can be taken from history, current events, films, other communication media, art, imagination and/or existing carnival traditions.

J'Ouvert

Translated from the French to mean 'the opening of the day', J'Ouvert officially opens the two days of street parade at 4.00am on carnival Monday morning. This is the time for 'ole Mas', a showcase of satire and wit, for irreverent remarks, all mainly through apt disguise and the little placard. All morning people dance in the streets to the live music of their favourite steelbands who often compete in the 'bomb' competition where they play their own arrangement of any of the well known Western European musical classics.

Conventional Mas band

Large band - 1000 to 5000 masqueraders
Medium Band - 500 to 1000 masqueraders
Small Band - 1 to 500 masqueraders
All Mas bands have a Mas camp, where all the administration, designing and costume making takes place. All Mas bands have a king and queen as well as individual masquerade characters which are entered into the pre-interval competitions. All Mas bands have a music band or bands that accompany them when they are masquerading on the road, the music bands can be any of, or combination of, the following: percussion band, brass band, DJ or steelband. The Mas bands all vie for the band of the year title. Most masquerade bands are run as commercial businesses: the would-be masquades book and buy their costumes. The total cost will include refreshment on the road as well as a donation toward the music. Most Mas bands will hold several events in any one year to raise money for carnival preparations and presentations.

CARNIVAL!

by Geraldine Connor

Carnival originated in Europe. Long before the Christian era, ancient rituals were performed to celebrate the changing seasons, harvest time, child naming and initiation ceremonies to name but a few. With the rise of Christianity, some of these festivals were absorbed into the Christian calendar.

The word carnival is derived from the Latin "carne vale" meaning "farewell to the flesh" and is traditionally celebrated in conjunction with the Christian observance of Lent. Carnival is the two day period of merrymaking, feasting and enjoyment preceding Ash Wednesday, which heralds forty days and nights of fasting and repentance.

Although many countries in the world have carnival festivals, today there are only three countries in the world that observe a highly sophisticated celebration of carnival which thousands of revellers masquerade through the streets on the two days before lent. They are Brazil, New Orleans and Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the high points of these carnivals became the 'Camboulay' from the French 'Cannes Brulees' meaning 'Burning Cane'. This was a wild, highly emotional and energetic drum dance enacted during the burning of the cane, by then the enslaved African men who wore masks and bore staves and lighted torches. These must have been the only enjoyable moments, the only moments of freedom, fun and laughter shared when enslaved Africans from different estates met and chatted. These times were now being commemorated by the 'free Africans' through Camboulay enactments at Carnival. These celebrations became suppressed and eventually outlawed in 1884, as a result of confrontation and riots. Also banned were the planning of African drums. This was to have far reaching significance to the music which in turn led to the development of Tamboo Bamboo music which in turn led to the development of the steelband in the middle of this century. It also directed more emphasis towards vocal musical forms out of which was spawned the calypso.

The Carnival Messiah, conceived by Geraldine Connor, features a radical reinterpretation of Handel's Messiah using contemporary Caribbean music, dance and theatrical forms, showcased through the vehicle of carnival masquerade. The message is potently relevant to today's society, addressing the notion of modern day Christianity yet continuing to express age old value and sentiments. The piece was devised and directed with the assistance of Mark Tillotson and Chris Lomas in artistic conjunction with Geraldine and a cast of Bretton Hall students. The show has been designed by specially invited Trinidadian masquerade expert, Nicholas Boisselle.

For the West Yorkshire Playhouse

Lighting Designer

Chris Brockhouse

Sound Designer

Mic Pool

Sound Assistants

Kevin Chameley, Lisa Sykes

Stage Manager

Janet Gautrey

On the Book

Klare Roger

Production Manager

Mike Brown

Technical Stage Manager

Phil Eddolls

Wardrobe Supervisor

Kevin Pollard

Project Manager

Daniel Bates

Set Built and Painted by

West Yorkshire Playhouse
Production Workshops

With special thanks to all West Yorkshire Playhouse staff who have made this production possible.

Special thanks to the University College of Bretton Hall, Shirley Jacobs of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Raymond Wilkes and Sheila Howarth of Force of One, Mick Molden, Gavin Lee Hurst, sponsors BT and Black Expressive Theatre Enterprises, Dr Tim Stephenson, David Hamilton and the cast of the Prudential Awards *Carnival Messiah* performance at the Royal National Theatre.

Geraldine Connor would like to thank all at West Yorkshire Playhouse especially Jude Kelly and Daniel Bates for their enthusiasm and support on this project.

Carnival Messiah was first performed in May 1994 at the Theatre Royal and Opera House, Wakefield

Production Credits

Coach Transport provided by Stanley Gath and Genmore Tours, Dewsbury
01924 466766

Mini Bus provided by Darton Hire, Dodworth
01226 205535

Banana Trees by Red Hall Services, Leeds
0113 265 0055

Large Carnival Costumes by Mahagony, 8 Flamstead Avenue, Wembley, Middx HA9 6DL 0181 902 5123

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205535**

Cast

Bethan Atherton, Bernadine Artuso, Gavin Bardon, Maxine Barker, Louise Barrett, William Barter, Sam Bell, Gabrielle Brady, Kathryn Brant, Dave Carter, Schani Cave, Iphigenia Charatsi, Jenny Cheal, Bob Collins, Susan Connell, Tom Cooke, Ian Cotterill, Daniel Redmond Davies, Kara Davies, Claire Dinsdale, Jock Docherty, Robbie Dacres, Emmanuel Egipto, Jhardine Farrell, Mark Fitton, Claudia Francis, Kerry Frampton, Ray Gallagher, Sarah Gibson, Ben Girling, Anita Goddard, Peter Golder, Jacque Golding, Simon Grainer, Eva Greer, Sam Grogan, E Haller-Clarke, Qaiser Hamid, Sorrell Harbenson, Kate Hatch, Emily Hobbs, Craig Hobson, Mary Hooton, Koko M Horton, N J Howarth, Gavin Lee Hurst, Iyare Iglehon, Cal Jaggars, Roy Johnson, Cathryne Jones, Emma Jones, Ruth Kay, Amy Lamb, Adria Lang, Karen Lee, Andy Legge, Ruth Linnett, Paul Lewis, Kirsty Leith, Mo Loveland, Nicole McFarlane, Robln McGinley, Sonja Mezinka, Allan Miller, Ian Mitchell, Rachel Modest, Mia Moreland, K-M Murphy, Sabina Murphy, Glynis Neslin, Louisa Northard, Lisa Noyce, Rebecca Osborne, Abigail Owens, Sarita Plotrowski, Charleen Quin, Adam Richards, Liselle Schmuillan, Kitty Simpson, Richard Slack, Tracy Spensley, Lee Stockhill, Wendy Swee Chin, Michelle Thomas, Paul Vickers, Susy Ward, Veronica Ward, Seta White, Beverley Whittaker, Ruth Williams, Jude Worthington, Keely Young.

Minstrels

Kerry Frampton
Paul Vickers
Paul Lewis
Daniel Redmond Davis
Andy Legg
Amy Lamb
Sam Bell
David Carter

Vocal Soloists

Rachel Modest
Adria Lang
Beverley Whittaker
Peter Golder
~~Susannah Ward~~
~~William Barter~~
Ben Girling
Paul Lewis
Bethan Atherton
Nicola McFarlane
Emma Jones
Jhardine Farrell
Claudia Francis
Dave Carter
Sam Grogan

Artistic Direction

Geraldine Connor
Chris Lomas
Mark Tillotson

Musical Direction Composition and Arrangements

Geraldine Connor

Movement & Choreography

Chris Lomas

Devised Script

Mark Tillotson

Adaptation by

Geraldine Connor

Costume & Masquerade, Design and Construction

Nicolas Boiselle
Hughbon Condor
Clary Salandy of Mahogany Masquerade Band

Costume Assistants

Amy Dowling
Matt Perlington

Make Up

Jenny Rowntree

Seamstress

Vivienne Stewart

Stage Manager (Bretton)

Gavin Lee Hurst

Assistant to the Stage manager (Bretton)

Thomas Cooke

Recording of Narration

Gavin Bardon

Recording of Tenor Steelpan

Dudley Nesbitt

Music

Master Percussionist

Sam Bell

Assistant Musical Director / Keyboards and Percussion

Ian Cotterill

Keyboards & Percussion

Roy Johnson

Guitar

James Docherty

Bass & Percussion

Iyare Iglehon

Kit Drums & Percussion

Gavin Bardon

Percussion

Mark Fitton

Tenor Steelpan

MeMn Zakers

- Dance

Dance Captain

Bob Collins

Dance Soloists

Alan Miller
Louise Barrett
Kate Hatch

West Yorkshire Playhouse
Playhouse Square
Quarry Hill
Leeds, LS2 7UP
www.wyp.co.uk

WEST · YORKSHIRE
PLAYHOUSE

PROGRAMME £1.50

20 September - 16 October 1999



Carnival Messiah

Conceived and adapted
by Geraldine Connor

Carnival Messiah Company Limited
and West Yorkshire Playhouse
present

Carnival Messiah

Conceived and adapted by Geraldine Connor

Inspired by George Frederic Handel's *Messiah*

Book by Geraldine Connor and Mark Tillotson

All music arrangements and additional music by Geraldine Connor

Musical Director
Andre Tanker

Choral Director
Michael Steele-Eytle

Lighting Designer
Robert Bryan

Sound Designer
Mic Pool

Production Designer
Wayne Berkeley

Masquerade and Costume Designer
Clary Salandy

Choreographer
Carol La Chapelle

Assistant Director
Mark Tillotson

Artistic Director
Geraldine Connor

Executive Producer
Suzanne Robertson



First performance of this production:
Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 20 September 1999

Carnival Messiah

Conceived and adapted by Geraldine Connor

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Mother Earth	Ella Andall
Mama God	Jean 'Binta' Breeze
Mama God's alter egos	Donald Edwards
	Haiden Medina
The Seven Minstrels	Renée Castle
	Jeremy Dobbs
	Kerry Frampton
	Ram John Holder
	Matthew Minkin
	Benedicte Seierup
	Nigel Wong
Mary	Anne Fridal
Ragga Storyteller	Tom Briggs-Davis
The Lone Disciple	Brian Green
Eshu, the Dark Angel	David Hamilton
Evangelist	David Mitchell
Dove of Peace	Alyson Brown/Ayodele Jones
Dove's Attendant	Ayodele Jones/Alyson Brown
Voice of Truth	Ronald Samm

UNDERSTUDIES

Mama God	Michelle Scally (8,9 October)
Mary	Simone Sauphanor (21,22,23,25 September - 2 October)

Smoking in the auditorium is not permitted

The use of tape recorders and cameras in the auditorium is not permitted

Please ensure that mobile phones and digital alarm watches are switched off before you enter the auditorium

Audio description and touch tours are a regular service at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, which we hope will increase your enjoyment and help capture some of the magic of live performance for visually impaired theatregoers

The describers will relay details from the programme alongside show information approximately ten minutes before the start of the show

Please take your seats in plenty of time

MUSICIANS

Sam Bell	Master Drummer/Percussion
James Docherty	Guitar
DJ Soul Criminal	Decks
James Goldingay	Bass Guitar
Roy Johnson	Keyboards
Michael Lovelock	Assistant Musical Director/Keyboards
Dudley Nesbitt	Steelpans
Charlie Moore	Kit/Additional Percussion
Andrew Penny	Percussion
Seiko Susso	Kora
Mark Taylor	Percussion
Danny Templeman	Percussion

THE CARNIVAL MESSIAH COMMUNITY BAND

Andre Johnson, Joshua Johnson, Jared Jackson, Keiran Ridges, Marion Small

THE CARNIVAL MESSIAH STEEL BAND led by Dudley Nesbitt

Rosalind Coleman, Charlotte Emery, Sherelle Freeman, David Gudgeon, Rebecca Howells, Victoria Jaquiss, Esther Keevash, Sarah Linley, Natalie Marks, Philip Pemberton, Angeline Smith, Christine Smith, Becky Smith, Tanya Sobolewski, Thomas Sobolewski, Janet Spencer, Victoria Stott, Lucy Tudor, Trish Walsh, Alicia Whitehead

THE COMMUNITY COMPANY

Kirsty Almeida, Claire Amias, Tim Arber, Justin Archibald, Joanna Austwick, Andrew Bass, Linda Binns, Joanna Collins, Emmanuel Egipto, Leigh Exley, Emma Fisher, Lee Fraser, Rachel Goldberger, Victoria Gratton, Kenneth Hegarty, Claire Horgan, Rachel James, Joy Johnson, Maxine Johnson, Brimah Kallon (stilt walker), Ellie Kingswell, Christella Litrus, Colm McCann, Margaret Marsden, Dan Moules, Louise Nicholl, Anna Parkes, Emile Peltier, Hayliegh Pemberton, Danielle Perkins, Hannah Pollard, Lucy Ridley, Laura Schofield, Calder Stapleton, Andy Summers, Laura Tudhope, Dawn Van Den Berg, Caroline Vinther, Helen Wooton, Karlene Wray, Marion Zubrzycki

THE CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY COMPANY

Grapefruit Team

Simone Binns, Louise Burton, Jean-Paul Chappell, Trudy Douglas, Lavinia Duke, Amanda Hawes, Marcus Harding, Anthony Henry, Lindsay McFarlane, Saffia Morris, Soyini Pryce, Kyrann Robinson, Anna Silverman, Jessica Williams

Mango Team

Andrene Campbell, Jo Dee Hanley, Claire Howarth, Simon Howarth, Hayley Mort, Natasha Mort, Kizzy Neat, Genevieve Say, Tesfa Walton, Daneill Whyles, Carrie Winfield, Danny Winfield

Pineapple Team

Jessica Ahmed, Hannah Balmforth, Fiona Carrington, Nakita Chohan, Celie Gallie, Stacey Grant, Cherié Johnson, Leon Johnson, Emmanuel Manners, Tonia Lyn, Samantha Mayne, Mercedes Somers, Jarrod Zubrzycki

THE CARNIVAL MESSIAH CHOIR

Rachel Bartlett, Andrew Bass, Trish Bryan, Delroy Edwards, Nicola Grierson, Sheila Howarth, Ioney King, Chantelle Mancini, Donna Odain, Joan Radican, Colleen Scott, Margaret Smith, Colin Terrelonge, Leonora Williams

DSM (on the book)

Klare Roger

BSL Signed Performance

Friday 15 October 7.30pm

Sign Language Interpreter

John Parker

Audio Described Performances

Wednesday 6 October, Wednesday 13 October 7.30pm

Saturday 9 October 2pm

Audio Describers

Jill Lipman and Pamela Wells



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Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield Councils



Yorkshire Arts



LEEDS CITY COUNCIL

Carnival

PROLOGUE

Blessing Orisa Libation

*Traditional Yoruban Chant
Mama God*

OVERTURE

J'ouvert Opening of the Day

*A fusion of pop, contemporary, traditional
Caribbean and African folk music genres*

ACT I

Birth

Dimanche Gras The Joyful Mystery

*annunciation, visitation, nativity,
presentation, finding the temple*

BUT WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING

*Yoruba/Caribbean folk/Gospel/Soul
FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN*

Classical/Jungle/Ragga The Life of Jesus

*Minstrels
Traditional Caribbean Folk*

HOSANNA

*Minstrels
Tassa, Bhangra, Soca*

THERE WILL BE ONE INTERVAL OF
TWENTY MINUTES BETWEEN
ACTS II AND III

Messiah

ACT II

Death

Lundi Gras

The Sorrowful Mystery

*Agony in the garden, scourging, crowning
with thorns, stations of the cross, crucifixion,
conflict*

HE WAS DESPISED

Classical/African traditional/Hip Hop

Gethsemane

Caribbean and African traditional

Hades

African traditional/Jazz

ACT III

Rebirth

Mardi Gras

The Glorious Mystery

*Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost,
Assumption*

HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET

Classical/Jazz/Soca/Gospel

Minstrels

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH

Soul/Traditional West African

WHOOPI BAND MEDLEY

Traditional World Folk

EPILOGUE

Las Lap

Mama God

HALLELUJAH

!HALLELULIAH!

