

Jouvay Mornin' with the Merry Darceuls

A Small Neighborhood Band on Carnival Monday

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Darceuls Lane (local pronunciation like “darkeyes”) is a small, dead-end street off the Belmont Circular Road in the predominantly Afro-Caribbean, working-class district of Belmont on the east side of Port of Spain. A week before Carnival one could find wired to railings on the corner a hand-lettered sign: “Merry Darceuls Jouvert Presentation '96, *I'm a Slave to,*” with an arrow pointing down the street. The arrow led one to a makeshift shelter of bamboo poles and large sheets of corrugated cardboard sporting a giant painted eyeball and announcing itself as “The Slave Yard.” Here was a neighborhood *mas camp*, a smaller, grassroots version of the typical Trinidadian showcase designed to interest Carnival revelers in joining a *masquerade* band. As with its more sophisticated counterparts, costume sketches inside the camp laid out the various sections of the band, any one of which one could join for a fee, in this case a very modest one of some 50 or 60 TT dollars (US \$9–\$10). Members of our research team had come late on this Saturday morning to explore the possibility of joining this neighborhood band for *Jouvay*.¹

Jour ouvert (pronounced “Jouvay”) takes place in the dark of Monday morning and, in marked contrast to the glitter of Carnival Tuesday, usually involves a serious encounter with mud—mud of many colors in hair, on face and body, on whatever clothes one might choose to wear. Historically, this opening nighttime phase of Carnival with its *jamet* (underclass) dominance, massed *flambeau*, and incessant African drumming was always a sore spot for colonial administrations who sought to curb it in various ways—including outright banning. In the early part of this century, indeed, the cries of “jouvay!” were not allowed to ring out until 6:00 A.M. (Cowley 1996:175). A Belmont resident recalled “*tambo-bambo*” music and “*old mas faces*” in the Jouvay of the 1930s. Interestingly, cut greenery was also employed: “swaying over the crowd was a host of leafy tree branches that nearly everyone was carrying so that it looked as though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane” (Araujo 1984:14). The Bush and its wild things were brought to Town. Calypsonian Charles Jones observed in 1946, after five years of a wartime ban on Carnival, that Jouvay was a



1. 1996 mas camp for the Merry Darceuls. (Photo by Martin W. Walsh)

rather shabby affair, driven by the new *steelbands* with little masquerading, a lot of near nudity, and much “ugly and indecent behaviour” (1947:63). It seems the mud bands that now characterize the event were influenced by post-war shortages. Jouvay, moreover, had taken back the night. Most bands today try to get on the road by 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning. A flare shot up in the night sky signals that it is time for bands to move out.

Like other parts of Trinidadian Carnival, Jouvay has always had a range of manifestations. The giant Tuesday mas bands might organize an uncostumed Jouvay outing for their members. And there are Jouvay bands proper who confine themselves exclusively to the Monday event. In middle-class areas they may only *jump up* in their own immediate neighborhoods. Johnnie Lee’s *Blue Devils*, a Jouvay band devoted to charitable fundraising in St. Clair, is a good example of the type, as well as the Gulf War-era *Desert Rats* in Newtown.² Current Jouvay theme costuming may do away with mud-daubing altogether, or a large organization might provide only a single mud section. “Masplayers” on Abercrombie Street, for example, had a “Gold Rush” section in their ’97 mas, *Trini Gone Wild Wild West*, which involved ochre mud over gold body paint. Significantly, it was 25 TT dollars cheaper than the sections involving costume elements.

In the eastside working-class neighborhoods, mud is essential, costuming less so. Accompanied by percussion ensembles, numerous small neighborhood mud bands put in a long night of *chippin’* downtown to the quayside, where, again like the grander Tuesday event, they pass an official reviewing stand. Prize winning, however, is not the major preoccupation that it is on the Tuesday Savannah Stage. Jouvay revelers would probably turn out in their thousands even if there were no prizes downtown. It is interesting, though, that this essentially “spontaneous” and “chaotic” event should also participate in the competitive ethos driving fancy mas, steelbands (*pan*), and *calypso*.

This Jouvay the Merry Darceuls had chosen the theme of addiction, how people are “enslaved”—one was invited to participate in the pun of “I’m a slave *too*,” while admitting “I’m a slave *to*”—TV, or fast food, or rum, etc. Hand-printed signs inside the camp, derived no doubt from literature on the slave trade, gave prices for slaves together with those for mules and horses, or

recommended a particular individual for “potty cleaning” rather than “stud work.” Memories of slavery, abolished in 1838, lurk in Trinidadian consciousness, even in the celebratory mode of Carnival. Just the day before in the parade of traditional “old mas” characters downtown, a group of some half a dozen teenage “slaves” were stripped to the waist and chained together, albeit comfortably shod in running shoes. Here in Belmont slavery was being given a contemporary satiric twist.

