

CARNIVAL TUESDAY, 1987

WE NOW REACH TOWN and taking that legendary walk up Frederick Street, through mas and muscle and every junction blazing. We pass through Raoul Garib band by Park Street. Woman in silver bikini wining by the Royal Jail, jumbie peeping over the wall, and all about is horn you hearing and bass rattling the road. Round by Memorial Square, we see Peter Minshall band coming up Keate Street with masqueraders a thousand deep. And when you see Minshall that mean David Rudder and Charlie's Roots on a truck somewhere near behind.

The great King David was there in truth, hanging out the side of the band truck with a towel round his neck, bringing in the chorus:

*This is not a fete in here, this is madness!
This is not the kinda jam where you stand up like a moomoo,
de riddim go jam you.*

Is so we end up crossing the big yard stage with Minshall and Roots, to find ourselves chipping through the savannah dust on the other side, in the trample out, still dancing, hip flinging, sweet in the paradiddle of the moment. Is there we was – dust kick and coming across the green to Queens Park West where the snow cone stands and beer and roti stalls line along the road. Smoke and scent of roast corn and sunburnt grass, wind blowing down sweet from the St Ann's Hills, sunlight glancing on sequins and glittering breast plates, Olmec helmets and spears, scattered and gleaming in pieces and beads on the asphalt where we walking, among the debris of Carnival Tuesday afternoon, looking to see where the bacchanal would lead us. That is where we was.

Now, across from the savannah was Marli Street, where the

US Embassy was, and where black people would line up from dark foreday dawn everyday, to catch hope in visas to escape this island. But on that burning day we was walking cool round there, not begging them white people for nothing. In fact we was wining, praising our birthright to mas and pissing on those white walls. Tomorrow, Ash Wednesday, the line would come back long.

Well, is in front there he was. Standing between the dust, and the green haze, and the grass-flies buzzing, and the savannah's burning ground swirling around him on all sides. But where he stood, calm savannah ghost, with his hands shut behind him and his trouser legs billowing in the breeze, like fish still flapping, his yellow shirt striped with blue and starch, his canvas trilby tilt to the right, against the sun, so that it cover at least one eye. But even from the back we knew it was him. I turned to Noel. 'That look like Kitchener.' And we side up alongside him, 'Mr Kitchener?' He shook both our hands, he blinked. Then he swung his hands back behind and rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet, grinning in the dust.

We knew that this private meeting with the master was both precious and impossible, and so Noel and I slowed our vibration to bask in the glare and presence of his myth. And so as not to let any awkward silence seep in and give him reason to walk the few yards to the street and be lost among the blam and the flutter of Carnival, I strained to engage the master; impromptu, extempore. I asked him, 'What you think of the calypsos this year? I mean, who you like for Road March?'

His big teeth were brown at the roots in the recessed gullies of his gum. His impediment was folklore. We expected it. 'S-S-Stalin have a good song. D-Duke song good too... T-T-Thunder.'

Noel, awkward in his limbs, blinked hard in the sun. He asked, 'What you think of Iwer George song?' Because Iwer was fresh and in serious contention for the Road March title, and it was curious that the Grandmaster had not mentioned this, nor any of the other jump an' wave anthems of that season. Well, is this debate what make Kitchener engage and explain what was real calypso and what was not, how Stalin does sing good. Duke and

Relator too. How he not sure about the Tambu and the Blue Boy and the Iwer and the jump and wine calypso, but he like David Rudder tunes. He speak on ray minor and sans humanité, on true-true kaisonians that used to sing in the golden age – bards like Growler and Invader, Roaring Lion and Beginner. He sang a few lines. Teach us how to know the difference between major and minor.

'Ja No!

That is the major.

Jah

no...

That is the minor.'

All these mysteries get unravel down till we left him standing there in the grainy field, with mas and gladness all around. He said he was watching the parade of the bands. He fixed his hat and leaned back in the heat. The master there, coasting a role.

We rejoined the multitude behind Roots and they start back to jam down Cipriani Boulevard, Tragarete Road and cut across to Ariapita, until they settle beside the Mas Camp Pub on French Street corner. Was a blood and rebellious mas that year, like the history of a people was exploding in the full bright and glitter, buzzing heights, bass to rock foundations, cuss words to burst fire like carbide.

See we in St James that night, seeking the last beating heart of the Carnival. Is bitter sweet sadness to let it go, but the spirit must go back up to the hills. Then we hear a steel band – far, like it far, far in the distance. But it coming to come and when it reach we start to jump with them, jump because this might be the last proper dance we have before the spirit gone. Invaders. They had a flag man leading, clearing the way – let the damn band pass. Further more, tell the DJ in the bar to stop spinning them kiss-me-arse record so the people can hear the sweetness of the pan.

As the steel band passing through the back roads of Woodbrook it taking people with it. Till what at first was a trickling crowd become a mighty gang of las' lap revellers, all seeking that last sweet lagniappe.

Invaders tired but they beating sweet. We tired too but we

carrying a joy. As we rounds by the Oval they start to play 'Pan in A Minor', by the Grandmaster Kitchener, his big pan tune for that year. That was the minor so melancholy, that was the zwill in the mad bull tail. Chip we chippin' behind Invaders, following them into the mystery of darkness, into the heart of the damn thing self.

All this get write in my copybook that night, as I write this down here now. Same way. Yes. Is there we was.

This is how we know they used to play mas in Trinidad.
— Lord Kitchener 'Play Mas'