Ragga/Soca/

Hip Hop/Rapso/Gospel/Classical

ABOUT CARNIVAL MESSIAH

"With Carnival Messiah, Geraldine Connor has undertaken a challenging assignment. Drawing inspiration from Handel's well-known celebratory oratorio, she has opted to tell the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection with all the colour, vitality and freshness of an open-air festival. The approach is decidedly multi-cultural and while no less laudatory in essence it is likely to prove enormously popular with non-traditional audiences."

ERROL HILL, John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory Emeritus, Dartmouth College U.S.A. 1968-1989, and author of **Trinidad Carnival**.

Carnival Messiah is a radical reinterpretation and original adaptation of George Handel's oratorio, **Messiah**, which was originally conceived and created for large-scale stage and theatre, using drama, Caribbean and contemporary popular music and dance genres, showcased through the spectacular masquerade of Trinidad and Tobago.



So what is this mysterious thing called Carnival? The word derives from the Latin *Carne Vale*, meaning 'farewell to the flesh' and in Europe dates back to the Roman and Dionysian Greek feasts in honour of the God Saturn where social order was capsized, masters became slaves and vice versa. The celebration involved excesses of behaviour and escape from the humdrum—the people were in control! This pagan festivity, alongside several other rites of passage and seasons, was eventually absorbed into the Christian calendar. Most people are blithely unaware of this most significant connection between Christianity, and in particular Roman Catholicism, with carnival practice in general.

Today, there are three carnival celebrations linked specifically to the Roman Catholic liturgy and they are celebrated on the two days preceding Ash Wednesday which in

turn herald Lent—forty days of fasting and abstinence. They are the Rio Carnival in Brazil, the New Orleans Carnival in the USA and the Trinidad Carnival in the Caribbean. Significantly, they have emerged directly out of sixteenth-century European expansionism through colonisation and the African diaspora.

It is this meeting of Africa and Europe centuries ago that has spawned what today we have finally come to regard as a new art form. It has a distinct cultural identity and a highly sophisticated aesthetic repertoire which, through processes of globalisation and mass migration, currently spans four continents.

In 1999, I see myself as a living exponent of the meeting of Europe and Africa all those centuries ago. I am the living product of African enslavement, of European colonisation and domination, of latter-day mass migration from the Caribbean to Britain, and I carry all that cultural baggage with me. I am what I define as a New European. But even more importantly, I am first and foremost an artist. For me the arts are the essential channel through which culture is understood, generated and transmitted, providing the necessary means through which societies express their feelings and beliefs.

Artistic expression provides unique approaches to the understanding, representation and expression of ideas, often providing significant common ground and common humanity to which all cultures of the world can relate. One conclusive way of manifesting my beliefs is to embrace the key attributes of a given culture and/or national identity in new and creative ways, interpreting diverse and exciting material in an original artistic framework. I was brought up on Handel's **Messiah**, but I was also brought up under the influence of Shango (Oresha traditional African religion), Catholicism, Masquerade, Caribbean music and dance, the oral tradition of storytelling and folktales as well as a very solid British education. It is my hope that in some way I have been able to capture some of these diverse experiences that have influenced my, and many others', artistic growth and experience by sharing the **Carnival Messiah** with you.

*This and subsequent pages:
Carnival Messiah in rehearsal
Photos by Tim Smith*



The context from which the production has evolved explores the parallels that exist between worship within Roman Catholic religion, the Orisha religion (traditional Yoruba) and Trinidad Carnival practice. This is achieved by identifying the 'Three Mysteries of Devotion' as ascribed to the life of Jesus in the Catholic liturgy. They are the Joyful, the Sorrowful and the Glorious mysteries.

These are then used in parallel with the Yoruba and Catholic cycle of life, "Birth", "Death" and "Rebirth", which in turn reflect the three key stages (acts) of traditional Trinidad Carnival, "Dimanche Gras" (Big Sunday), "Lundi Gras" (Carnival Monday) and "Mardi Gras" (Carnival Tuesday) with 'J'ouvert' used appropriately as the Overture.

'J'ouvert' translates from French patois to mean 'opening of the day' and it officially opens the two days of the street parade at 4.00am on Carnival Monday morning. This is the time for 'Ole Mas', a showcase of satire and wit, for irreverent remarks all mainly through apt disguise and the "little placard". All morning, people dance in the streets to the live music of their favourite steel and percussion bands.

The music here is represented by a pastiche of ole-time Caribbean calypso, folksong and folk music, dance music interspersed with, and accompanied by, African derived percussion. These rhythms are then developed into what we recognise today as the very trendy hip hop, jungle, ragga, disco and funk dance music which are accompanied by the appropriate dances.

The theatre is traditional carnival 'Ole Mas'. Interspersed amongst all of this and used to constitute the carnival background sound are identifiable snippets of the first overture Handel wrote for the **Messiah** oratorio. Instruments from the western classical tradition, the Caribbean and the African diaspora are all easily identifiable and present in this melee of sound.



CARNIVAL MESSIAH AND THE COMMUNITY

Carnival Messiah's Community and Education Programme, attached to the professional production, specifically targeted voluntary and community participation in the project. Seventy participants from Leeds, Wakefield and Bradford were identified and auditioned during March 1999. They were joined by two gospel choirs, twenty steel band players from the Leeds College of Music, and sixteen theatre and popular music degree students from Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds.

Workshops were held at the Wakefield campus of the Bretton Hall College of Music and on the main campus from April to August 1999. The programme was delivered at three levels: in performance skills and masquerade making, chorale, dramatic ensembles, solo/individual performance, minstrels, the band, steel band and performance management, culminating in the four-week run of **Carnival Messiah** at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. All participants are being assessed on both workshop and production performance.

Production team workshop leaders were drawn in the main from the Yorkshire region—David Hamilton of Phoenix Dance and RJC in dance; Mark Tillotson in Drama and Mime; Sam Bell, master drummer and Latin percussion specialist; Dudley Nesbitt, steelpannist; Leroy Johnson on keyboards; led by Geraldine Connor, MMus (London), LRSM, Dip. Ed. and Head of the Popular Music Studies degree at Bretton Hall. Greta Mendez, the doyen of Caribbean dance and folklore, and Clary Salandy of Mahogany Arts masquerade and costume designers in London, also contributed. Tutors included: Naomi Czuba, Gloria Laing, Kirsty Almeida, Laura Schofield, Michael Lovelock, Charlie Moore, Andrew Penny, Danny Templeman, Mark Taylor and James Goldingay.

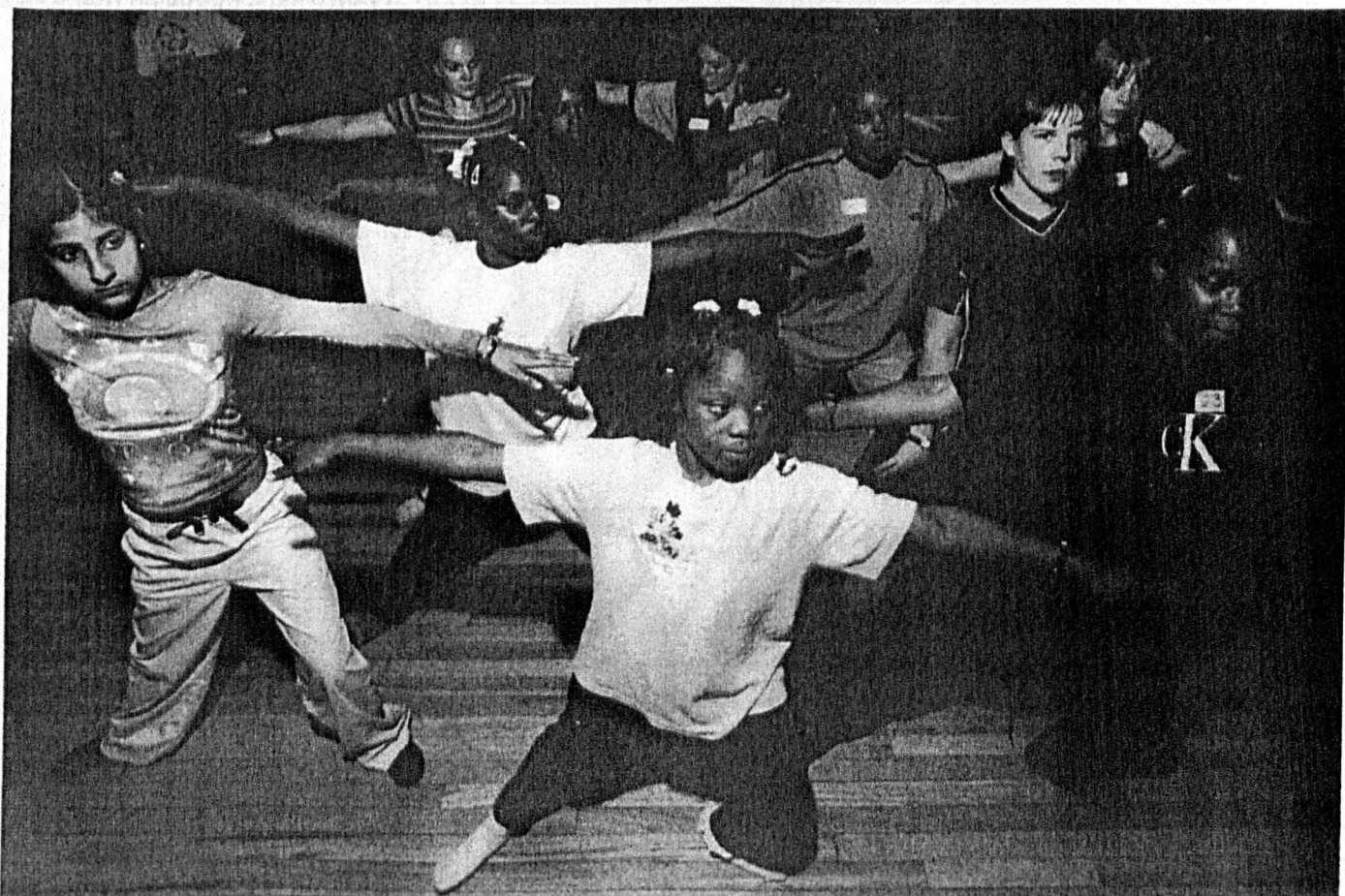


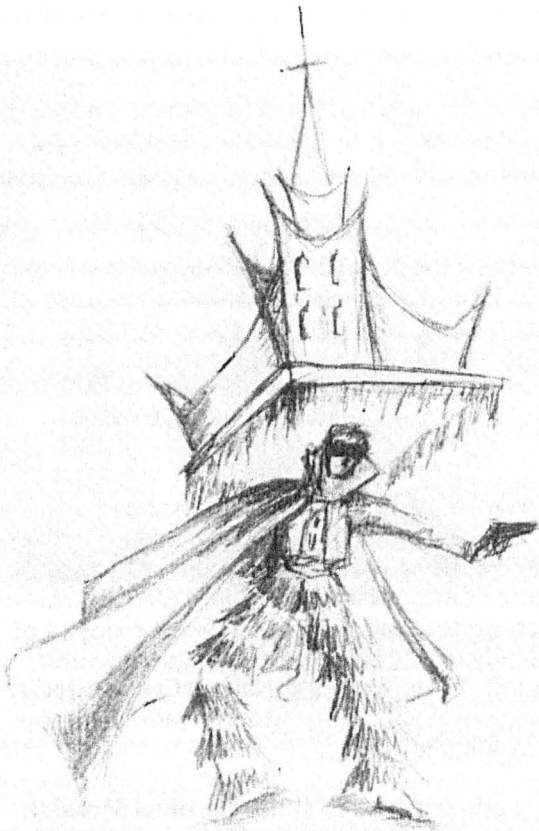
BRETTON HALL

COLLEGE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

*Sponsored by Bretton Hall
College, University of Leeds*

Bretton Hall College of Music, University of Leeds, partners with the **Carnival Messiah** Company in the educational programme, generously provided workshop and rehearsal facilities, musical equipment and accommodation at their Wakefield and West Bretton campuses.