After a few minutes of exploring the camp we were joined by a large, light-skinned man in a tank top. He had a clean-shaven crown and a ready smile and introduced himself as Leroy, the first-name basis being almost automatic in Trinidad. We initially mistook him for the leader of the band. He corrected us and filled us in on the organization of groups such as the Merry Darceuils. A “Captain” leads the band but he is only the first among equals: “We work in such a way that everybody aroun’ get a chance to show their stuff.” Leadership thus changes from year to year, and this circulation assures that the group does not become overly dependent on one individual. Whoever comes up with the idea for the next year’s theme usually becomes Captain by a simple consensus of the eight or so neighborhood males who concern themselves with such matters, the decision being made shortly after Christmas.³ Leroy emphasized, however, the essentially democratic nature of the whole enterprise: “We mus’ have a Captain to go in competition, but when it come to work, we work as one.” Carnival was only two days out of the year and it was important to enjoy oneself and avoid contentions over leadership: “Everybody’s one, everybody, white, black, yellow, pink, everybody’s one. There’s no discrimination at all.” This band, he assured us, was harmonious and relaxed.

When asked to give some examples of Darceuils bands from previous years, Leroy found it hard to choose: “So much mas!”⁴ *None Shall Escape*, an elaborate World War II mas, had escapees being shot down in the street as well as a “gas chamber” section. *The Sky Above, the Mud Below*, also the title of an early 1960s documentary on New Guinea tribesmen, featured the “Mudmen of Asaro” (“a kinda mas”) which the band had studied as part of their research, again, paralleling the larger bands of Tuesday mas. Other jouvert themes appear to have echoed prize winners in the Tuesday large-band competitions. *Ye Saga of Merrie England* was the legendary George Bailey’s winning mas of 1960 and a *Norse Gods and Vikings* won in 1959 (Anthony 1989:501, 508), while the Darceuils had their *Merry England* and *Ol’ Valhalla*. Perhaps the influence of the film *The Great Escape* or the BBC television series *Colditz* was behind their *None Shall Escape*. Such recyclings of pop stuff are common in Carnival, a process that one may term the “folklorization” of mechanically reproduced popular culture.

Leroy declared, “We won this competition 12 years straight,” a boast that was no exaggeration. Darceuils Lane was an important center for Jouvay as far back as the early 1950s. A local chronicler mentions their impressive *Seven Ages of Man* staged by the seasoned veteran William Shepherd in 1954 (Anthony 1989:238–39). It was not clear at the time, but it appears that in his recollections Leroy was referring to an earlier heyday of the band and not to very recent history.⁵ In 1995, rather than produce anything under their own banner, they had in fact joined a nearby band, *Oaksville* (referring to various rum labels—White Oak, etc.), for which they manned a section of “Zulus.” It became more obvious in the course of Jouvay ’96 that here, at the end of the decade, Darceuils Lane was attempting something of a comeback rather than coasting on a 12-year streak of victories.

The 1996 idea looked very promising, however. Leroy took obvious delight in the *I’m a Slave to* theme, pointing out for us the various emblems that the different sections would wear in addition to the obligatory mud and a basic costume of broken manacles for all participants. He modeled for us one of



the more elaborate: *I'm a Slave to Minding People Business*, consisting of a small cardboard window complete with functioning sashes and little lace curtains hung behind. Suspended from a headpiece frame, the window hung directly in front of the wearer's face, turning him instantly into the typical nosy neighbor—the “peepin’ kinda Tom business.” For the very oral and mostly outdoor urban culture of Port of Spain this might well seem more than a minor social annoyance. Denise Plummer’s “Mind Yuh Own Business,” to cite another example, was one of the top *soca* tunes played over and over by the DJs of the large mas bands in Carnival ’96.

Other sections had their appropriate emblematic headpieces: the Slaves to Rum, Beer, Fast Food, TV, and the Telephone, a women-only section. The Slaves to Poverty, Hustlers (prostitutes), or the Protectors (police) were also cleverly done, though less instantly recognizable. The Slaves to Religion were to be in whiteface with a necktie and a bible in hand, obviously a swipe at Trinidad’s growing evangelical movement. For those who did not opt for something particular there was a blanket section, the Slaves to Mud. It was obviously a well-thought-out scheme full of wit and satire. Had Leroy chosen his section? Actually, no. His answer exposed a bit of tension between the spontaneous and the organized in Jouvay practice: “You see, Jouvay is a kinda spontaneous business, you know. Jouvay you not ready to plan way ahead, you understan’.” But as we would come to realize in the course of the event, planning was the crucial factor.

