

CARNIVAL
ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Trinidad Carnival Performance



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Introduction

The Christian tradition of Pre-Lenten Carnival was introduced to Trinidad around 1785 with the arrival of the French settlers. Banned from the masked balls of the French the slaves would hold their own carnivals using their own rituals and folklore and mocking their master's behaviour. After 1838 when slavery was abolished the freed Africans began to hold their own carnival celebrations in the streets

Following the immigration drive to Britain from the Caribbean after the second world war many Caribbean carnival traditions took hold in the UK and had a huge influence from the birth of Notting Hill Carnival to the creation of new and original musical genres.

This resource outlines a number of traditional characters who appear at Trinidad Carnival, maps the journey of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and looks at Trinidadian Carnival Music and its influence on music in the UK.

Traditional Carnival Characters

Dame Lorraine

This traditional Trinidadian carnival character is depicted with exaggerated physical characteristics the effect being produced with the use of padded pillows. Dame Lorraine is a satirical take on the French aristocracy who were plantation owners in the late 18th century and her theatrical behaviour makes fun of the pretensions of the court of Louis IV.

The Midnight Robber

The Midnight Robber is one of the most beloved characters in traditional carnival. Both his costume and his speech are distinctive. His 'Robber Talk' is extravagant and boastful. The way he talks is derived from the tradition of the African Griot or storyteller and the speech patterns and vocabulary are imitative of his former master. He wears a black satin shirt, cape, pantaloons and a huge black broad-brimmed fringed hat on which a coffin is often superimposed.

The Pierrot Grenade

A descendant of the Pierrot he is a finely dressed masquerade and deeply learned scholar, who displayed his erudition by spelling polysyllabic words and quoting passages from Shakespeare. He is egotistical and retains the scholarly manner, but instead of the elegant costume, he wears rags. His gown consists of sack cloth, on which strips of coloured cloth, small tins containing pebbles, and small boxes that rattle, are attached. He may wear a hat or a coloured head tie on his head, and his face is covered with a grotesque mask. The mask provides anonymity for someone who delights in making cutting comments on 'respectable' members of the community.

Traditional Carnival Characters: Suggested Activities for Key Stage 2

1. Who is Dame Lorraine? Why does she look amusing and who is she trying to make fun of?

2. What kind of person is the Midnight Robber? Describe what he looks like.

3. Describe Pierrot Grenade's clothes and say what kind of a person you think he is.

4. Make up your own carnival character.

Describe what kind of person he/she is and design a costume for them. Imagine that you have the following materials to make the costumes:

- Brightly coloured feathers
- Sequins
- Coloured ribbon
- Shiny cloth
- Wire

Further suggestions:

Research the following carnival characters: Moco Jumbies, Jab Jab, Burrokeet and Negre Jardin.

Timeline

Documenting the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its Abolition

1540 – 1850

Up to 15 million Africans were enslaved and transported to the Caribbean and the Americas. Of these about 7 million were transported to the Caribbean and 3.6 million to Brazil, a smaller proportion (about 1 million) were taken to North America

1502

First slaves reported to be in the 'new world' of the Caribbean and South America

1640 – 1680

Beginning of large-scale introduction of African Slave labour in the British Caribbean for sugar production

1730

Britain became the biggest slave trading country: from 1690 – 1807 British ships transported 2.8 million enslaved Africans

1747

Liverpool overtook Bristol as the biggest slave port in England with 40 boats leaving every year and up to 600 enslaved Africans on each boat

1783

There was public outrage when in England the case of the Zong slave ship became known – the captain threw sick Africans overboard because of claimed shortage of water – the owners could claim insurance if it was shown that this could save the ship, but not if they die of natural causes

1807

The bill for abolition of the slave trade, proposed by William Wilberforce was passed in the British Parliament

1838

The emancipation of enslaved people in British Territories

1888

Slavery abolished in Brazil in the reign of D Pedro II

Timeline:

Suggested Activities for Key Stage 2

- 1. How many people were transported from Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade?**
- 2. Which was the biggest slave port in England? How many slaves left from there each year?**
- 3. When was slavery abolished in England?**
- 4. Who was the politician who passed the Act of Parliament abolishing the slave trade in British Territories?**
- 5. What job did many of the slaves do when they arrived in the Caribbean**

Further suggestions:

Research the conditions that existed on the ships that carried the slaves across the Atlantic
Find out what the 'Gate of No Return' is in Cape Coast, Ghana.