J'OUVERT

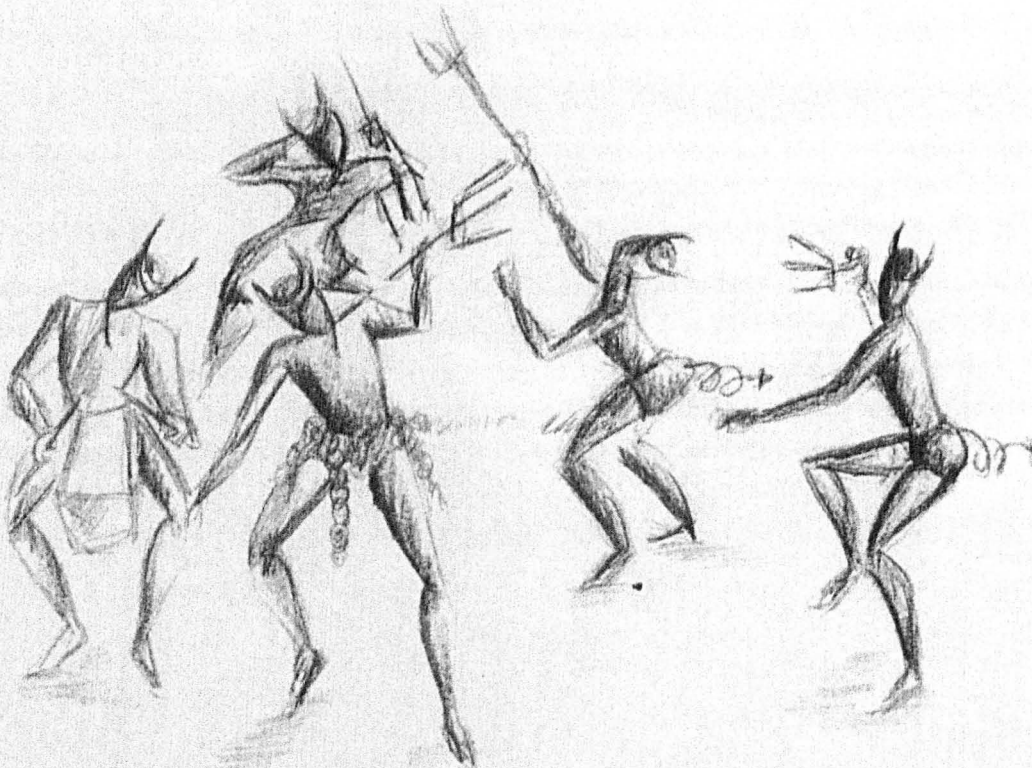
The most traditional enactment of Trinidad carnival, J'ouvert, is derived from the time during slavery when all the enslaved Africans and their masters would gather at various sugar plantations to burn the cane fields, in a bid to rid them of insects and snakes before harvesting.

This enactment, called Cannes Brulees, is now known to be the only time of the year that enslaved Africans from different plantations were able to legitimately get together en masse. It was a time of celebration for them; many marriages, child naming ceremonies and personal thanksgiving were known to take place under the guise of Cannes Brulees.

It is no wonder that when emancipation took effect in Trinidad on August 1, 1834, the enslaved Africans celebrated their newly acquired freedom by reproducing and instating the enactment of Cannes Brulees as an anniversary symbol of liberation and freedom.

*This and next page:
Costume designs by
Clary Salandy for
Carnival Messiah*

The Cannes Brulees, under its new guise of Carnival/J'ouvert celebration, provided the model for tribal and later mass mobilisation of a disenfranchised people by providing the blueprint upon which the carnival masquerade bands of today have modelled themselves.



ORISHA

Orisha is a Yoruba derived, non-Christian religion within which over 600 deities are worshipped. However, as with other belief systems, there is the notion of one supreme God—Oludumare. There is no written liturgy or sacred book. In the Orisha faith, the devotee derives a sense of well-being and self-worth from practising what are essentially community focused enactments and keeping in close touch with nature. The continuity and uniformity of the religion has depended upon the maintenance of the oral tradition through the generations.

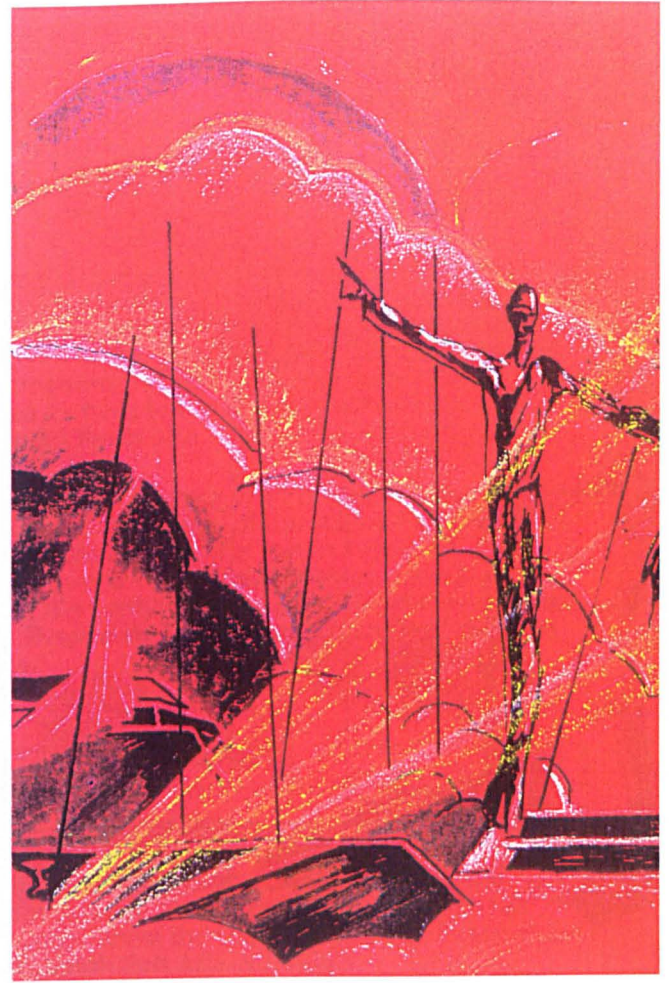
There is a legitimate link between the Christian religion and the Orisha religions that has manifested itself through a process described as syncretism. This came about when, in a bid by the enslaved Africans to preserve the few remains of their African heritage, on arrival in the Caribbean, they took the newly imposed names of the Christian saints and gave them to their Orisha deities, so they could ostensibly practise their religion openly.

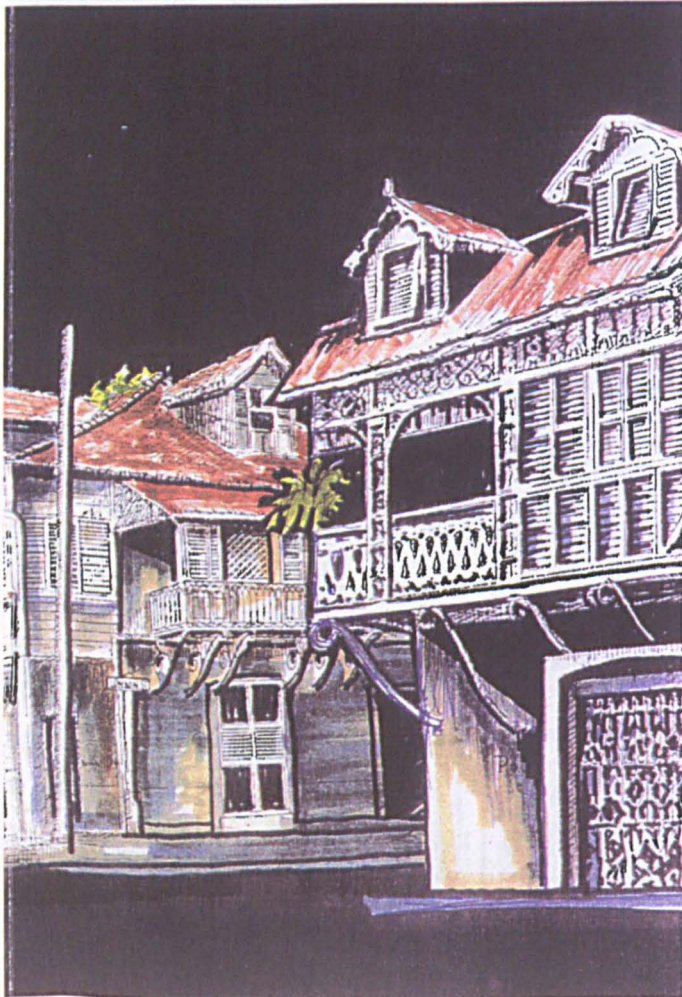
In 1883, the suppressive legislation Musical Ordinance No. 11 stated that "every owner or occupier or their agents responsible for the rogues, vagabonds (free Africans) and such like, assembling in their yards or premises, singing or dancing to the music of the drum, chac chac or any other similar instrument, is banned." This in effect drove what was already a covert practice even further underground. Today there are still outdated laws in existence in Trinidad, which forbid the open practice of the rites and rituals of the Orisha religion.



Shango Abakoso is the namesake of the Shango cult in Trinidad. He is the baptiser, and lives in the wilderness. His syncretised Christian namesake is John the Baptist. Shango's presence is always felt in prayers, at the end of feasts and at thanksgivings when he will manifest his blessings through the Olorun. Shango is the Orisha power of Lightning and Thunder. His symbol is the Shepherd's crook and his colours are red or red and white.

Some of the other deities are Yemanja—St Ann; Osanyin aka Osain—St Francis; Oshun—St Philemon; Oga—St Catherine; Shakpana, aka Bozewo—St Jerome; Ajahjah—St Dominic; Eshu—the trickster—Satan.





Central illustrations: Set
Designs by Wayne Berkeley for
Carnival Messiah
Other illustrations: Costume
designs by Clary Salandy

ELLA ANDALL Mother Earth

Born in Grenada, Ella migrated with her mother to Trinidad and Tobago when she was a child.

In her teens she began shaping her career as a singer, and for over twenty years she has been writing, performing and recording. A world beat artist, her repertoire is extensive, ranging from High Life influenced Calypso and Soca music to traditional Orisha chants. She has made the Caribbean Top 10 with hits including "Second Fiddle," "Different People" and "Black Woman," as well as having an international hit with her cover version of Eddy Grant's "Hello Africa." She has been acclaimed for her performances of songs such as "Bring Down the Power of Love," "Sing a Song for Bread, Peace and Justice" and "Women of the Sun".

Ella is a writer and composer, and her songs include: "Rhythm of a People," "Missing Generation," "Say My Name," "Soca Yard," "Where are the People of Conscience" and "Remove the Barriers". She won Trinidad and Tobago Female Artist of the Year in 1996, and Entertainer of the Year in the Indo Caribbean Awards 1997. Ella continues to perform internationally, in Italy, Morocco, England and the Caribbean. In April 1999 she worked as Musical Director and Chantuelle in the play **Shango de Ima**, at the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, with appearances in Jamaica.

**JEAN 'BINTA' BREEZE** Mama God

Jean is a writer and a performer of international standing. She grew up in rural Jamaica and then lived and worked in Kingston, where she established herself as a writer, performer and recording artist. After studying at the Jamaican School of Drama, she linked up with Linton Kwesi Johnson, who encouraged her to come to Britain. She has since performed her work worldwide, including tours of the UK, the Republic of Ireland, the Caribbean, North and South America, Europe, South East Asia and Africa.

As an actress, dancer, choreographer and director, Jean brings all of her artistic experience to bear on her work as a poet.

**TOM BRIGGS-DAVIES** Ragga Storyteller

Tom was born in Birmingham and trained at Bretton Hall College.

As a songwriter/performer past projects include the invention of ageing rock'n'roll icon Johnny Parmesan and the Parmesan School.

Tom began playing music at the age of five, and singing at the age of eleven. His interest in ethnomusicological style began in a band supporting Lesley Garrett in a concert at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1997. Since then Tom has been working on **Carnival Messiah** as well as developing other projects and bands.

**ALYSON BROWN** Dove of Peace/Dove's Attendant

Choreographic credits include work as Choreographer/Associate Choreographer for Oya Kairi Dance Company, Trinidad Tent Theatre, Malick Folk Performers, and at the Opening Ceremony of the Centennial Games in Atlanta, 1996.

Dance credits include: **Callaloo and de Crab, Dance Beryl Dance, Summertime: the Beauty of the South, Song of the Earth, Electric Man, Tan Tan, Hallelujah, The Dance of Nations, The Odyssey, L'Homme et le Toro and Mrs Merry Monarch.**

Theatre credits include: Rudette in **O Babylon**, by Derek Walcott, and Sinestra in **Sno Cone and the Seven Dounes** (Trinidad Tent Theatre).

Television credits include: **No Boundaries.**


RENÉE CASTLE Minstrel

Born in Canada, Renée moved to Trinidad and Tobago with her parents as a child, where she began her performing life singing in school choirs. At the same time she trained in classical ballet and studied music.

At eighteen she began working with several local theatre companies, initially apprenticing with Raymond Choo Kong Productions at the Space Theatre, and with Immortelle Theatre Company in performance art. Since then she has appeared in many lead and supporting roles in drama, comedy, performance art and musicals. She was nominated for the Cacique Award for Best Actress in 1997 for her performance as Grace in **Dear Counsellor** by renowned Jamaican playwright Trevor Rhone at the Little Carib Theatre, and most recently played Karen in **Mary Could Dance** at the Central Bank Auditorium, which received ten Cacique Awards in 1999. She can also currently be seen in the popular local television mini-series **Westwood Park**.

Renée's dance experience includes touring with the La Chapelle Dance Company, of which she is a member. She has sung in local bands both at home and abroad, and has been writing, recording and performing her own compositions for the past few years. She was most recently featured as a soloist on recordings from the musical **A Brighter Day**.

Renée's freelance career has included work as a radio announcer and television presenter/producer. She has also sung and voiced many commercials.


JEREMY DOBBS Minstrel

After graduating from Bretton Hall College as a mature student, Jem has been actively involved in theatre in education, and teaches drama to a wide range of students. He also plays and tours with a number of local bands.


DONALD EDWARDS Mama God's alter ego

Donald started dancing at Harehills Middle School under the guidance of Nadine Senior MBE. Intake High School became the focal point for a three-year theatre arts course studying dance, drama, film and music under the guidance of John Auty and various teachers.

After leaving Intake High School Donald became a founder member of Phoenix Dance Company. He was with the company from 1981 - 1992, touring nationally and internationally and working intensively in education and the community. He then became a founder member of RJC Dance Productions, touring extensively with them from 1993 - 99.

Donald graduated from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in 1997 with a BA distinction, and is now pursuing a freelance career after eighteen years of touring.


KERRY FRAMPTON Minstrel

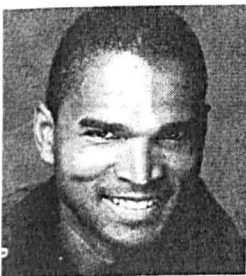
Kerry trained at Bretton Hall College where, as a student, she worked on the original version of **Carnival Messiah**. After graduating she performed in small-scale and educational theatre, touring various productions, including **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, **The Orchard Skins**, **The Dream Machine** and the musical **Paradise**.


ANNE FRIDAL Mary

A native of Trinidad and Tobago, Anne trained at the Royal College of Music, London, with Margaret Bissett Stubbs.

Anne's career has taken her around the world, and she has performed in Israel, Hawaii, Japan, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, England, Ireland, Wales, Canada and the USA. She has performed at the Bregenz Festspiele with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with the London Zempel Choir, and at the Royal Albert Hall and the Purcell Room in London. She is the founder of El Cariam Folklore, an American Caribbean Folk/Classical ensemble.

Opera credits include: **Porgy and Bess** (Glyndebourne Festival Opera/Royal Opera House/Royal Festival Hall); **Cavalleria Rusticana** and **Carmen** (Opera Northeast); **Il Trovatore**, **Così fan tutte**, **Aida** and **Un Ballo in Maschera**. Anne also featured in Trevor Nunn's film of **Porgy and Bess**.