Leroy then took us down an alley to the right, Rudin Lane, to visit the workshop and meet the Captain who came up with the *I'm a Slave to* idea. A high masonry wall and a substantial gate seemed to argue privacy, but we passed easily into the narrow front yard of a white, two-unit house, two sets of steep concrete steps leading up to the doors. Half the yard was roofed over

2. Leroy modeling the mask for *I'm a Slave to Minding People Business*, Darceuls Lane, 17 February 1996. (Photo by Martin W. Walsh)

with sheets of heavy plastic and cardboard, and under this ceiling hung a sheaf of yellow cardboard telephones, white shakos with serpent designs (for the Slaves to Protectors), and miniature versions of satellite dishes. A long work table was filled with tools, wire frames, glue, and paint. Rubble and bits of discarded hardware on the ground indicated that this was a work area for more than just a Carnival band. The Captain, whose front yard this was, soon joined us. The trim, dark-skinned man, his beard just beginning to turn grey, cheerily introduced himself as “Sundaie,” repeating his name several times as he shook hands all round. He was a self-styled jack-of-all-trades—shoemaker, carpenter, snowcone vendor, tutor in African drumming. And he was ready to hold forth. As outsiders we were quite fortunate to find ourselves involved in that favorite Trinidadian pastime of just hanging out and talking, which goes by the name of *liming*.

Sundaie proved to be a master limer and neighborhood philosopher. During the following hour and a half, people materialized from up and down the lane to drop in on his holdings forth. For starters, Sundaie summed up his *I’m a Slave to* invention:

The whole idea, really, born from everyday livin’ within the country, you know, the t’ings we hold on to that we not supposed to hold on to, and stuff like that, you know. So we try to bring it out in...reality, so to speak, and...from there the idea was taken to the rest of the members of the band who contributed their ideas also, to bring it to this kind of climax. That is it, in a nutshell.

A definite agenda began to emerge. He was keenly interested in restoring the old traditions and prestige of the neighborhood: “This yard here is really...what you should call a pit for culture because ever since I was small I grew up in this yard and...they used to always make mas and stuff in this

3. *Sign on Darceuil Lane, Belmont, 17 February 1996. (Photo by Martin W. Walsh)*



yard.” But like many others, Sundaie had “graduated from here” and gone off to work with the big mas bands on the west side of town, the likes of Wayne Berkeley and Peter Minshall. Sundaie had actually worked for the Minshall organization in the ’70s as a costume builder (“a Master of Decoration,” as he styled himself), a fact he kept returning to, even at one point jokingly referring to Minshall as “my secret rival.” Working with the big, prestige bands, however, had its price:

We work a lot with those bands, but apparently most of the Carnival now has gone to the west, so we tryin’ now to bring it back into this area, because this area was really the Mecca of Carnival, more or less, you know. So we have lost some of the...substance that make up the whole fullness of Carnival in the Belmont area, Belmont, Port of Spain area. So we as band leaders and other members, Belmont, other people in Belmont, are bringing bands in order that we can build the whole, the whole setting of Carnival and not lose it, because it’s bein’ carried away.

He attributed a “lack of foresight in the past” as the chief cause of the decline of small neighborhood mas bands:

You know, you go down to, like, Steve Lee Heung or probably Peter Minshall, you work mas with them, right? But the crowd followin’ you also. So they would go and play with them and then after, if you don’t back and do anything, then they stay there. So what we are doin’ now is tryin’ to bring back the crowd, you know.

It would be too strong to say that Sundaie nurtured a grudge against the big mas bands and their leaders. He obviously admired their artistic achievements. But he legitimately bemoaned the eclipse of small neighborhood bands and the sapping of their creativity: “What we tryin’ to do now is try to bring back some of the ideas that we have given those people. We are tryin’ to take it back [conspiratorial laugh], you know.”

Sundaie was exposing a fairly deep rift in present-day Carnival between the “party” and the “presentation.” The party is given over to a present-moment hedonism, with perhaps a veneer of the “all-ah-we-is-one” ideology. The presentation aspires to a more Bakhtinian brand of Carnival, expressing itself against an elite culture or a comfortable status quo. One can find this dichotomy as well in the calypso competitions, where two songs are called for from each contestant, one an upbeat “party song,” and the other a more traditional satirical commentary on local events, personalities, or mores. The Bakhtinian aspect appears to be dwindling in the mas bands, even at the neighborhood level. Around either corner of Darceuls Lane on the Circular Road are other, slightly more upscale Jouvay bands: Homebase Associates and The Parakeets. Homebase’s ’97 theme was *So Dey Say* which seemed to ape *Old People Does Say*, a mas which won the ’96 Jouvay prize for Masplayers over on Abercrombie Street. These Circular Road Jouvay bands are only four or five years old and both Sundaie and Leroy look on them as newcomers who are not really carrying on the local tradition. They are not “portraying,” to use Sundaie’s favorite word, but rather giving in to what he perceives as the bland commercialism of the Carnival marketplace.

A small band like the Merry Darceuls, Sundaie observed, needs to be simple yet creative:

You don’t always need glitter to make somet’ing look good, because if you watch these t’ings [indicating headpieces], they are...not glitter, you

understan'. But it's the Art, you know, having the Knowledge of what you doin'. And makin' it the easiest way so that somebody, even though you not there, could be able to handle it without a problem, you know, because you want everyt'ing to look kinda original...unique, you know, you don't want people to t'ink, well, they gettin' any kinda t'ing for their money.

