

MY MEETING AND MOVEMENT IN PARANG

25/3/07.

My name is Lordrick Espinosa. I was born at Biche in the county of Nariva, fifteen miles south of Sangre Grande, my father's name was William Espinosa. In November 1941 I left my father's home and went to live at his uncle Aniseto Salsa in Port of Spain. While living there a young Venezuelan lady name Juanita Rodriguez used to pay frequent visits to my uncle's wife who was also a Venezuelan. Juanita got friendly with a young co-worker name Maria Castillo who asked her to spend a weekend with her and her families at Caura. Juanita said "yes, That's a fine idea," then she asked me if I can make the trip with them, I said "o.k I'll go."

One Saturday evening in the month of August we took a Damarie bus at the junction of the Eastern Main Rd and the Caura Royal Rd. We travelled on a winding gravel road through the Northern Range, when the bus made its last stop and we got out I saw a small shop and at the back on higher ground was a Roman Catholic church. Later I was told it was one of the 5 oldest Catholic churches in Trinidad; built by the Capuchin priests who came from Spain in 1686.

We travelled on a dirt road to Maria's house, we received a friendly welcome. When we were about to leave the dinner table I heard a Cuatro playing at the front door, Maria then said "Ah! we are getting a parang." After a few verses were sang at the door the door was opened, the man came in and when he had finished singing his song Maria's father went and shooked his hand and embraced him, He then said to us "this is my cousin Bito Castillo", and to Bito he

said those two are Maria's friends Juanita and Lordrick." Bito told him he saw when we came off the bus and decided to welcome us with a parang. Then he said "I brought something small," placing his hand in his hip pocket he pulled out a flask of rum, we took a drink then one of Maria's brothers brought out a pair of maracas another brother came out with a guitar and the sweet parang continued.

About 9 P.M Maria told me we are going to make house parang. We travelled through a cocoa field, a short distance from a house there was a call for silence, the flashlight was switched off and the flambeau^{eau} was blown out. (The flambeau^{eau} is a bottle filled with kerosene with a cloth wick) We walked silently to the door and started the parang. The house was filled with lights, the door opened and we went inside, after singing a few songs a break was taken for refreshments then three more songs were played and we left.

Maria had informed me on our way to another house that when Bito was singing at the door he was informing those people inside as to who he is and his reason for coming, his second song was the Anunciation, birth, presentation as a baby in the temple etc. The last song (La Despedida) was informing the occupants of the house that he is about to leave, thanking them for the fine hospitality given to him and his companions and is thinking of returning in the near future with the good news.

At the fourth house Shielo Berot, Maria's cousin joined us, we then went to the home of Mr. Luis De Leon, that man was a master of the art, he started an extempo he won

against Bilo and told him he should come to him in the future to get some coaching. It was 5 AM so I said to myself this is the end of the parang but I was dead wrong this parang had just began. We went through the cocoa field travelling down hill, as the morning was clearing up I could have seen the mist in the distant down in a valley so I asked where are we going now? The answer was: To Lopinot and the people who live there are our families and they were once residence of Caura. During the time the parang was going on at the home of Mr. Bily Gomez our first stop in Lopinot I observed our three ladies were not with us, when they returned they were in a new change of clothes. It was then I realized the reason each was carrying a small container. We visited the homes of the Castillos, Moras, Salinas, Reyes, Norigars, Dolabys and Sotero Gomez who was said to be the greatest violin player in parang. At 5 P.M that Sunday Maria, Juanita, Sheila and I catch the last Damannie bus for Arouca then another to Port of Spain.

This was the begining of my parang life for every weekend it was Caura here I come with Maria and Juanita for parang in those days was a way of life with those people, on the cricket field, at birth days, weddings, christening, thanks giving etc.

At the end of the 2nd World War the Colonial Government decided to build a reservoir in the Caura valley they ordered the residents to get out, the people obeyed, some went to Las Cuevas, Santa Cruz, Maracas St Joseph, St John at Mount St Benedict and Arima and with them went the parang. That reservoir was never completed.

It was a common thing to see those people travelling with

their musical instruments while visiting their friends and families, but their journeys were not happy ones for people constantly insulted them with remarks such as: "you rum suckers have no pride, no shame, no culture, even the clothes you all wear among decent people is disgraceful, why don't you people stay in your home and leave us alone?" Yes parranderos were treated like the steel band men in their early days.

In the late 1950's Paul Castillo and I came across two white collar workers, Micky Phillips and John Henderson. Micky could not speak Spanish nor play the musical instruments but he had them at home, John spoke Spanish, English, French and Patois, he also played the Cuatro, Guitar, Piano and Clarinet. These two men fell in love with the parang so very regularly Micky or John would take up Castillo, Tito and Toy Lara, Francis Gomez, and I to parang at their friends in the Urban areas and as far as St Raphael, Gran Couva, Tabaguite, Tamana etc. They paid no mind to what people were saying about the parranderos.