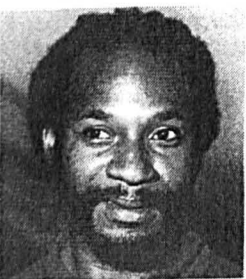

BRIAN GREEN The Lone Disciple

Originally from Trinidad, Brian trained at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts in London.

Credits in Trinidad include the title role in **Hatuey**, Rick in **Queen of Bands** and Rocky in **The Rocky Horror Show**. Brian migrated to Australia where his credits included **Much Ado About Nothing** (Sydney Theatre Company at the Sydney Opera House); **Merrily We Roll Along** (Footbridge Theatre), **Kiss Me Kate** (Brisbane Festival) and **Carmen Jones** (Melbourne Concert Hall).

Opera credits include: Baz Luhrmann's production of **La Bohème** (Sydney Opera House); Jake in **Porgy and Bess** (Grand Opera House, Belfast) and Monostatos in **The Magic Flute** (National Opera of Wellington). Brian has just completed a national tour of **The Magic Flute** in which he played Papageno, which finished its run at the Bloomsbury Theatre.

Brian is an experienced martial arts instructor, and is currently producing an action opera video.

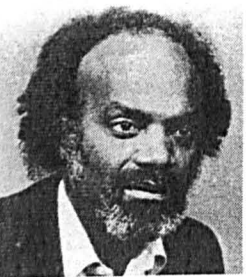

DAVID HAMILTON Eshu, the Dark Angel

David is a founder member of RJC Dance Company. Shows for the company include: **Captured** (1996), **Passionell** (1997), **Language, Life and Respect** (1998), and **Jus ezee** (1999).

He toured southern and South Africa in September - October 1998, visiting Botswana, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Namibia, Durban and Mozambique.

Previous work at the West Yorkshire Playhouse includes **The World Goes Round** and **Granny and the Gorilla**.

David has been working with **Carnival Messiah's** community company since April 1999.


RAM JOHN HOLDER Minstrel

Ram John was born in Guyana and educated in America and Britain.

Theatre credits include: **God Bless** (Royal Shakespeare Company); **The Bacchae**, **The Party** (National Theatre); **Reggae Britannia** (Royal Court); **Destry Rides Again** (Donmar Warehouse); **The Lower Depths**, **To Kill a Mockingbird**, **The School for Scandal** and **In My Father's House** (Birmingham Rep); **Rat Trap** (Northcott Theatre, Exeter); **Playboy of the West Indies** and **Return to the Forbidden Planet** (Tricycle Theatre); **School's Out** (Theatre Royal, Stratford East); **The Trinidad Sisters** (Tricycle Theatre/Donmar Warehouse); **Moon on a Rainbow Shawl** (Almeida Theatre); **Beef, No Chicken** (Shaw Theatre).

Television credits include: **Man Friday**, **The Rastafarian Agitator**, **The Beautiful Caribbean**, **Video Stars**, **Open House**, **Hunter's Walk**, **Crown Court**, **The Roadrunner**, **Rat Trap**, **Playboy of the West Indies**, **Black Silk**, **The Lenny Henry Show**, **Rockcliffe's Babies**, **Big George Is Dead**, **Desmond's** (six series playing Porkpie), **Missing Persons**, **Hallelujah Anyhow**, **Runaway Bay**, **The Jazz Detective**, **F.L.I.P.**, **Seed** and **The Governor**.

Film credits include: **Two Gentlemen Sharing**, **Leo the Last** (in which he performed all the songs), **The Education of Sonny Carson**, **Britannia Hospital**, **Half Moon Street**, **My Beautiful Laundrette** and **Playing Away**.



AYODELE JONES Dove of Peace/Dove's Attendant

Ayodele graduated from the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in 1991 and has since performed with Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble, African Cultural Exchange, Axis Dance Company, Bill Lowther Dance Company, Courtney Pine, Irie Dance Company, Kokuma Dance Theatre, and Shanturia Dance Theatre. Other performance credits include choreographic projects with Kon-toc Dance Company, Nexus Dance Company, and Phoenix Dance Company.

Ayodele is now exploring other areas of the arts and as a result has recently appeared in a short film **Brace Yourself** for the Channel Four series **Reality Bites**. Her most recent achievements include her success in gaining an MA in Performing Arts from the University of Leeds, and in devising, choreographing and directing **When Our Ship Comes In - Black Women Talk**, which was performed at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in October 1998. She is also dedicated to performing arts education and teaches and choreographs dance theatre in schools, colleges, and with community and professional groups throughout the UK.



HAI DEN MEDINA Mama God's alter ego

Haiden arrived in Britain from Trinidad in 1994.

He became a member of Kokuma Dance Theatre in their 1994/95 season in **Spirit of Carnival** (which toured nationally) under the guidance of Artistic Director Jackie Guy. He later attended a foundation course at the Lewisham College in London, and is currently in his final year at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, where he is studying for his BA (Honours) Degree.

Haiden has a special interest in working with different dance companies as a freelance dancer.



MATTHEW MINKIN Minstrel

Matthew became active in theatre as a teenager when his parents settled in Florida, performing throughout Florida with various children's and adult performance groups. He also studied ballet, tap and jazz. In 1991 he moved to New York to study film at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He made several short films, of which one, **Sergeant Doo-Dee**, won the Best Experimental Comedy Award in the Central Florida Film and Video Festival. Throughout this time he continued acting, performing on comedy stages and playing character roles in independent films.

In 1996 Matthew went to Paris to study at Ecole Jacques Lecoq. He is currently living in New York, working on fusing technology with live performance, and he is building a website that will broadcast live theatre performances to people across the world.


RONALD SAMM Voice of Truth

Ronald was born in Trinidad, where he successfully competed in the national biennial Musical Festival and was the youngest principal with the Trinidad and Tobago Opera Company.

He came to London in 1987 to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he studied singing with Noelle Barker and Ian Kennedy. Whilst there he discovered a passion for oratorio and is still a regular soloist with London and Manchester choral societies.

West End credits include: **The Secret Garden**, directed by Nona Shepherd, **Porgy and Bess**, directed by Trevor Nunn (Royal Opera House); Husky Miller in **Carmen Jones**, directed by Simon Callow (Old Vic); and **The Buddy Holly Story** (Victoria Palace). At the Chichester Festival Theatre: **Born Again**, directed by Peter Hall.

Ronald returned for post-graduate study at the Royal Northern College in Manchester as a Lord Pitt Scholar, studying with Nicholas Powell. He left in 1997 after having performed roles with British Youth Opera, Pegasus Opera and the college production of **Werther**. He has since performed with Travelling Opera, Broomhill Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera Chorus, and from autumn 1998 until summer 1999 was at the National Opera Studio.


SIMONE SAUPHANOR Understudy - Mary

Simone is of French and Trinidadian parentage. She came to London in 1984 to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she was awarded a number of scholarships and prizes. She also won the Ernst and Young Prize for Singers at the Royal Overseas League competition, which led to a performance at St James's Palace in the presence of the Queen and the Heads of State of the Commonwealth countries. She has worked with Christiane Eda-Pierre in Paris and now studies with Janice Chapman.

Opera credits include: Constanze in **The Abduction from the Seraglio**, Donna Anna in **Don Giovanni** and Countess Almaviva in **The Marriage of Figaro** (Opera Project); Alice Ford in **Falstaff**, Judith in **Duke Bluebeard's Castle** and Jenny in **The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny** (Reisopera, Netherlands); the First Lady in **The Magic Flute**, Donna Anna in **Don Giovanni** and Fiordiligi in **Così fan tutte** (English Touring Opera); Violetta in **La Traviata** (Opera Box) and Mimi in **La Bohème** (First Act Opera).

Oratorio: Verdi's **Requiem** (Exeter), **Messa per Rossini** (Cologne), Haydn's **Creation**, David Fanshaw's **African Sanctus** and Michael Tippett's Spirituals from **A Child of Our Time**.

Concert engagements include her American debut with the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra conducted by Anne Manson in August 1999, and Orff's **Carmina Burana** in Germany next year.

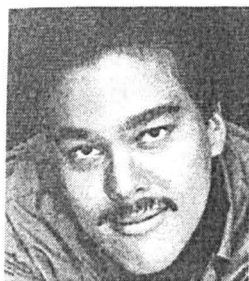

MICHELLE SCALLY Understudy - Mama God

Michelle has recently returned from Edinburgh where she performed in **Café Graffiti** as part of the main Festival, as well as performing her one-woman show on the Fringe. She is currently working on her first book which is to be published by Arts Circle, and she is also working on three mainstream singles, to be released soon.


BENEDICTE SEIERUP Minstrel

Benedicte is from Denmark. She trained at Guildford School of Acting and then for two years with Jacques Lecoq in Paris, also studying the scenographic course Laboratoire d'Etudes du Mouvement (LEM).

She performed in Benjamin Britten's **Noyes Fludde** in Notre Dame in Paris, and recently completed a tour of Gogol's **The Nose** with her company Stampede Theatre Company. This is Benedicte's first professional engagement since leaving Paris.


NIGEL WONG Minstrel

Trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and at the Mountview Theatre School. Nigel made his debut at the Old Vic with **Carmen Jones**, followed by the national tour. He has since appeared in **Miss Saigon** (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane); **Showboat** (RSC/Opera North and on tour); **Kiss me Kate** and **the Taming of the Shrew** (English Theatre Company in Stockholm). He created the role of John Dean in the world premiere of **The Seven Stars** (Tippett Centre Bath).

Television credits include: **The Kurt Weill Event** and **Worlds Apart**. Radio credits include: Flute in **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (BBC World Service) and **Eye Witness** (Radio 4).

Nigel has also directed **The Kiss of the Spider Woman** and **The Lover**.

WAYNE BERKELEY Production Designer

Wayne was born in Trinidad and is best known there for his designs in the Carnival arena. He has designed the winning 'Band of the Year' award a record eleven times, including six consecutively from 1989 to 1994. Some of his prize-winning bands include Secrets of the Sky, Kaleidoscope, Titanic, Strike up the Band, Mirage, Rain Forest and Amarant. He also designed the winning 'Queen of the Bands' costumes a record twelve times. Wayne has also won on many occasions in London, New York, Barbados, St Vincent and St Maarten.

Wayne has worked in several major cities, including Las Vegas, Montreal, New York, Paris, London, Munich, Caracas and throughout the Caribbean, as a set and costume designer, director, and exhibition designer.

He was costume designer for the **Great Dance Gala** (Royal Albert Hall) and the folk musical **Man Better Man** (London); mural designer for the Grenada Government; costume designer for the show at the Trinidad Pavilion (Montreal Expo '67); and he designed the Caribbean's exhibit at the last World Fair in Seville. Costume and stage designs include: **Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night, The Pirates of Penzance, Guys and Dolls, Equus** and **Xante**. Opera designs include: **Carmen, Die Fledermaus, The Merry Widow, Cavalleria Rusticana** and **I Pagliacci**.

Wayne's first love is Broadway, and he has produced and directed his own Broadway shows over the past five years. His most recent achievement was designing the stage set for the finale of The Miss Universe Beauty Pageant.

ROBERT BRYAN Lighting Designer

Born in Derby, Robert was Resident Lighting Designer at Glyndebourne and the Royal Opera House for many years.

Theatre credits include: **Waiting for Godot** and **Long Day's Journey Into Night** (Royal National Theatre); **The Spanish Tragedy** and **All's Well That Ends Well** (Royal Shakespeare Company); **The Magistrate** and **Misalliance** (Chichester Festival Theatre); **Divine Right** (Birmingham Rep); **David Copperfield** (Greenwich Theatre); **Talking Heads** and **Absurd Person Singular** (Watermill Theatre); **The Lover, The Collection** and **A Kind of Alaska** (Donmar Warehouse); **Eyam** (Bridewell Theatre); **The Memory of Water** (Vaudeville Theatre); **The Birthday Party** (Piccadilly Theatre); and **The Importance of Being Earnest** (Haymarket Theatre).

Other opera credits include: **Showboat** and **Oberto** (Opera North); **Otello** and **Don Giovanni** (English National Opera); **Anna Bolena, The Consul** and **I Pagliacci** (Monte-Carlo Opera); **Madam Butterfly** and **Rigoletto** (Australian Opera); and **William Tell** (Vienna State Opera).

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

WY **PLAY**
HOUSE

Sponsored by

GNER

The West Yorkshire Playhouse presents

CARNIVAL MESSIAH

Book by Geraldine Connor and Mark Tillotson

Music & Lyrics by Geraldine Connor

Artistic Director Geraldine Connor

Co-director Mark Tillotson

Production Designer Wayne Berkeley

Masquerade & Costume Designer Clary Salandy

Choreographer Carol La Chapelle

Musical Director Michael Lovelock

Lighting Designer Robert Bryan

Sound Designer Glen Massam

Steelband Director Dudley Nesbitt

Chorus Master Michael Steele-Eytle

Musical Arranger Geraldine Connor

Assistant Choreographer David Hamilton

First performance of original production:
Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 20 September 1999

First performance of this production:
Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 22 June 2002

Sponsored by

GNER



Supported by Friends of
the Playhouse

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Mother Earth / !HalleluiaH! Singer
Mama God
Mama God (cover)
Mama God's alter egos

Shango Adepts

Chantuelle
Pierrot Grenade
Robber
The Seven Minstrels

Mary
Joseph
Ragga Storyteller
Ragga Storyteller's Assistant
Market Dancer
Joseph's Brother
Kathak Dancer
The Lone Disciple
Eshu, The Dark Angel
Pontius Pilate
Jesus/ The Two Thieves

The Dove of Peace
The Dove's Attendant
The Gospel Singers

The Evangelist
The Voice of Truth
The Carnival Messiah
The !HalleluiaH! Singers

J'Ouvert Characters/ The People of the World/
The Twelve Disciples

ELLA ANDALL
JEAN 'BINTA' BREEZE
MICHELLE SCALLY-CLARKE
DONALD EDWARDS
GENEVIEVE SAY
DAVID HAMILTON
DONALD EDWARDS
AYO JONES
RONALD SAMM
ALYSON BROWN
BRIAN GREEN
ALYSON BROWN
RONALD SAMM
JEREMY DOBBS

BEN FOX
KERRY FRAMPTON
RAM JOHN HOLDER
GLENDA McSWEEN
BENEDICTE SEIERUP
NIGEL WONG
ANNE FRIDAL
BRIAN GREEN
TOM BRIGGS-DAVIES
PAULETTE MORRIS
DAVID HAMILTON
RONALD SAMM
JAYMINI CHAUHAN
BRIAN GREEN
DAVID HAMILTON

JoJo
ERNEST BREW
DAVE MITCHELL
LAURA TUDHOPE
ALYSON BROWN
AYO JONES
COLLEEN SCOTT
LINDA PELTIER-BINNS
DAVE MITCHELL

RONALD SAMM
ALYSON BROWN
ELLA ANDALL

KIRSTY ALMEIDA

TOM BRIGGS-DAVIES
STELLA LITRAS
PAULETTE MORRIS
CARA ROBINSON
THE COMPANY



Yorkshire Arts



MUSICIANS

Musical Director and Keyboards

Keyboards

Kit Drummer

Percussion

Percussion

Steelpans and Percussion

Kora and Percussion

Bass guitar/guitar

Decks

Decks

Pre-recorded introduction to Hosanna: Sitar

Pre-recorded introduction to Hosanna: Dilruba

MICHAEL LOVELOCK

ROY JOHNSON

CHARLIE MOORE

SAM BELL

DANNY TEMPLEMAN

DUDLEY NESBITT

SEIKOU SUSSO

TOM KIRKPATRICK

INDY PANESAR

TESSFA WALTON

PANDIT NARENDRA MISHRA

SUKHDEV SINGH NAMDHARI

THE COMMUNITY CHORUS

Jessica Ahmed, Dan Amis, Leonie Avenant, Hayley Beasley, Marva Bell, Pat Bell, Linda Peltier-Binns, Louise Burton, Paula Cunningham, Chantelle Davis, Ruth Dunstan, Emmanuel Egipto, Nkem Emenike, Valeri Frederick, Lyndsey Holmes, Simon Howarth, JoJo, Helen Kennedy, Camilla Limon, Kate Lowe, Sophina Maynard, Saffia Morris, Hayley Mort, Michelle Moseley, Kizzy Neat, Louise Nicoll, Tessa Parr, Emile Peltier, Hannah Pollard, Nicole Quartermain, Bhavini Raval, Joan Redican, Genevieve Say, Ulla Silvennoinen, Lisa Strachan, Laura Tudhope, Kevin Ulaya, Suzanne Vaughan.