Paralleling these concerns was Sundaie's interest in traditional drumming. The Darceuils' music was acoustically based on the African drum ensemble—no big sound trucks for this group. Sundaie had been instrumental in forming several groups and had taught drums to local youth. In the early '70s, he reminisced, "I started to play drums on my own, right, before I really got friends to form a group. The idea about it...it had a general stigma of a dislike for oneself, you know." But Sundaie was part of the Black Power generation here in Trinidad, which paralleled that in the States. Drumming was a way to discover self-identity, that "we really have somethin' here!" He amusingly recalled an incident of police harassment when he was drumming for a wake (a practice called *bongo*) in the nearby town of Tunapuna. African drumming has always had a subversive quality in Trinidad. Drums were completely banned after the Carnival riots of the 1880s, for example.⁶

It is not surprising that drumming would be strong in the 1970s with the advent of Black Pride. Sundaie still participates, mildly, in a rhetoric of "oppression," "suppression," "the System," and "the Establishment." His graying beard is a kind of badge. "I am kinda radical, you know," he laughed, "and society does not accept you when you're a radical."

Sundaie had barrels and logs of mango and coconut wood lying about which were part of an ongoing process of drum building. It was easy to get him to demonstrate his art. He brought out a tall drum he had made of avocado wood, with an open human hand carved in relief. He proceeded to sing and drum in the calypso beat, then showed us how you could fuse this Trinidadian staple with the Latin *samba*. Sundaie outlined the tripartite structure of a traditional ensemble: the basic beat, then the "rolling drum" for rhythm, with the "cuttin'" drum filling in between the two: "When all these t'ings come together you get the fullness of the music."

Sundaie regretted the fact that in Trinidad, unlike Africa, the drummer was only a backup musician. Big parties would hire a DJ and his sound system, perhaps a pan group, but seldom a drum ensemble. It all seemed to be going against the grain, his keeping up the drumming. He would teach a group here in the neighborhood but they would move on and he would have to begin again. He was not in it for the money, but his idealism was wearing thin.

The talking broadened out.

Brian, our taxi driver, and Sundaie got in a heated discussion over local autonomy versus centralized control and foreign influences. What is responsible for the decline of local mas—Michael Jackson, the media, "this cable t'ing they bringin' in the country"? Who is responsible? "All a we, boy, all a we's responsible for it," Sundaie maintained. He seemed to be an individual who had often gotten burned in his dealings outside the community, who had often

4. Sundaie demonstrating African drumming at a workshop of the Merry Darceuils, Rudin Lane. (Photo by Martin W. Walsh)



come up against the stonewall of “Politics.” He maintained a wariness and guarded independence. Above all, he longed for the Carnival’s historical role as a forum for the “all licenc’d fool”: “Mas is really a form of protestin’ the country, because I can remember when I was small, portrayin’ the mas was more serious.” For instance, one might portray the Prime Minister as a Devil with a fork and tail if one disliked his policies:

So mas was really a form of protest, but it has become commercialized. It has lost the whole idea of protest behind it. So this mas what we are bringin’ here, we bringin’ back this long-time days, as I say, bringing back the old-time days. You see, we free, but if you notice the pictures, the chains has been broken, but are still on our hands because we still slaves to this, slaves to that, so this is the whole t’ing. Mas is really a form of protest, showin’ the masters of this time, or the Establishment, that you was not pleased with certain things that they was doin’. A lot of youth has grown and don’t understan’ what mas is really all about, that t’ink it’s about puttin’ on a costume and you go and you dance. But mas is portrayal. You are sayin’ somethin’.

It was impossible to tell how many in the Darceuls band shared Sundaie’s passion, but there were no dissenting voices among those in the yard.

Mas might need to recover a Bakhtinian rebelliousness, but there was nothing rigidly doctrinaire about Sundaie’s attitudes. It had been a good-humored harangue, and he would be the last to deny the communal enjoyment at the heart of the event. “Sharin” was of the essence for him, “sharin” with his neighbors and, yes, with anyone who cared to join the band. We left the yard feeling very positive about our Jouvay plans, looking forward to the mud of early Monday morning.

On the night of *Dimanche Gras* our group attended the kings and queens finals and the calypso competition. We were to leave the Savannah Stage about one o’clock in the morning and head over to Belmont for Jouvay. The calypso competition was hardly past the halfway mark when the hour arrived. We assembled outside the stage area, all of us in old clothes, most of which would be discarded the next time we changed, and stripped down to basics—no jewelry or watches, just a few bills tucked in a shoe or buttoned up in a shirt pocket for a possible taxi later and, of course, a good bit of rum.