This map shows the movement of African slaves to the Caribbean and South America in the 15th - 18th Centuries and the onward journey of immigrants to the UK in 1940s



Music of Trinidad Carnival

Steel Pan

Africans who were brought as slaves to Trinidad had their own musical culture of drumming – they even used drums to send messages over long distances. The rich plantation owners, therefore, feared that drums would be used by the laved in order to organise rebellion. In 1883 such was the authorities fear, drumming was banned altogether. However, people of the Island decided to make music with whatever came to hand. In 1936 the steel pan was invented when it was discovered that different tones could be produced using oil drums (left by the USA army on the island). By pounding the top into a bowl shape and then making indents, different notes could be played.

Calypso

Calypso rhythms can be traced back to the arrival of the first African slaved brought to work in the sugar plantations of Trinidad. Forbidden to talk to each other, and robbed of all links to family and home, the African slaved began to sing songs/ They used calypso, which can be traced back to West African kaiso, as a means of communication and to mock the slave masters.

1914 was a landmark year in the history of calypso as it was the year that the first calypso recording was made. By the late 1930s, exceptional calypsonians such as Atillan the Hun, Lord Invader and the Roaring Lion were making a strong impression on the calypso music world. Lord Kitchener who was the most famous calypsonian in the 1940s arrived in England aboard the SS Windrush with other immigrants from the Caribbean.

Music of Trinidad Carnival: Suggested Activities for Key Stage 3

1. Why was music banned in 1883 in Trinidad?

2. What was used to create steel pans?

3. Why did the slaves create calypso? What was it used for?

4. Here is one verse of a calypso song. Can you follow this pattern and make up a verse of your own?

1 The sun was shining and we were having fun
 But then the clouds came and blocked out the sun
 We were taken away – never to return
 Work to be done but no money to earn

Chorus

Working so hard for a mouthful of sugar
 We've all got friends but there's no time to meet
 Working so hard for a mouthful of sugar
 We have to work all day with little to eat
 Working so hard for a mouthful of sugar
 Chipping and chopping all day long
 Working so hard for a mouthful of sugar
 Making up the words as we sing our song

- 2 They say the Columbus discovered this place
But there were people here from another race
Diseases from the Europeans made many die
Now deep underground their bodies all lie
- 3 It seems the sky has gone a different way
Because the colour has changed from blue to gray
We wake up at sunrise to start doing our job
The aches and the pains make us want to sob
- 4 We asked Yemoja to come and set us free
To rescue us from this awful misery
We know she's coming, the future's looking bright
Thanks to her we now see the light

Influence of Caribbean Music in the UK

The arrival of immigrants from the Caribbean on the SS Windrush in the 1940's and 50's brought new influences to popular music in the UK.

Lord Kitchener ("Kitch"), born Aldwyn Roberts came from Trinidad to Britain on the Windrush in 1948, aged 26, and made his home here. On disembarkation at Tilbury, he treated waiting reporters to a performance of London Is The Place For Me, which became an early hit for him. Harry Belafonte's popular 1956 album Calypso was the first LP in history to sell over a million copies.

Calypso has spawned many modern variants including: Soca (a fusion of Soul and Calypso), Rapso (slower rap and hip-hop rhythms) and Chutney (Fusion of Soca and Indian influences).

Other immigrants arriving from Jamaica in the 1950's brought with them a love of Ska and later Reggae music. Second generation immigrants who grew up in the UK gave birth to many groups including: Aswad, Matumbi and Steel Pulse.

Later in the 1980's and early 90's artists such as Eddie Grant and Jazze B, from Soul II Soul, became driving forces behind the British music scene. More recently Kano has made 'grime' popular and Jamelia has had a strong influence on the mainstream.