THE CHILDREN'S CHORUS

PAPAYA TEAM

Rachael Frederick, Bianca Gerald, Claire Howarth, Mercedes Somers, Jordan Thompson, Lorenzo Thompson, Carrie Winfield, Danny Winfield.

GUAVA TEAM

Katrina Brown, Olivia Buckley, Nakita Chohan, Maria Dos Santos, Joshua Johnson, Leon Johnson, Kimberley Lister, Anna Silverman, Emma Stoker.

THE CHOIR COMPANY

Rachel Bartlett, Hubert Bell, Sangeeta Chana, Joy Johnson, Ioney King, Colleen Scott, Margaret Smith, Shirleecia Wilkinson, Janet Winfield.

COMMUNITY STEELBAND

Rosalind Coleman, Charlotte Emery, Christopher Friend, Dave Gudgeon, Victoria Jaquiss, Esther Keevash, Natalie Marks, Hayley Miller, Richard Ormord, Stewart Paton, Philip Pemberton, Becky Smith, Christine Smith, Katie Smith, Tanya Sobolewski, Thomas Sobolewski, Jan Spencer, Trish Walsh, Alicia Whitehead, Georgia Witt.

DSM (on the Book):

Photography: ~~Community~~

Costume Design Sketches:

Community Liaison/Chaperone:

Chaperone:

Steelband Liaison:

SARAH NORTHCOTT

KEITH PATTISON & TIM SMITH

CLARY GALANDY

SHIRIA HOWARTH

AVRIL FREDERICK

VICTORIA JAQUISS

BSL Interpreted Performances: 12 July 7.30pm

BSL Interpreter:

JOHN PARKER

Audio Described Performances: 6, 16 July 7.30pm and 11 July 2pm

Audio Describers:

ANNE MUERS & PAM WELLS



LEEDS CITY COUNCIL



EUROPE MEETS THE CARIBBEAN ON A CARNIVAL STAGE

REDEFINING HANDEL'S MOST FAMOUS WORK IN CARNIVAL MESSIAH

A radical reinvention of Georg Friedrich Handel's oratorio 'Messiah' for large scale stage and theatre, featuring Caribbean and contemporary popular music and dance genres, showcased through the spectacular masquerade of Trinidad and Tobago.

Reflecting as it does, the cross fertilisation of the cultures of Africa, Europe and Asia in the Caribbean over the past four hundred years, it is a fitting introduction to this new Millennium showcased in a country moving inexorably into the 21st Century with a cultural diversity that is celebrated in this work

"With Carnival Messiah, Geraldine Connor has undertaken a challenging assignment. Drawing inspiration from Handel's well-known celebratory oratorio, she has opted to tell the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection with all the colour, vitality and freshness of an open-air festival. The approach is decidedly multi-cultural and while no less laudatory in essence it is likely to prove enormously popular with non-traditional audiences"

ERROL HILL, John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory Emeritus, Dartmouth College U.S.A. 1968-1989, and author of *Trinidad Carnival*

This production of Carnival Messiah is dedicated to the memory and work of my father, the late Edric Connor, my mentor, the late Beryl McBurnie and to Arthur France and the late Roy Walmesley who brought me to Leeds and to Jude Kelly, who kept me in Leeds.
Geraldine Connor 2002

PROLOGUE

'ORISA LIBATION'

Invocation & Blessing of the Space

Narration

IN THE BEGINNING

OVERTURE

J'OUVERT

Green Corner, Port-of-Spain

ACT I

The Annunciation and Visitation

SHANGO AYE

In an Orisa tent

The Nativity

WONDERFUL STORY

Other Places and Bethlehem

The Celebration

FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

Bethlehem Market Place

Narration

JESUS WALKIN' JESUS TALKIN'

The Temptations and The Miracles

SANS HUMANITIE

The Triumphant Palm Sunday Procession

HOSANNA

Jerusalem

The Last Supper

SANS HUMANITIE

ACT II

Agony in the Garden

BEYOND THE GARDEN

The Garden of Gethsemane

The Scourging

HADES

The World of Hell and Damnation

Pontius Pilate: Crowning with Thorns
Outside Pilate's Palace

Stations of the Cross: The Crucifixion

CRUCIFIXION ADAGIO I

Calvary Hill

Narration

MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

Calvary Hill

The Transformation

CRUCIFIXION ADAGIO I

Calvary Hill

INTERMISSION

There will be one interval of twenty minutes

ACT III

The Gathering of the Disciples

HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET

Taking the Gospel to the World

THE ASCENSION, PENTECOST AND THE ASSUMPTION

In a Room Somewhere

The Resurrection

REDEEMER

Goodbyes!

WHOOPI BAND MEDLEY

Narration

THE LIGHT SHINED IN THE DARKNESS

The Celebration

!HALLELUIAH! CHORUS

EPILOGUE

'Las Lap'

!HALLELUIAH!



KIRSTY ALMEIDA

!HalleluiaH! Singer

Trained: Laban School of Dance & Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds.

Kirsty is a vocalist, songwriter, promoter and performer. She held the title of Young Musician of the Year in Gibraltar and is currently directing the tour of **Cubanite** (October 2002).



ELLA ANDALL

Mother Earth!/HalleluiaH! Singer

Ella has been writing, performing and recording for over twenty years. She was the recipient of and Best Female Composer two years running, Best Female Artist in Trinidad and Tobago, and Best Female Vocalist in the Sunshine Awards USA.

Theatre credits include: **Tales of the Orisha** (University of the West Indies), **Carnival Messiah**, **Yaa Asantewaa-Warrior Queen** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

As a world beat artist, Ella has performed alongside many legendary artists. She continues to perform internationally in the USA, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean.



JEAN 'BINTA' BREEZE

Mama God

Jean 'Binta' Breeze is a writer and performer of national standing.

Theatre credits include: **The Prayer** (Young Vic), **One Love** (Lyric Hammersmith), **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Film credits include: As writer, **Hallelujah Anyhow** (BFI BBC2) and **Brixton**.

Publications of Jean's work include: **The Arrival of Brighteye**, **On the Edge of an Island**, **Ryddim Ravings** and **Spring Cleaning**. Jean's work has also been widely anthologised.

As an actress, dancer, choreographer and director, Jean brings all of her artistic expression to bear on her work as a poet.



TOM BRIGGS-DAVIES

**Ragga Storyteller/Eshu's attendant/
!HalleluiaH! Singer**

Trained: Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Born in Birmingham, Tom spends most of his time in London working with the 'glammily riffastic' sound of the Goose.



ALYSON BROWN

Pierrot Grenade/The Dove of Peace/The Carnival Messiah

Dance, Theatre and Carnival credits include: **Tan Tan** (1990) **Mrs Merry Monarch** (1990) **Joy To The World** (1995), **Spirit of the South** (1996 Summer Olympic Opening) **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse) **Dancing Skeletons** (2002 Radio City Music Hall, New York)



JEM DOBBS

Minstrel

Trained: Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds

Jem was born and raised in Leeds. His most recent appearance was in **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** (Shrewsbury Castle). His next planned venture is a production based on the life of legendary trumpet player Buddy Bolden.

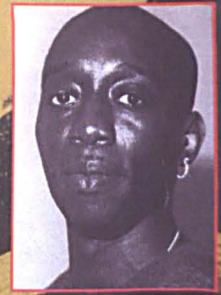
DONALD EDWARDS

Mama God's alter ego

Trained: Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

Donald was a founder member of Phoenix Dance Company. He toured nationally and internationally with the company between 1981 and 1992 working within education and the community. Donald then became a founder member of RJC Dance Productions touring extensively with them from 1993 to 1999

He is now a freelance artist.



BEN FOX

Minstrel

Trained: East 15

Theatre credits include: **Millennium Mysteries** (Teatr Biuro Podrozy, Poland), **As You Like It** (Creation, Oxford), **Happy End** (Theatre Clwyd), **Keep On Running** (Birmingham Repertory Theatre), **Frankie and Tommy** (Lyric Hammersmith), **A Taste of Honey**, **The Gambler** (Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch), **EX** (Battersea Arts Centre), **Return to the Forbidden Planet** (Cambridge Theatre, West End), **Kes** (A.C.T Paris).



ANNE FRIDAL

Mary/Hosanna Celebration Leader

Trained: The Royal College of Music

Theatre credits include: 1999 production of **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse) **Porgy and Bess** (Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Royal Opera House, Virginia Opera USA, Blaisdell Opera Hawaii, Royal Festival Hall, Eugene Opera USA, Sarasota Opera USA, productions in Israel, Japan, Ireland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Austria). **Cavalleria Rusticana** (Opera Northeast, New York and Boston USA).



KERRY FRAMPTON

Minstrel

Trained: Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds

As a student, Kerry worked on the original workshops for **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse) and has been involved with the production since 1994. She currently works with the English Touring Theatre.

Theatre credits include: **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (Cambridge Arts Theatre), **Paradise** (Morag House Theatre), **A Change of Mind** (Sadler's Wells).



BRIAN GREEN

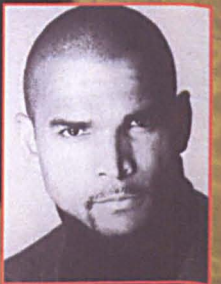
Chantuelle/Joseph/Hosanna Celebration Leader/
The Lone Disciple

Trained: The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

Theatre credits include: **The White Devil** (Brooklyn Academy of Music NY/STC), **Carmen**, **The Magic Flute** (Pegasus Opera, London), **Porgy and Bess** (Grand Opera House, Belfast), **Carmen Jones** (Melbourne Concert Hall), **The Caribbean Tempest** (Royal Botanical Gardens, Sydney), **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Merrily We Roll Along**, **Much Ado About Nothing** (Sydney Theatre Company), **Been So Long** (Stables Theatre).

Television credits include: **West Wood Park** (Trinidad).

website: www.brian-green.net

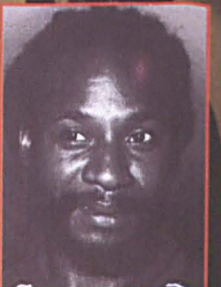


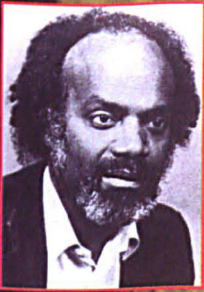
DAVID HAMILTON

Eshu, The Dark Angel/Assistant Choreographer

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah**, **The World Goes Round**, **Granny and the Gorilla** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Dance credits include: **Jus ezee**, **Language**, **Life and Respect**, **Passionell**, **Captured**, all for RJC Dance Company of which David is a founder member.





RAM JOHN HOLDER

Minstrel

Ram John was born in Guyana and educated in America and Britain.

Theatre credits include: **Julius Caesar** (Bristol Old Vic), **In My Father's House**, **The School for Scandal**, **The Lower Depths** (Birmingham Repertory Theatre).

Television credits include: **Desmond's**, **Porkpie**, **The Governor**.

Film credits include: **Playing Away** and **Lucky Break** (Film 4).



AYO JONES

The Dove's attendant

Trained: Northern School of Contemporary Dance and University of Leeds.

Dance credits include work with companies: African Cultural Exchange, Irie and Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble.

Theatre credits include: **Spirit Global** (Selfridges), **Carnival Messiah**, **Living Stories – Journeys To ...** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Beauty and the Beast** (Lawrence Batley Theatre).

Ayo works as a teacher, choreographer, writer and director throughout Yorkshire and the UK.



STELLA LITRAS

!HalleluiaH! Singer

Trained: Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds.

Theatre credits include: **Yaa Asantewaa–Warrior Queen**, **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Composer credits include: **Roots** (Bretton Hall College), **Snowblack and Rose Red** (Theatre Royal Stratford East), **Living Stories** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Stella has visited Trinidad on many occasions for musical growth and studied the Orisha culture as well as the sounds and styles of Trinidadian music.



GLENDA McSWEEN

Minstrel

Trained: Boston University

As her most important milestone in life, Glenda cites the birth of her son. Working with Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott and her voice teacher Phylis Curtin are amongst her most important career highlights.



DAVE MITCHELL

The Evangelist

Having studied studio recording, popular music, Latin percussion and singing, Dave teaches, performs, writes and records. He is currently devising a film and stage show entitled **The Formidable Charlton's Alien Vampire Disco**.



PAULETTE MORRIS

Assistant Ragga Storyteller / !HalleluiaH! Singer

Paulette was born in Leeds and is a singer/songwriter. She currently works as a vocal tutor at Leeds College of Music. Paulette has worked as a backing singer for Boyzone, Peter Andre, Finlay Quaye and many others. She performed in **Spirit Global** at Selfridges in Manchester and London. With her sister Annette, Paulette enjoyed a number two hit in the reggae charts with **Slipping Away** on Ariwa records.