After the packed intensity of the Savannah Stage, the mile walk over to Belmont was quiet. Port of Spain seemed deserted. Turning into Darceuls Lane, the impression was not dispelled. It was quiet, though many lights were on. In a yard off to the left, the large, papier-mâché head we had noticed the day before remained unfinished, lurking in the shadows. We proceeded to the workshop down Rudin Lane, passing the sheet-cardboard float which was our slave ship, the *S.S. Middle Passage*. Sundaie looked frazzled, quite the opposite of the relaxed limer of Saturday. He greeted us with a remnant of cheerfulness, but one could tell there was a lot on his mind. Being a mas Captain was obviously no holiday. Had he been making costume bits up to the last minute? His parents, he later admitted, had been sending over meals for him: “They realize I’m under strain. I ain’t gonna cook none.” We got our individual headpieces and settled down for a wait, the kind of thing we were getting used to in Trinidad. Things were still fairly quiet. As we passed around the rum, we got the distinct impression of being the first guests at a party that wasn’t yet underway. Were we the band? What happened to the hundred plus revelers that were promised? Neighborhood people began showing up, but much too casually. The impression deepened that things were not going well for the Merry Darceuls. Gradually we learned that the drummers were over-

due. There was no sight of the “pan-aroun’-the-neck” men either. It was getting uncomfortable, frustrations seethed. There were comings and goings, but no Jouvay in sight. We waited.

More children began showing up to claim costume bits, their energy helping to lighten up the scene. Leroy’s young son was among them, already a veteran mas player. Eventually it was time to mud-up back out on Darceuls Lane. The mud is provided by the band organizers and is included in the band registration fee. Several buckets of fine, liquid mud of different hues, from chalky white to bright ochre to black, were arranged on the sidewalk. Some of these would be carried downtown by members of the band, for “freshenin’ up,” as Leroy put it. The young teens, especially the girls, took a great interest in us older white folk. Our tentative efforts at coating arms and face were augmented by these less squeamish veterans. They took on the intensity of

5. *Children of the Merry Darceuls mas band, Jouvay morning, 17 February 1996. (Photo by Max Harris)*



makeup artists in daubing faces and facial hair. One group of youngsters was helping a boy carefully turn his hair into a helmet of bright yellow mud. Several adults opted for a lot of white mud on head and face, creating striking skull-like effects in the dim light of the street. Mud had its own *raison d'être*, its own aesthetic. I began to wonder how well the rather heavy “text” of the slave theme would “read” in the larger, sprawling event. There was no attempt to group the various sections in any way. Unlike the serried ranks of Tuesday mas, we would function as freely circulating individuals within the collective of the Merry Darceuils. Would our various “slaveries” even register?

Muddled up and beginning to feel the effects of multiple sips of rum, we were ready to party but somehow could not. A crowd was building in the lane as more and more of the neighborhood turned out, but it somehow lacked direction. There was no focus because there was no music. The drummers and their truck had still not arrived. Sundaie was complaining, too, that the pan men had let him down, even though they had gotten a deposit. The wait continued as our mud slowly dried. We milled about. On one side of Darceuils Lane is a small pan-yard. Now it was dark and deserted but for a single light and a solitary pacing individual. He was waiting too. Eventually he gave up. The single light went out. The sound of the gate clanging shut was depressing, to say the least.

Then they arrived, five or six drummers. The driver of the old pickup was a short man with a tuft of beard and a black, green, and red knit cap. Like Sundaie he was a member of the Black Power generation. He seemed stoned. Hastily the band got itself together. Sundaie was up on the truck and the drummers were beginning to weld themselves into a rhythmic force. A chorus of voices lifted itself up over the crowd noise, “Jouvay MORN-in!” We were underway at last.

The drummers were getting into it, the Darceuils Slaves starting to jump up. I was a Slave to Beer with a Carib bottle-top plastered on my nose. I had retained two empty Carib beer bottles from the Savannah. Striking them together at the neck made a nice sharp click and so I was able to fit into the building rhythm of the band. It turned out to be very important to be connected to the event in this way, even if one could not appreciate all the nuances of the drumming. A tall, young woman materialized rapping away on a rusty break drum with furious concentration, a regular Jouvay Amazon. A handsome couple in their early thirties seemed glued in the “goin’ down south” position of a classic *wine*, that slow, sexy, dorsal grinding that everybody in Trinidad seems to relish, even school kids.

Leroy was everywhere, splendid in his mud and well on the way to realizing his ideal of bacchanal. (On Saturday he had told us that he really wasn’t a rum drinker, not even at Christmas, but in the three days of Carnival he more than made up for it.) One of the Slaves to Television showed up with a cardboard TV set which he wheeled around in an old baby stroller. It was labeled “Silver Moon” and its proud owner wore sunglasses and an inane grin on his face. He was a freelance contributor to the band.