In 1964 M.P. Alladin was staging a cultural show, district to district. Paul Castillo and I told him he should add a little parang, he agreed but said organize a group with a title. I brought Tito Lara, Francis Gomez and John Henderson, Castillo brought his two brothers Thomas and John and a mandolin player name C. Vidal, we called the group "La Pastora Serenaders".

Our first appearance was at the Holy Faith Convent at Couva. After reading an article on page 6 of the Evening News November 30 by H. Roop Dass "An old Custom Is Fading Away" I went to Paul Castillo

and told him what Mr. Roop Dass said is the truth so we should do something to keep it alive; he agreed.

With the approaching 1965 Christmas Season Paul Castillo and I went to see Mr. Leo De Leon, Program Manager of 610 Radio. The meeting with him was a success, he agreed to do parang broadcast providing each group has a title and each member wearing the same color shirt. The Lara Brothers was the first organised group with me as leader. Other groups were National of Rio Claro, La Pastora of Lopinot and Valencia Handycraft to name a few. The first show was held at Valencia, the second was held at Arima, from then on Arima ^{has} remained the Headquarters for parang fiestas. Fiestas

In 1968 the first parang competition was staged, the winner was Ready Mix with Mr. Silvestre Mata as lead singer, the prize was \$200⁰⁰, the Lara Brothers came 2nd they received \$125⁰⁰.

Presents. At these parang shows only the country people attended, the white collar workers and business people were never there, so I decided to keep parang parties at my home in Cantaro, Santa Cruz using the Lara Brothers alone, free drinks, food, ice cream and home made dainties were given at my personal ^{expence} expence. These parang parties were staged in 1967 and 1968. John Henderson, Hugh Woods and Winston Dolly were the parang lovers who brought to my home Dr. J.D. Elder, Dr. Hilda Bynoe, Mr. Andrew Carr, Mrs. Squires of the American Embassy to name a few. These people having realized how enjoyable those parties were began to hire the Lara Brothers to play at their different functions. The first to be paid for parang.

It was in the year 1969 I observed people of high social order began to attend our parang feasts.

In 1971 the weaker groups who had been failing to win a top place in the competitions staged a meeting and formed "The National Parang Association". Two weeks later the leading groups formed "The Trinidad And Tobago Parang Association" with Paul Castillo as President and Mr. Silvestre Mata and I (Lordrick Espinosa) as Trustees.

During the late '60's and early '70's I played an important part in the forming of new groups. In 1972 I formed "La Tropical Serenaders" and became its lead singer in '74, my first attempt as a singer, I came 2nd, in '75 and '76 I came 3rd, in '78 I sang for a group from Santa Cruz I came 2nd, in 1979 I was leader singer for "La Libertad" we won and held the title for 4 years.

In 1983 at a meeting held at Buena Vista st, St Joseph I was asked not to compete any more, I should only appear as guest artist. At the end of the meeting Alfredo Rivas our second best lead singer said to me, "Lordrick, stoping you is stoping me also I will not contest any more." He is a man to his word since then he is only making Christmas house to house parang.

May I inform my Trinidadian friends parang is not only for Christmas as you may think, since it is about our Saviour, Jesus the Christ parang should be played during the Easter celebration dealing with the Last Super, Arrest of Jesus, His Trial, Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension the 40th day after Easter.

The question is: Do we have in our midst a parang singer capable of dealing with those Topics? I say no, only me.

You're Truly
Lordrick Espinosa

In 1968 The Kiwani's International stage their first parang show called "Let the people sing" at Woodford Square Port of Spain, the winner was Ready Mix, they received a cheque of \$100, the National Parang Group of Rio Claro received \$50 for the 2nd place, the Lara Brothers got a case of Rum for placing 3rd and a Hamper for the People Choice.

During the time those shows were taking place Paul Castillo and I had a meeting with Mr. Holly Beteaudier, soon after that meeting parang on T.V began.

In 1973 Parang Groups began to get sponsorship, trophies and cash from the business section. That same year the Humming Bird Silver Medal was awarded to Mr. Silvestre Mata for being a parang musician, composer and extempo singer.

The Trinidad and Tobago Parang Association was about to close its doors in 1974, because of lack of funds but up came a Chinese business man who offered his financial assistance providing he is given the right to run the shows as his personal business, which means getting venues, bars, police, P.A system and full charge of the ticket booth, and to prevent any talk of unfairness by him he needs one of our officials to work with him, and at the bar, ticket booth, and gate he needs a parrandero to work with his workers.

At the end of the season after clearing all expences all he wants is 25% of the taking the remainder belongs to the Association. Up to 1984 parranderos of the T.T.P.A were satisfied with the wonderful job that man had done, for we had thousands of dollars in the bank.

That man happens to be Mr. Urban Kong Lum Yung. The best Judges ever, were Mr. S. Mata, F. Herrera and A. Thomas PhD. Full details will be given in a book Korduck Espinoza to be publish soon.