CARA ROBINSON

!HalleluiaH! Singer

Trained: Bretton Hall, University of Leeds

Cara has co-written and performed on tracks released under David Holmes, 13 AMP and L.T.J Bukem. Current projects include the live band 'Bumper' and upcoming EP **Cara Vs Waxlounge**.



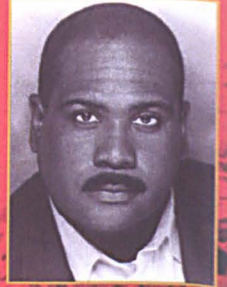
RONALD SAMM

Robber / Hosanna Celebration Leader /The Voice of Truth

Trained: Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Northern College of Music and the National Opera Studio

Ronald was born and raised in Trinidad. His love of singing has led to many roles in opera and West End musicals.

Future work includes roles with Birmingham Opera Company and Opera North in 2003.



MICHELLE SCALLY-CLARKE

Mama God (Cover)

Michelle was born and raised in Leeds. She appeared in the 1999 production of **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse). Since the release of her book and album **I Am**, Michelle has grown as a performance poet nationally and in Europe. She will be performing at Glastonbury, Edinburgh and the Crossing the Border Festival in Amsterdam.



BENEDICTE SEIERUP

Minstrel

Trained: Guildford School of Acting and Ecole Jaques Lecoq, Paris.

Benedicte is from Denmark and is a founder member of Stampede Theatre Company.

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Fly Dragon** (Hoxton Hall), **The Nose** (Etcetera Theatre), **Marriage** (Thorndike Theatre), **Bloody Mary** (Theatre Antibia), **L'Arche de Noe** (Notre Dame, Paris).

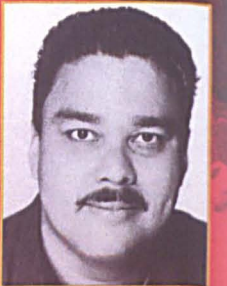


NIGEL WONG

Minstrel

Trained: Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Mountview Theatre School

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Carmen Jones** (Old Vic), **Miss Saigon** (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane), **Showboat** (Royal Shakespeare Company/Opera North). Nigel created the role of John Dean in the world première of **The Seven Stars** (Tippett Centre Bath). Radio credits include: **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (BBC World Service), **Eye Witness** (Radio 4).



WAYNE BERKELEY

Production Designer

Wayne was born in Trinidad and is best known there for his designs in the carnival arena. He has designed the award-winning 'Band of the Year' a record eleven times including six consecutively. He also designed the winning 'Queen of Bands' costumes a record twelve times. Wayne has also won awards on many occasions in London, New York, Barbados, St Vincent and St Martin. Wayne has worked in several major cities, including Las Vegas, Montreal, New York, Paris, London, Munich, Caracas and throughout the Caribbean, as a set and costume designer, director and exhibition designer.

Costume design credits include: **Great Dance Gala** (Royal Albert Hall), **Man Better Man** (London).

Production design credits include: **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **The Miss Universe Beauty Pageant**.

Costume and design credits include: **Romeo and Juliet**, **Twelfth Night**, **The Pirates of Penzance**, **Guys and Dolls**, **Equus** and **Xante**.

Opera designs include: **Carmen**, **Die Feildermaus**, **The Merry Widow**, **Cavalleria Rusticana** and **I Pagliacci**.

Wayne's first love is Broadway and he has produced and directed his own shows there over the past seven years.

11.17 OUEEN'S HALL PROGRAMME 2003

CARNIVAL MESSIAH



QUEEN'S HALL • JULY 21-29, 2003



WY PLAY HOUSE



The Ministry of Culture and Tourism,
The Board of Management of Queen's Hall
and
Republic Bank Limited
present

CARNIVAL MESSIAH



PHOTO: KEITH PATTON

Conceived by Geraldine Connor
Book by Geraldine Connor and Mark Tillotson
Music and Lyrics by Geraldine Connor

Artistic Director	Geraldine Connor
Co-Director	Mark Tillotson
Production Designer	Wayne Berkeley
Masquerade & Costume Designer	Clary Salandy
Choreographer	Carol La Chapelle
Musical Director	Michael Lovelock
Lighting Designer	Robert Ryan
Sound Designer	Glen Massam/Frank Agarat
Steelband	Trinidad & Tobago National Steel Orchestra
Chorus Master	Ava Hutchinson, Geraldine Connor
Musical Arranger	Geraldine Connor
Assistant Choreographer	David Hamilton

First performance of original production: Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 20 September 1999.
First performance of this production: Queen's Hall, St. Ann's, Trinidad & Tobago, June 20, 2003.

with all the colour, vitality and freshness of an open-air festival. The approach is decidedly multi-cultural and while no less laudatory in essence, it is likely to prove enormously popular with non-traditional audiences.

'With Carnival Messiah, Geraldine Connor has taken undertaken a challenging assignment. Drawing inspiration from Handel's well-known celebratory oratorio, she has opted to tell the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection

ERROL HILL, John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory Emeritus, Dartmouth College USA 1968 - 1989 and author of Trinidad Carnival A Mandate for a National Theatre

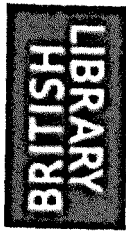
This production of Carnival Messiah is dedicated to the memory and work of my father, the late Edric Connor, my mentor, the late Beryl Mc Burnie and to my friend and musician Andre Tanker. Special thanks to Wilma Primus, Ivor Skinner and Marina Maxwell.

Geraldine Connor, July 2003



WY PLAY
HOUSE





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West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ

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message from the minister

Carnival Messiah is a celebratory insight into the history, religion and multi-ethnic culture of Trinidad and Tobago, which offers a new theatrical perspective on our legendary festival by blending Handel's 18th Century oratorio with the unique African and Indian cultural dynamic found only in this part of the world.

Under the artistic direction of creator, producer and sister of the soil, Geraldine Connor, Carnival Messiah has earned tremendous critical reviews in the United Kingdom where it was first performed at the renowned West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in 1999. It is therefore a great pleasure to bring this critically acclaimed production home.

In the newly refurbished Queen's Hall, Trinidad and Tobago now has a premier theatre and concert space of an international standard which can host performances for a variety of artistic disciplines. The theatre now has facilities for the physically challenged, as well as leading edge sound, lighting and stage rigging infrastructure. It is a facility of which the artistic community and indeed the whole of Trinidad and Tobago can be justifiably proud. We expect that these features will redound to the benefit of local and international productions alike.

My government has a long history of supporting and encouraging the development of the performing arts, recognising full well the important part that drama, dance and music play in our national heritage and our sense of cultural identity.

Much of what has emerged in theatre arts in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Caribbean came about in large measure through the pioneering work of the Prime Minister's Best Village Trophy Competition. In the early 1980s, the then government took steps to organise and manage the National Drama Festival - yet another avenue through which theatre artists could develop their skills and make their mark. If today we are able to produce a work of the magnitude of Carnival Messiah, credit must be given for the level of groundwork which was set.

In addition, the government provides annual technical and financial support for the Secondary Schools' Drama Association and for the hosting of annual drama festivals for the secondary schools of this nation, as well as the Cacique Awards for excellence in drama, hosted by the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago. It is this set of drama festivals which has helped to form and mold our present day actors, actresses, stage directors and technical personnel.

This production of Carnival Messiah would not have been possible without the support of the corporate citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to thank all members of the corporate sector for their assistance in ensuring that this project came to fruition. You have not paid "lip service" on this occasion to our arts and culture, but have sought to contribute in a meaningful way to the development and promotion of our arts and culture, and in so doing to the building of a better Trinidad and Tobago, and for that you must be commended.

Let me also take this opportunity to offer, on behalf of the government of Trinidad and Tobago, sincere thanks to the Board and Management of Queen's Hall who have successfully organised the sponsorship drive for the hosting of Carnival Messiah. You have indeed devoted yourself to the mission of the development of arts and culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Please rest assured that your hard work, dedication and, no doubt, great personal sacrifice, do not go unnoticed.

The Hon. Penelope Beckles
Minister of Culture and Tourism





HOWARTH, Sheila - Education Officer

Sheila was born in Leeds, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom. She works as a Learning Mentor in a high school, an Educational Outreach worker for the Carnival Messiah Company, a performer and a Duty Manager at the West Yorkshire Playhouse (U.K). Sheila has been involved with **Carnival Messiah** from the beginning looking after the community cast.

Television Credits: Fat Friends – 2002

Theatre Credits: **Carnival Messiah**, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 1995, 1999, 2002. **Roots in Boots**, West Yorkshire Playhouse, 1996.



LAURANCE, William (Bill) - Musician

Bill was born in the U.K. and has just finished his degree in music at Leeds University U.K. Bill has conducted the Leeds University Chamber Orchestra; he is also an accomplished percussionist and teaches music to students. Bill is the first keyboard player for the Carnival Messiah production.



MITCHELL, Dave - Musician

After leaving school in 1990 Dave spent five (5) years writing and performing comedy shows, playing the **Dame** and **The Bad Guy** in pantomimes and touring the U.K. with "Theatre in Education" projects. Between 1995 and 2000 he studied music technology and recording, Latin and Aboriginal percussion, as well as, performance and obtained an honours degree in Popular Music Studies.

He currently teaches music and performance skills to disaffected youths and young musicians in the north of England. He sings for the funk rock group "The Anonymous Groove Jam Band" and writes and performs for the rock rap opera **Formidable Charlton** and also writes poetry and has plans to make a film.

Role in **Carnival Messiah** – Evangelist, Stilt Walker, Chorus Member

Time spent working with **Carnival Messiah** – 6 years.

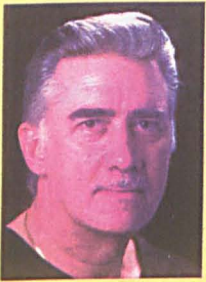


SAMM, Ronald - Joseph's Brother

Trained: Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Northern College of Music and the National Opera Studio.

Ronald was born and raised in Trinidad. His love for singing has led to many roles in opera and West End Musicals.

Future work includes roles with Birmingham Opera Company and Opera North in 2003.



SCOTT, Nigel - Minstrel

A member of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop for over 30 years Nigel created the role of Don Juan in Derek Walcott's **Joker of Seville**. He has also performed in the TTW in Walcott's **Pantomime** as Harry Trewe **In a Fine Castle, Remembrance, The Charlatan** among others. For the workshop's 40th anniversary he performed as Serge in Y. Reza's **Art**. He also had singing roles in **Camelot** as Sir Lancelot and Baron Von Trapp in **Sound of Music**.

Nigel has toured extensively with the TTW, to the USA, Holland, Singapore and the Caribbean islands. He has appeared in film roles—in Walcott's **The Rig**, the **Life of Hart Crane** for PBS and most recently as the Police Commissioner Peter May in **Secret of the Shells** directed by Anthony Maharaj.

Nigel continues to voice radio and TV commercials and documentaries for several Advertising agencies around Port of Spain.



SHIPTON, Chris - Musician

Chris is a musician, live music promoter and events organiser from Leeds, U.K. As a bass player Chris has performed with several bands in the U.K., specialising in funk and groove oriented music. Chris' main field of work lies within the organisation of live music gigs and events. Having his own company "Anonymous Groove" Chris works on the development of the live music scene, helping musicians and bands find gigs through building a local musicians network and organising showcase style clubnight events to bring focus to up and coming talent.

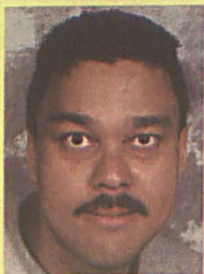
Theatre Credits: **Carnival Messiah**, West Yorkshire Playhouse, U.K.



TEMPLEMAN, Danny - Musician

Danny T has been a percussionist since the age of 11 and studied Cuban, Brazilian and popular music under the direction of Geraldine Connor. He now works as a performer, teacher of music and a manager of "Knock on Wood Global Music Supplies" in the United Kingdom.

Theatre Credits: **Carnival Messiah**, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds (U.K.) 1999, 2002.



WONG, Nigel - Minstrel

Trained: Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Mountview Theatre School.

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Carmen Jones** (Old Vic), **Miss Saigon** (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane), **Showboat** (Royal Shakespeare Company/Opera North). Nigel created the role of John Dean in the world premiere of **The Seven Stars** (Tippet Centre Bath). Radio credits include: **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (BBC World Service), **Eye Witness** (Radio 4).

LOVELOCK, Michael - Musical Director

Michael is a multi-talented musician, playing guitars, kit & percussion and cello, as well as his main instruments of piano and vocals. He trained classically, achieving Grade 8 Piano with distinction before going on to study a B.A. in popular music studies at Bretton Hall Arts College in the U.K.

He is also a skilled engineer and producer. Michael is a successful singer/songwriter, with his 2001 single **Rising Up** reaching No.1 in the U.K. Christian Radio Playlist. His single received critical acclaim and he was subsequently asked to appear live on the "GOD" satellite channel.

In the 1999 production of **Carnival Messiah** in the U.K., Michael worked as assistant musical director alongside Andre Tanker. He then went on to become Musical Director in the 2002 U.K. production. Aside from performing, Michael is also a director of two (2) companies and is heavily involved in the promotion of both Christian Music and Music in Education. He is currently composing new Christian Worship material, whilst also working on his forthcoming solo album.



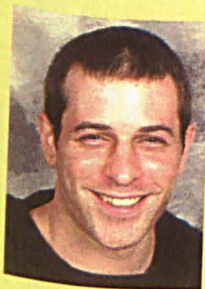
JOHNSON, Roy - Deputy Musical Director

Roy learnt his trade in church and has played with All Saints, Mark Morrison, Gary Christian Five, Bryan May, Cannon and Ball and Roy Castle to name a few! He also teaches voice, bass guitar, drums and keyboards and runs workshops in schools.



BELL, Sam - Percussion

Sam is a percussionist and songwriter. He completed a BA in Popular Music at Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds before studying with master drummers in Cuba. He now plays in several bands and enjoys working with contemporary dance.



MOORE, Charlie - Kit and Percussion

Charlie first worked on **Carnival Messiah** in 1999 whilst studying for his degree. He has just completed his first solo LP and is currently a sound engineer at the Barn recording studio, Gibraltar.