We were probably never more than three or four dozen, but the band’s population had swelled considerably. A few older men, hardly muddy at all, made their appearance. The Merry Darceuils banner, a bit of hand-painted sheeting slung between two poles, also appeared. It would more or less serve as our vanguard if the teenage boys carrying it would concentrate on keeping it taut. But the “Slave Ship” brought another headache. The trailer element on which it rode had no real coupling and was jury-rigged to the truck with wire. We hardly got to the corner when the contraption collapsed. Sundaie lost patience—he wanted the thing jettisoned and the band to get under way. We were only a few hundred yards down the Belmont Circular Road, however, gathering numbers all the while, when the slave ship caught up with us again, hauled along by band members who refused to abandon it. It was jury-

rigged once again and became a carry-all for the band members' extra mud and drink since the flatbed of the truck was packed with drummers and their instruments.

At first the streets were empty; only a few spectators in their doorways marked our passing. But soon the mustering of mud bands from further up in Belmont and over in East Dry River could be palpably felt. Darceuil was one trickle of a swelling flood. Rill after rill collected into streams, all heading down to the great river that was Trinidad Jouway. We rolled down the long curve of the Circular Road, over the St. Ann's River bridge with the sprawling General Hospital on the right. We crossed the main artery of Charlotte Street and headed west. Drumming came in from every side, a layering of beats which made for a "fullness," to use Sundaie's phrase. Just as easily the layers could peel away again, leaving just the sound of our own drums. One lapsed into a semi-hypnotic state participating in the rhythm. Almost anything might serve as improvised percussion: sticks or metal rods on biscuit tins, frying pans, hubcaps. One paused only long enough to take a swig of rum and pass around the bottle. Chippin' along, one found oneself in different relationships with the truck—close beside it, drifting behind, surging in front among band members one had not seen before. The children of the band were most active on the periphery. There were some fairly young ones here at three in the morning, scampering about.

We were in broader streets now, among the taller buildings of downtown. We turned at Lord Harris Square down Abercrombie Street. The sky was overcast with a hint of rain. I had no idea of the time, no sense of fatigue in the great pulse of the moving and drumming. Approaching cross streets, our forward progress would be halted for short periods as other bands crammed in ahead of us. One could not tell very much about them. There might be some pan, a small sound truck; you might notice Devil horns or other bits of costume. Down one side street were chalky mud men with hair teased out in horns, and something like Zulu warriors down another. Pauses in the flow would give us occasion to consolidate and raise our own energy level up a notch. Then we would move again, funneling into an ever more packed, ever more intense press of humanity. But there was no real blockage. One always passed through with room to dance and bang away on brake drum or bottle.

It was now hard to tell where the perimeter of our band was. We were definitely dissolving into the larger event. Spectators as such were rare—everyone was a participant, the sidewalks also flowing with people, though at a different rate. Impressions came and went as in a mild hallucination. You could smell them long before they actually came into view—Jouway fanatics, the *Jab Molassis*, naked but for briefs and running shoes, covered from head to toe in thick, black motor oil. They grimaced and bellowed and moved on. Freelance mud people, many of them young white couples, tourists, would join the band a short while, wine to our drumming, and fade away again. The female half of our own wining couple looked a bit more passive now, but the mating dance went on. The cardboard TV in the baby stroller was looking somewhat the worse for wear. Our Slave to Fast Food was trying to keep up his act of marathon

6. Sundaie drumming on Jouway morning. (Photo by Gordon Means)



running. Gradually I knew that dawn was near and a lighthouse was up ahead. We were at the harbor and South Quay. A sharp left turn was in the offing, the approach to the Jouvay reviewing stand—and then, disaster.

It was not just another traffic jam up ahead. Our truck driver sprang out of the vehicle aggressively, slamming the door. The band members were in a state of agitation, especially Leroy. The center of the storm was a large policeman. We were being held up. Other bands passed us by, and we could see them pushing with renewed energy into an area of glaring stadium lights that must be the reviewing stand. But we were sidelined, permanently it seemed. Our driver looked more subdued now. The news was that he had really screwed up. In the surf of angry voices beating against the stolid policeman, we gleaned that our driver did not have the correct papers. And he had cursed out the cop. The necessary permit from the Traffic Office—a matter of a mere 15 minutes, insisted the policeman—was lacking, and so our truck would not be allowed to traverse the last three or four hundred yards. Sundaie was at the end of his tether. It all seemed now a conspiracy against the band by that larger society which the Darceuls had set out to satirize. Our microphone allowed him to vent his feelings, albeit a futile argument:

He wants the driver to pack up the truck and the drums to come off!
That is what you get when you, you stage a mas like this, because you touchin' everybody corn, you mashin' everybody corn. Because this mas says somethin', it says somethin', and that is what makes the difference. [...] First time in mas I have ever seen this, first time, first, first time. [...] These is the things set me thinkin' of the society, the way in which they accep' us, and all that. [...] This a big problem. My, my neck is in the noose. I feelin' every time the chain turn. I'm feelin' my breath has been taken away.

He looked out forlornly as the rest of Jouvay passed us by:

This a serious thing. It may look like kicks, but's serious, very, very serious, because you makin' a statement to the nation as a whole. And they prevents you from makin' a statement when you want to make it! This is the day we suppose to make our statement. And look at what has been happenin'. From the time it start, I been gettin' hurt. 'Til when we reach here to go on stage, I been gettin' hurt.

There was nothing for us to do but unload the truck, sling the drums, and try to pass before the reviewing stand on foot. It had become a point of honor for the band. I noticed Sundaie hauling the slave ship all by himself with what seemed the last of his strength. I told him to get back to his drum, that that was more important. The rest of us could take care of the ship. Sam Kinser soon joined me in hauling the thing past the reviewing stand. There were some bright lights, but I never heard the Merry Darceuls announced on the speaker system. Was there some cheering? Our drumming, I know, had recovered and we must have made some sort of show for the record with our *I'm a Slave* to theme.

Before we knew it, however, it was over—or at least the competitive phase of Jouvay was over. It was time go our separate ways. Sundaie shook hands, relieved and exhausted. Leroy, having achieved his dionysian goal, was over-ripe in his farewells. He locked us each, in turn, in a great muddy bear hug, urging us all to come back again next year. We headed back through downtown Port of Spain, our hotel up in St. Ann's seeming infinitely far away. But the day was young. The sun would soon be rising and the great hills of Trinidad's north coast were now clearly outlined in the dawn.

Remnants of Jouvay bands inhabited the streets. We would read in Monday's tabloids of fourteen, or was it eight, or only five stabbing injuries during Jouvay '96, but our group encountered nothing untoward. Indeed one old-timer had assured us on the march, "You bein' protected, y'know, you don' know it, but you protected." A band looked after its own, even the transient visitors. Our group was tired but pressed on. Crossing the Savannah we were awed by the spectacle of the big mas bands, not in their Tuesday costumes now, but still there by the thousands, with their massive sound trucks, ringing the entire five-mile perimeter. It looked like the red dawn of revolution, but it sounded like the biggest party on earth. Jouvay had really only been the curtain raiser, and here was the dry run for the golden hordes of Tuesday mas. We watched as band after band broke over the Savannah stage like tsunamis in slow motion.

The taxi stop on the other side of the Savannah looked like a refugee camp: dozens of people lying about, their mud peeling, catching a little sleep. There was no hope of a ride, so we continued on up the narrow valley of St. Ann's. It was fully morning now, normal neighborhood life beginning to get underway. A service was going on in a small chapel. We muddied veterans of the night were beginning to feel out of place. Our final Jouvay event was a washing up visit to the communal water pipe we had passed many times on the big bend in the road just below the hotel.

On reflection, all in our group came to realize how truly extraordinary it was for complete outsiders to be allowed in so close to the life of a neighborhood in such a relatively short period of time. It as if we had been allowed to wander into the living models for V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* or Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*. And all because of Carnival, with its powerful ethos of "all ah we." Of course, we were in no position to appreciate all of what might have been going on in Darceuls Lane, and it would be presumptuous to judge. Nevertheless we felt deeply grateful to the Merry Darceuls for their singular openness. Taking a mid-afternoon break from the almost numbing spectacle of Tuesday mas on the Savannah Stage, two of us returned to Darceuls Lane. The sun was hot, the neighborhood empty and quiet. We found Sundaie and his neighbor Garfield in their yard as relaxed and content as we had found them on Saturday. The frenzy of Mardi Gras might as well have been on another planet.

7. From left: Martin W. Walsh, Sam Kinser, and John Cartwright as Slaves in the Merry Darceuls Jouvay 1996. (Photo by Max Harris)



Leroy, we knew, was off with a Devil band and would have been among the earlier entries in the endless Tuesday parade. He was still partying, but Sundaie had no interest in Tuesday mas. As far as he was concerned Carnival was over. Having regained his old composure and warm smile, he could even laughingly refer to “our sufferin’s” of a day and half before. We did not feel it appropriate to inquire just exactly where and why it had gone wrong, or how the small band Jouvay competition had turned out.

One of Sundaie’s remarks on Saturday had proved all too prophetic: “I t’ink is proper management is the biggest problem in mas, especially with these small bands.” Putting up a neighborhood mas, especially if there has been some break in tradition or loss of key personnel, was always a risk. It seemed that the Merry Darceuls had taken more than their share of lumps in Jouvay ’96. But the struggle for taking back local control of Carnival from the forces of big money, commercialization, and the mass media would probably go on, perhaps more successfully on the next go round. Perhaps not.