SUSSO, Seikou - Kora and Percussion

Seiko began to play the Kora at the age of six under the expert guidance of his father. As well as working in film and television, Seiko played in **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse) and has conducted many workshops in schools developing Griot music and culture. Seiko has had the privilege of performing for Nelson Mandela at the Queen's Hotel, Leeds.

board of management

Ann Marie de Silva - Acting Chairman
Shaffira Khan - Treasurer
Mark Aimey
Carol La Chapelle
Mondira Balkaransingh - Secretary
Thomas Sanoir
Aubrey Adams

staff

MANAGER

Heather Henderson Gordon

ADMINISTRATION STAFF

Erik Ceilto Lawrance Charles
Rebecca Mills Albon Mills
Pamala Maloney Lenore Kalicharran

TECHNICAL STAFF

Curtis Bachan - Technical Co-ordinator
Todd Hill - Theatre Stage Manager
Wesley Simon - Assistant Stage Manager

Celia Wells - Lighting Technician
Knolly Whiskey - Lighting Technician
Chester Boucaud - Follow spot operator
Dennis Marshall - Follow spot operator

Aaron Rudden - Moving Lights Programming
Tredon Thompson - Sound Technician
Jonathan Mills - Sound Technician
Keith Bachan - Sound Technician

Cajetano Letren - Stage Hand
Clint Reid - Stage Hand
Peter Daniel - Stage Hand
Jesus Pereira - Stage Hand

special thanks

Lindsay Whiskey
Valentine Thomas
Clive Prince
Mark John
Vernil Rogers
Marlon Alexis
Sean Farfan
Alan Etienne
Franklyn Etienne
Sherwin Morris
Dominic Joseph
Jimmy Morris
Ryan Degannes

ACT I

The Annunciation and Visitation
SHANGO AYE
In an Orisa tent

The Nativity
WONDERFUL STORY
Other places and Bethlehem

The Celebration
FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN
Bethlehem Market Place

Narration
JESUS WALKIN' JESUS TALKIN'
The Temptations and The Miracles
SANS HUMANITE

The triumphant
Palm Sunday procession
HOSANNA
Jerusalem

The Last Supper
SANS HUMANITE
Jerusalem

The Gathering of the Disciples
**HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE
THE FEET**
Taking the Gospel to the World

**THE ASCENSION,
PENTECOST AND
THE ASSUMPTION**
In a Room Somewhere

The Resurrection
REDEEMER

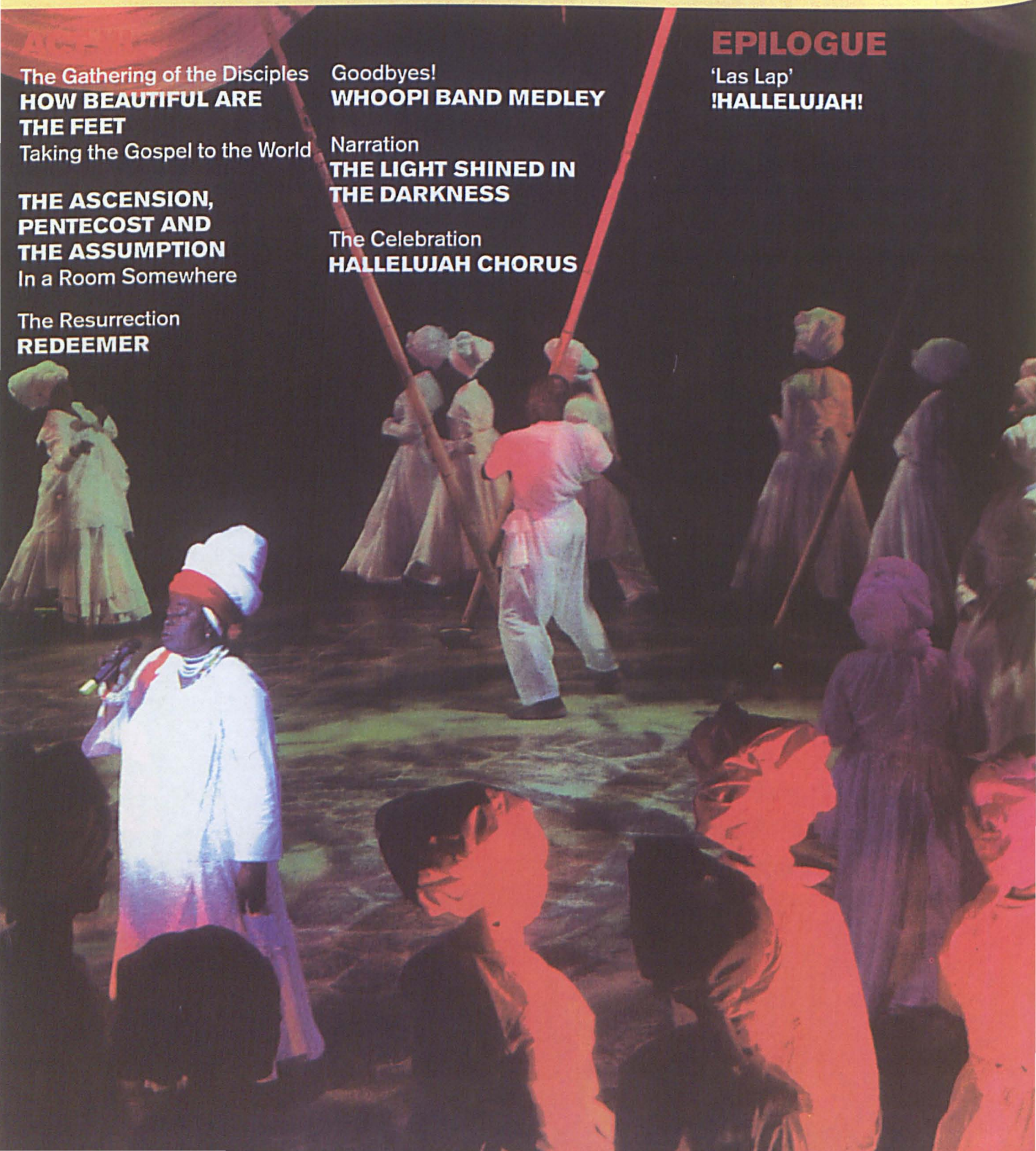
Goodbyes!
WHOOPI BAND MEDLEY

Narration
**THE LIGHT SHINED IN
THE DARKNESS**

The Celebration
HALLELUJAH CHORUS

EPILOGUE

'Las Lap'
!HALLELUJAH!



cast

in order
of
appearance

LIBATION

Mother Earth

ELLA ANDALL

PROLOGUE

Mama God
Mama God's Alter Ego
Mama God's Alter Ego
Pan Continuo

LEAH GORDON
DEON BAPTISTE
MARION PHILIP
BOOGSIE SHARPE
DUDLEY NESBITT

J'OUVERT

Band
Flags

MARCIA CHARLES
NATALIE JOSEPH-SETTLE
CARLOS GRIFFITH, MANNY EGIPTO
MARVIN GEORGE, CINDY GILL
HHG, GAIL EDINBOROUGH
LESLIE NATHANIEL
ALYSON BROWN
ANTHONY MEDINA
BRIAN HONORE
EVELYN MUNROE CAESAR

Pierrot Grenades

Robbers

Belé - Led by

Sailor
Firemen

Dame Lorraine

Acrobats - Led by
Devils

Stickfight
Street Dance

MARCIA CHARLES
GAIL EDINBOROUGH
RALPH DYETTE
DEREK CASSANOVA,
MINDY GILKES, ANTHONY SANDY

RONALD SAMM
DEREK CASSANOVA
DAVE MITCHELL
NYLA EDGHILL
NATALIE JOSEPH-SETTLE
DELTON FRANK, CINDY GILL
DELTON FRANK, DEREK CASSANOVA
THE COMPANY

MINSTRELS

NIGEL SCOTT
BEN FOX
LLEWELYN MC INTOSH
MAXINE WILLIAMS
NIGEL WONG
GLENDA McSWEEN

SHANGO

Priestess
Shango Adepts

ELLA ANDALL
ALYSON BROWN
DEON BAPTISTE
DAVID HAMILTON
NATALIE SETTLE
HEATHER H. GORDON
CINDY GILL, RONALD SAMM

FOR UNTO US

Mary

Joseph
Ragga Storyteller
Asst. Ragga Storyteller
Market Dancers

ANN FRIDAL
JANINE DE BIQUE
BRIAN GREEN
ATAKLAN
BRO RESISTANCE

TIGANA DUNCAN, DAVIV WALKER,
NICHOLAS WALKER, KENDELLE TELESFORD
DWAYNE LA BARRIE, MATTHEW REGIS

HOSANNA

Mary

Joseph
Joseph's Brother
Kathak Dancer

ANN FRIDAL
JANINE DE BIQUE
BRIAN GREEN
RONALD SAMM
MALVENI SEELAL
SAT BALKARANSINGH

Tassa Drummers

CARIB ASPHALT ST JOHN'S UNITED TASSA

THE LAST SUPPER

Jesus
12 Disciples

PAUL ROBERT PRYCE
MARVIN GEORGE,
ANTHONY MEDINA
MARLON PHILIP,
CARLOS GRIFFITH
CINDY GILL,
RAWLE BURKE
LESLIE NATHANIEL,
LYDIA LEDGERWOOD
EMMANUEL EGYPTO,
DAVID HAMILTON
RONALD SAMM,
KIRSTY ALMEIDA

GETHSEMENE

The Lone Disciple

BRIAN GREEN

HADES

The Dark Angel

DAVID HAMILTON

CROWNING WITH THORNS

Pontius Pilate

CAMILLE QUAMINA

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus
Thief I
Thief II

DAVE MITCHELL
SHANE DRAYTON
JOHN STERLING

THE CONFLICT

The Dark Angel
The Dove of Peace

DAVID HAMILTON
ALYSON BROWN



HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET

Recessitative
Gospel Soloist I
Gospel Soloist II
Evangelist

**RAWLE BURKE, MAURICE CHEVALIER
STELLA LISTRAS
GILLIAN BENJAMIN
DAVE MITCHELL**

REDEEMER

The Voice of Truth
The Dove of Peace
The Dove
Kora
Percussion
Percussion

**RONALD SAMM
ALYSON BROWN
CHANTAL SIMON-THOMPSON
SEIKO SUSSO
DANNY TEMPLEMAN
SAM BELL**

HALLELULIAH!

Singer I
Singer II
Singer III
Singer IV
Singer V
Carnival Messiah

**ATAKLAN
STELLA LISTRAS
BRO RESISTANCE
ELLA ANDALL
RONALD SAMM
ALYSON BROWN**

MUSICIANS

Michael Lovelock - Musical Director
Bill Lawrence - Keyboards I
Roy Johnson - Keyboards II
Chris Shipton - Bass Guitar
Charlie Moore - Kit Drummer
Sam Bell - Percussion
Danny Templeman - Percussion
Pandit Narendra Mishra - Pre-recorded introduction to Hosanna: Star
Sukhdev Singh Namdhari - Pre-recorded introduction to Hosanna: Dilruba

Everald "Redman" Watson - Percussion
Gary Haywood - Percussion
Jameel Haywood - Percussion
Carib Asphalt
St John's United Tassa - Tassa Drums
Seiko Susso - Kora
Indie Panesar - Decks

OUTDOOR J'OUVERT CHARACTERS

Pierrot Grenade
Robber
Sailor
Bat
Police
Thief
Musicians
Die Mas

**Felix Edinborough
Brian Honore
Ralph Dyette
Amadu Wiltshire
Layne De Chi
Chad Benjamin
Bunny Dieffenthaler
John Cumberbatch**

STEELBAND: Trinidad & Tobago

ational Steel Orchestra

Franklyn Ollivierra - Admin. Manager
Nestor Sullivan - Operations Manager
Clarence Morris - Captain/Arranger
Aaron Bonnett - Musician II
Daymon Alexander - Musician II
Junior Lett - Musician II
Kell Ann Dickson - Musician II
Shirl Frederick - Musician II
Curtis Jones - Musician II
Carlton Harewood - Musician II
Valomo Joseph - Musician II
Shakeer Mitchell - Musician II
Sule Sampson - Musician II

Kenneth Clarke - Musician II*
Kevin McLeod - Musician II
Junior McLeod - Musician II
Jamal Glynn - Musician II
Anthea Balfour - Musician II
Richard Gittens - Musician I
Martin Cain - Musician I
Anselm Campbell - Musician I
Jason Peters - Musician I
Alicia Thomas - Musician I
Anton Jack - Musician I
Dexter Simon - Musician I

COMPANY CHORUS:

The People of the World Singers/Dancers

**Maya Cozier
Nikita Alcalá
June Hazell
Marie Chan-Durty
Charmaine Quamina
Tremaine Warner
Leslie Nathaniel
Danielle Alexis
Janeal James
Andre Johnson
Marcia Charles
Kelly La Jeunesse
Khalida Neckles
Olimall Gordon
Stacy Gould-Charles
Patrice Quammie
Deanna Dieffenthaler
Serran Clarke
Ian Baptiste
Layne De Chi
Nicola Johnston**

**Mindy Giles
Rahel Moore
Kadesha Holder
Khadija King
Jeniece Sutherland
Karen Eccles
Jonathan Bishop
Maria Ramdeen
Camille Quamina
Marvin George
Greig Warner
Eric Nicholson
Anthony Sandy
Nzinga Sibongile Job
Kelsey Des Vignes
Cheryll Rambert
Carlos Griffith
Alicia Richards
Raquel Winchester
Jeuel-Marie Green
Nakeisha Thomas**

**Radha Ramkhelawan
Reshma Ramkhelawan
Sharon Devenish
Donna Mae Greaves
Stasha George
Marie Guerra
Kimmy Stoute-Robinson
Onika Henry
Karen Robinson
Jameela Charles
Sacha Mc Donald
Abeo Jackson
Candie Rodriguez
Nalla Edghill
Heidi Dieffenthaler
Samantha John
Umeko Henderson
Anna Lee McAlpin
Amadu Wiltshire**

OFF STAGE CHOIR

**Gail Palmer
Judith Fitzwilliam
Linda Mc Collin
Jean Woodruff
Ann Thomas
Junior Howell**

**Rosalyn Campbell
Molly Guy
June Hazell
Patrick Rouse
Peter Bowman
Murchison Jarrette**

**Richard Ried
Terry Marcel
Judy Agard
Aloma Nurse
Donna Mae Greaves
Richard Carimbocas**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Manager
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

Master Carpenter
Assistant Carpenter
Scenery Rigging

**GRAEME NIXON
GISELLE E. LANGTON
LESLIE ANN LAVINE
GILLIAN HISLOP
JOHN MENDES
GEORGE BRAITHWAITE
PHILLIP EDOLLS**

COSTUME

Costume Co-ordinator
Assistant Costume Co-ordinator

**CLARY SALANDY
NICHOLAS BOISSELLE**

COMPANY MANAGER

CHERIE CARVALHO

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS (UK)

**JUNE BADEN-SEMPER
GERALDINE CONNOR**

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER II

TERRY WOODSLEY



ANDALL Ella - Mother Earth/!Halleluia! Singer

Ella has been writing, performing and recording for over twenty years. She was the recipient of the Best Female Composer two years running, Best Female Artist in Trinidad and Tobago, and Best Female Vocalist in the Sunshine Awards USA.