Are there not really two Carnivals in Port of Spain: the Jouvay event, which still belongs to the “People”; and Tuesday mas in the hands of commercial interests and the “Establishment”? The one values transgressive dirt, the other transcendent glitter. Are they necessary polarities, or merely different historical phases? Can they function together, or will the latter overwhelm the former? One can only wish the small bands well. I recalled some of Sundaie’s remarks on Jouvay morning. They expressed not just the frustrations of a small band leader, but the aspirations of the Carnival artist in every Trinidadian:

What are not publicized are the workers that make these men [Minshall et al.] so famous, you know. The workers are just hidden in the background, and I am one of them that are hidden in the background lookin’ to show that glimmer of light.

Addendum ’97

For Jouvay ’97 the Merry Darceuls staged *One Momin’ in a Coal Mine*. It was Leroy’s idea. Circular placards advertised the mas as far away as Memorial Park and a large yellow banner with sponsor logos flew over the lane, evidence of some serious promotion. Sundaie had produced excellent facsimiles of hardhats out of papier-mâché, as well as sturdy cardboard replicas of picks and shovels. A laundry cart was made up to look like a loaded coal wagon. Coal dust was added to the usual ochre mud, for the classic look of the grime-covered miner. (The previous evening Leroy had been methodically grinding up bits of charcoal with an old cannon ball on a scrap of tin roofing.) Music was supplied by L.H. Pan Groove, a small pan orchestra related to the legendary Casablanca steelband. This group created a very different musical environment for the band. Whistles and rattles rather than supplementary percussion were the rule as band members took turns helping to push the pan trolley along to the new Broadway venue downtown and then over to another reviewing area eastward at “The Greens.”

While the coal mine idea might seem a retreat from the sharp, satiric portrayal of *I’m a Slave to*, it had its serious side as well. The band’s concept centered on the perception of miners as an exploited workforce—not in Trinidad but Appalachia or South Africa. There was a “Cave-In” section, for example, which produced some horrendous blood-and-mud effects. A very accomplished contortionist would drag himself along just ahead of the rolling trolley. He afforded Sundaie several opportunities for improvisations with a thoroughly juiced-up “Doctor” (last year’s parent of the TV in the baby stroller). Their routines were caught by at least one video team. The props for the pickax section, moreover, were very good to dance with. One could

mimic the motions of hacking away to the beat of the pan, or even do stickfighting moves with fellow members. In general, the coal-mining theme, with its hardhats and recognizable tools, had a clearer theatrical impact within the chaotic swirl of Jouvay than the previous year's slave theme.

Numbers were up appreciably as well. Several older men came in their actual T&T Telephone hardhats complete with lamps, adding a touch of realism. Two younger men in my pickax section were glad that they managed to play this year after being away for some time. They wanted to take a more active role in the life of the band. Things were a lot mellower, generally, and there were none of the disasters of the year past. The Merry Darceuls seem to have rebounded from '96, and the prognosis looks good. Indeed, the Third Place award given to *One Mornin' in a Coal Mine* in the Small Band category of the 1997 Jouvay competition confirms the comeback of this neighborhood band. Perhaps it could be true again that, in Sundaie's words, "When you missed this band, you missed Jouvay."

Notes

1. This subgroup of the Trinidad research team was spearheaded by Sam Kinser, who had made contact with the Merry Darceuls earlier in the week. Ruth Stegassy of Radio France taped the interviews. John Cartwright and I participated in the discussions of Saturday, 17 February 1996. On *Jouvay* itself we were joined by Helene Bellour, Catherine Fitzmaurice, and Gordon Means, official project photographer, with Max Harris also taking pictures. I "played" with the band again in 1997, obtaining further information on local Carnival history, particularly during an early evening interview with Leroy and Sundaie on Saturday, 8 February 1997. All quotes by Leroy and Sundaie, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1996 interview.
2. Blue Devils are one of the more popular of the traditional masquerades (*old mas*). The Blue Devils of the nearby mountain village of Paramin are particularly known for their intensive, comic/demonic performances (see the essay by Max Harris in this issue of *TDR*). The Paramin troupe organized their own downtown Jouvay band, *Blue Devils and White Angels*, for Carnival '97. In 1998 Johnnie Lee's Jouvay band entered and won the Jouvay band competition.
3. In my 1997 interview, Leroy and Sundaie claimed there was no standing committee of the Merry Darceuls and that they were, in fact, the core of the organization, the promoters, and the idea men. In '97 it was Leroy's turn with his "coal mine" theme.
4. In earlier Darceuls bands, themes ranged from song and movie titles—*The Street Where We Live*; *America, America*; *Bwani Junction*; *Let My People Go*; to the geo-political—*China in Joy and Sorrow*; *Tragedy in South Africa*; and the aboriginal—*50,000 B.C.*; *The Sky Above, the Mud Below*.
5. Neither Leroy nor Sundaie, men in their late forties/early fifties, recalled Shepherd, who was a bit before their time. Other famous Belmont Captains, Ken Morris and Harold Saldenho, were familiar to them.
6. Stephen Stuempfle (1995) summarizes the earlier music traditions of Trinidad Carnival in his first chapter. The best account of the riots of 1881 and 1883 is Anthony de Verteuil's (1984).

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