Theatre credits include: **Tales of the Orisha** (University of the West Indies), **Carnival Messiah**, **Yaa Asantewaa-Warrior Queen** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

As a world beat artist, Ella has performed alongside many legendary artists. She continues to perform internationally in the USA, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean.



ATAKLAN (Mark Antonio Jiminez) - Ragga Storyteller

Ataklan is one of the leading youth Rapso artists in Trinidad and Tobago. Born in Chinapoo Village, Morvant, Laventille - he is an exceptional performer, composer, recording artist, poet, painter and youth activist.

He founded and manages "De Laventille Bucketeers", a bucket drumming group and has participated in many symposia on youth culture and music.

After an early stint with the group Homefront, Ataklan left to pursue a career as a solo artist, producing hits such as **Failing, Flambo** and **Pick It Up**.

Highly respected in the Rapso arena and in the music society in general; Ataklan always makes time to stand up for the youth against violence and towards brotherhood and unity.

This young man has taken his music to the Caribbean islands and to North America. He also represented Trinidad and Tobago at Carifesta VI (the premiere Caribbean Festival of the Arts) and at the Assembly of Caribbean Youth.

His first album release is called **Atanomical** and this was followed by the album **Atamorphosis**. Ataklan has also produced the theme song for a television documentary on Rural development.



BERKELEY, Wayne - Set Designer

The name Wayne Berkeley has been associated for 40 years with Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in the Design of Award Winning Carnival Bands and Kings and Queens of Carnival. Who can forget the bands like **Kaleidoscope, Rain Forest**, and **Titanic** or the **King of Carnival, The Hat I got For Christmas**. He had the distinction of winning the Band of the Year title thirteen times, six of which were consecutive.

Wayne's multifarious talents are however not limited to the Carnival stage. His activities span the arenas of theatre, dance and musicals. In 1965 he was selected by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as the costume designer for The Great Dance Gala at the Royal Albert Hall and for the Musical **Man Better Man** in London. He was again assigned for duties of Costume designer for the show at the Trinidad and Tobago Pavilion at the World Expo '67, held in Montreal Canada. In '92 he did the designs of the Murals for the World's Fair in Seville, Spain.

He has designed the costumes for several Las Vegas shows including **Starmaker**. His work in show costume design is legendary. Other highlights include the **Caribbean Carnival Extravaganza** at the Barbican Theatre in 1992, and the Royal Festival Hall in 1993. In 1999 he designed the set for the Award Winning Musical **Carnival Messiah** In Leeds, and again in 2002.

For his extensive, life long contribution he was awarded the Humming Bird Gold Medal, in the year 1974.

Wayne is again the set and costume designer for **Carnival Messiah**.



BROTHER RESISTANCE - Assistant Ragga Storyteller

Brother Resistance is one of the founding members and the driving force of the new Caribbean music style called Rapso.

Rapso is the Rap of Soca, the Poetry of Calypso, highlighting the traditional African Rhythms of the Caribbean. Essentially it is defined as the "power of de word in de riddum of de word".

Rapso as a musical artform is the combination of voice rhythm with traditional drum and steel drum. The Rapso Riddim is influenced by the rhythms of the steelband yards, the Orisha yards (Orisha being an African religion still retained in Trinidad & Tobago) and the drum yards. In its musical expression Rapso can be compared to the Dub Poetry of Jamaica and the Afrobeat of Nigeria's Fela Kuti.

Brother Resistance has won several awards as a poet among others for his poem **Pan Baby** in 1980.

BROWN, Alyson (The Spirit of Caribbean Art) - The Dove of Peace

Dance, fashion, choreography, storytelling... she has devoted her life to the art of performance. Since joining forces with Peter Minshall and The Callaloo Company, Ms Brown has taken the performance of the Mas, the form of the dancing mobile to unprecedented levels. Her inherent understanding of movement and the human spirit has brought life to many portrayals. Paris, Moscow, London, Singapore, New York, The Caribbean... she has communicated the joy, beauty and power of the mas to millions.

DeBIQUE, Jeanine - Mary/Hosanna Celebration Leader

Jeanine DeBique first recipient of the Youth Ambassador for Peace Award of the Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO is currently pursuing the Bachelor of Music Program in Classical Voice at the Manhattan School of Music, New York.

In the year 2003, she was among the distinguished honorees of the nongovernmental community in celebration of international Women's Day, in recognition of her contribution to youth development through music in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. DeBique's achievements in the area of piano and voice since age three places her among Trinidad and Tobago's finest. She has received several awards for excellence in music both nationally and internationally and has to her credit, performances in New York and locally, with some of the leading choirs in Trinidad and Tobago along with three successful classical voice recitals of her own in two years.

Jeanine is presently being trained by Prof. Hilda Harris at the Manhattan School of Music. Locally she trained under Mrs. Michelle Varley.

EGIPTO, Emmanuel (Manny) - Workshop Leader

Manny was born in the Philippines, but is now a resident in the U.K. He is a dancer and performer. Presently he is studying dance at Newcastle University (U.K.). Manny is one of the original dancers of the Carnival Messiah Company. He has performed all over the world as a dancer.

Theatre Credits: **Carnival Messiah**, (West Yorkshire Playhouse, U.K.) 1995, 1999, 2002.

FOX, Ben - Minstrel

Ben trained at East 15 acting school.

Theatre includes: **Millenium Mysteries** (Teatr Biuro Podrozy, Poland) Touchstone in **As You Like It** (Creation, Oxford) Frankie in **Frankie and Tommy** (Lyric, Hammersmith and Everyman, Liverpool) Sammy in **Happy End** and Nick in **Bedroom Farce** (Theatr Clwyd) Geoffrey in **Taste of Honey**, MC in **Oh What a Lovely War**, Dennis in **One for the Road**, Lionel in **The Gambler**, Cliff in **Cabaret** (Queens, Hornchurch) Rosencrantz in **Hamlet** (Ludlow Festival) Don in **Keep on Running** (Birmingham Rep.) Garry in **Noises Off** (Playhouse, Salisbury) Hal in **Loot** (Palace, Watford) Joey in **Pal Joey** (Belgrade Coventry) Jack in **Ex** (BAC) Jerry J. in **Good Companions** (New Vic, Stoke) Stig in **Stig of the Dump** (Swan, Worcester) Billy Caspar in **Kes** (A. G. T, Paris) Cookie/Ariel as understudy in **Return to the Forbidden Planet** (Olivier winning cast. Cambridge, West End). Pantomime at Theatr Clwyd. Everyman, Liverpool. Octagon, Bolton. Playhouse, Salisbury. Queens, Hornchurch. Wolsley, Ipswich.

T. V. includes: **Men Behaving Badly** for Hartswood Films/BBC, **Casualty** for BBC, **Beast** for Hartswood Films/BBC, **Spooks** for ITV, **The Eternal Rectangle** for ITV and many adverts. Radio includes: Voices for **Valiant** Walt Disney, **The Magic Roundabout**, **The Rak of Anor**, BBC, **Anzacs over England**, BBC, **Kes** (French Radio).



FRIDAL, Ann - Mary/Hosanna Celebration Leader

Trained: The Royal College of Music

Theatre credits include: 1999 production of **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse) **Porgy and Bess** (Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Royal Opera House, Virginia Opera USA, Blaisdell Opera, Hawaii, Royal Festival Hall, Eugene Opera USA, Sarasota Opera USA, productions in Israel, Japan, Ireland, Wales Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Austria). **Cavalleria Rusticana** (Opera Northeast, New York and Boston USA).



GORDON, Leah - Mama God

Leah Gordon is well known as a dancer, singer and actress and has appeared in numerous productions both locally and internationally. Her credits include: **Your Handsome Captain, No Exit** (Huis Clos), **Joker of Seville** and **The Odyssey**. She has worked with esteemed directors including Raymond Choo Kong, Louis Me Williams, Rawle Gibbons and Greg Dorant of London's Royal Shakespeare Company. A member of the La Chapelle Dance Company, she worked extensively with the Astor Johnson Repertory Dance Theatre.

Ms. Gordon has worked with children and adolescents in Dance and Theatre in Education and conducted workshops in Carnival Theatre in England. She holds a Cacique award for Best Actress.



GREEN, Brian - Joseph/The Lone Disciple

Trained: The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

Theatre credits include: **The White Devil** (Brooklyn Academy of Music NY/STC), **Carmen**, **The Magic Lute** (Pegasus Opera, London), **Porgy and Bess** (Grand Opera House, Belfast), **Carmen Jones** (Melbourne Concert Hall), **The Caribbean Tempest** (Royal Botanical Gardens, Sydney), **Carnival Messiah** (West Yorkshire Playhouse), **Merrily We Roll Along**, **Much Ado About Nothing** (Sydney Theatre Company), **Been So Long** (Stables Theatre).

Television credits include: **West Wood Park** (Trinidad).

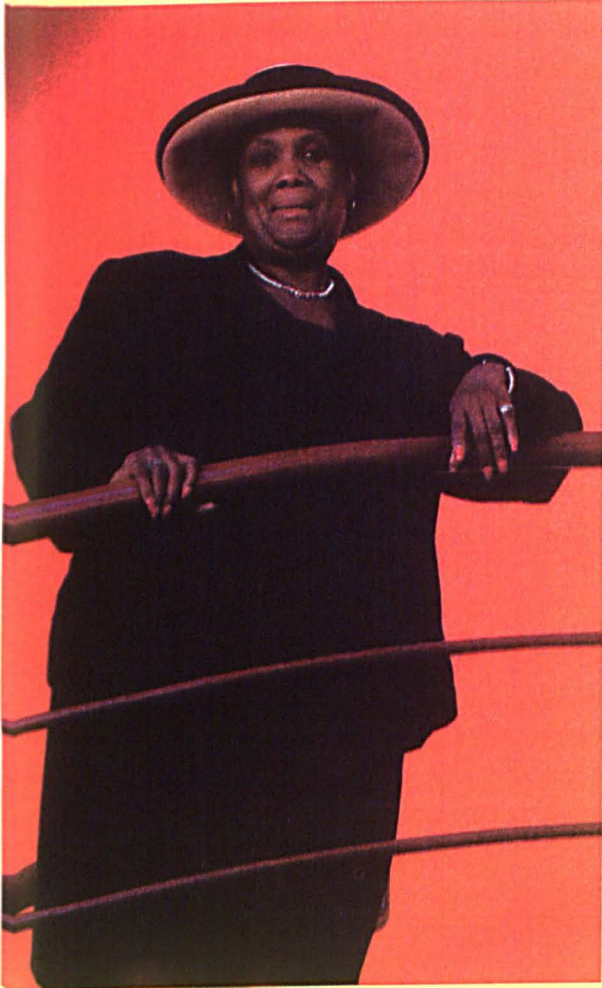


HAMILTON, David - The Dark Angel

Theatre credits include: **Carnival Messiah**, **The World Goes Round**, **Granny and the Gorilla** (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Dance credits include: **Jus ezee**, **Language**, **Life and Respect**, **Passionell**, **Captured**, all for RJC Dance Company of which David is a founder member.

message from the acting chairman of the board



Ann Marie De Silva
Ag. Chairman



To say that Carnival Messiah is a baptism of fire for Queen's Hall is an understatement. It is the first time that a Queen's Hall board has undertaken a production, far less a production of such magnitude. But what better way to present the capabilities of the Queen's Hall in its new phase of increased stage technology? We are tremendously proud of the new facility, and like any proud parent, we want to show off our "baby". It is indeed a pleasure and an honour to be able to highlight our newly outfitted facility with a production which has earned so many international kudos and which is the brainchild of our own Geraldine Connor, daughter of Trinidad and Tobago music legend Edric Connor. By all measures, Geraldine has certainly done her country proud.

We hope that Queen's Hall, too, will continue to do our nation proud. In the last few months, we have achieved a number of our objectives. Firstly, the establishment of the lay-by, which will provide much improved parking facilities for users of the hall, was made possible by the Ministry of Works which provided both the funding and the labour, and for this we are most grateful. Secondly, we are near completion of a publication and a 15-minute video documentary on the history of Queen's Hall, so that generations to come will understand the significance of such an historic building. We have also established online access, in the form of an e-mail address (queenshall@tstt.net.tt) and a website - www.queenshalltrinidad.com - which will be online in the very near future. In the grand scheme of things, our next construction phase will include our administration building, box office and a bistro, where patrons can refresh themselves before or after a show, and where artists who want a more intimate setting for their productions can perform to small audiences.

But back to the production at hand. Carnival Messiah would not have been possible without the tremendous support of our sponsors, whom we thank from the bottom of our hearts; without you this would have been absolutely impossible. I would like to make special mention of the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and our platinum sponsor, Republic Bank, both of whom redefined the term, "putting your money where your mouth is" and truly came to the aid of this production of Carnival Messiah. The Board of Queen's Hall plans to stage four high-quality productions a year, and will rely heavily on the support of the business community for their success. The Board also plans to establish a foundation to assist local artists in making their projects a reality.

Once again, the Board of Queen's Hall is immensely proud to blaze the trail for international collaborations such as Carnival Messiah. We thank all the people who make Queen's Hall a success on a daily basis, including our technical, administrative, janitorial and security personnel, as well as the Patrons of Queen's Hall. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Carnival Messiah cast and crew who withstood those gruelling hours of rehearsal to ensure that the standard of this world class production was maintained, and dare I say, even emulated. Lastly, I would like to say a personal thank you to Gloria Eastman and Suzette Farah for their support of this venture. We look forward to many more exciting performance collaborations in the future.

message
from the
platinum
sponsor



Ronald F. deC. Harford

Chairman and Managing Director
Republic Bank Limited

As Platinum Sponsor of Geraldine Connor's Carnival Messiah, Republic Bank is delighted to have been given the opportunity to bring this inspirational masterpiece to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As you would experience during the performance, Carnival Messiah is a groundbreaking, theatrical experience of sound, colour, drama and immense energy. An instant success in the United Kingdom, Carnival Messiah bedazzled and amazed audiences there with its vitality, spectacle and vibrancy.

We view Carnival Messiah as a tremendous artistic collaboration of international value that offers untold learning possibilities for our young artistes. Republic Bank's unwavering corporate focus has been on enabling the development of the young people of the Caribbean, who will one day shape the destiny of this great region.

We passionately believe in the dynamism of our local creative communities and remain committed to ensuring that our diverse artistic and cultural expressions are encouraged, supported and celebrated. To this end, we feel both honoured and proud to have played our part in bringing this unique, critically acclaimed production "home" for you to enjoy first-hand.



Republic Bank Limited