

Part 3. Trinidad Carnival Is . . .

Spectacle!

First some context: Quite separate from Carnival, Trinbagonians love to put on fancy dress and perform. At least, they invest quite a bit of time and effort into that activity, with pictures in the paper and occasionally money as reward. There are opportunities all year long for anyone, young and old, to get on stage and do their thing, whether it is play music or dance or just look beautiful. Here are some of the performances and events between September and January that featured non-professionals: grandmothers in *Ms. Abuela Beauty Pageant* (Dec), rural residents in *Best Village Competition Finals* (Nov), young beauties in the *Miss Trinidad and Tobago* contest (Oct) and *Tobago Top Model Semi-finals* (Oct), secondary students in Classical, Semi-classical, and Religious Choirs segment of *SanFest 2009* (Oct), and all wanna-be's in *Digicel's Rising Star Contest* (Oct). This is not the entire list. Keep in mind that all this is taking place on an island with population of only 1.5 Million.

What all this practice means for Carnival is that the final 4 days feature visually stunning pageantry almost non-stop. For children there is the Kiddie Carnival, sponsored by the Red Cross, and on Carnival Saturday, the Children's Parade of Bands. Terminology: a "**band**" might refer to a group of people with musical instruments but at Carnival it more generally means a band of people wearing the same or related costumes, walking or doing a simple routine of some type. Kiddie Carnival was on the Big Stage and featured children from 1 year to teenager; they definitely weren't walking on stage in a Ninja costume that Mom bought at the variety store. Here is a small selection; as you can see, the visual inventiveness and fabrics were absolutely astounding.



This queen's huge floating crown is supported by a back frame and she is surrounded by "jewels"



Orchid in the jungle—the fabric shimmered



Find the child.



Riff on a Hopi dancer, with a second costume behind.

Even more fun was the Children's Parade of Bands; it was more informal and I could move around to take photos. Side note: Carnival organizers charged \$240US for a photography permit. Professionals who needed to set up their equipment properly had to ante up; the rest of us just snapped away. The paraders loved posing for pictures.





Children are not present for the final two days of Carnival – presumably grandmothers or great-grandmothers are pressed into babysitting service while the parents “Play ‘Mas” in Port of Spain and San Fernando.

The final 3 days of Carnival consist of

1) **Dimanche Gras** , the big outdoor stage show where the Soca Monarchs, the Calypso Monarchs, and the Junior Carnival King and Queen (selected at Kiddie Carnival) are presented and perform. It is also the finals for the Carnival King and Queen competition. These are the very large costumes that are the wonders of Carnival; the designs are limited only by the requirement that the costume must be worn and propelled by one person – wheeled frames are allowed. And they stagger the imagination. An added amusement this year was that there was a fresh breeze that night and several costumes zipped across the stage out of control. Alas, my camera is rather feeble for such an occasion but here are a few shots to give you the flavor of the event, even if the images are fuzzy. Designing and making these costumes has become quite an

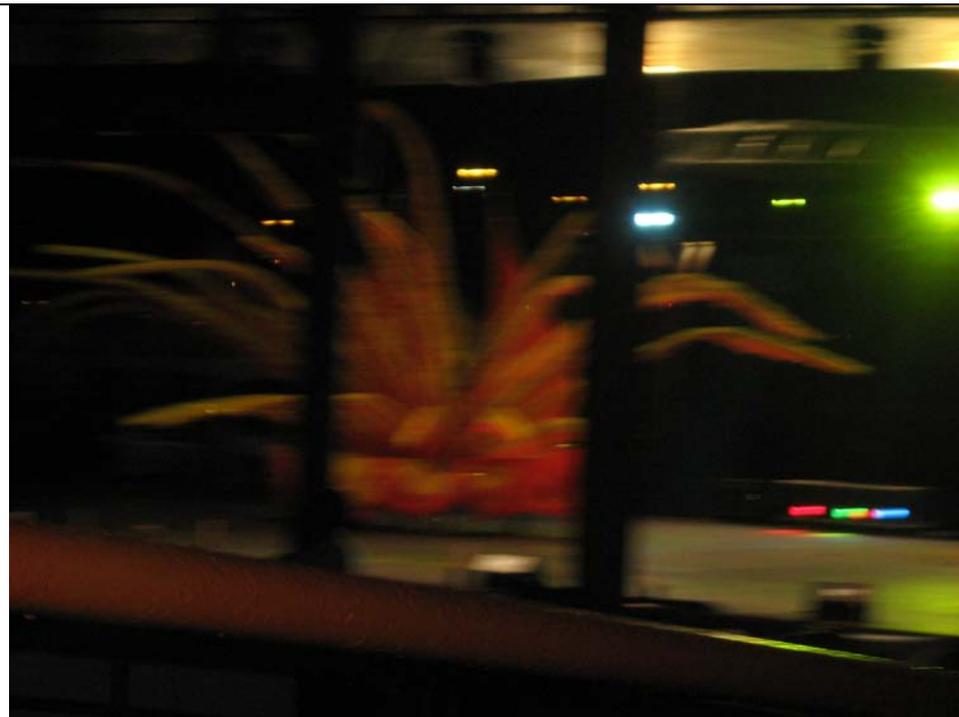
art, not to say industry, in the West Indies and the Trinidad costumes are the most elaborate by far. It is such a pity that the finalists are not all put on display downtown until the next year – maybe they could use one of the empty skyscrapers the government built . . .



My favorite – wonderfully eerie. Find the man propelling it.



She was doing fine . . . until the wind swept her offstage

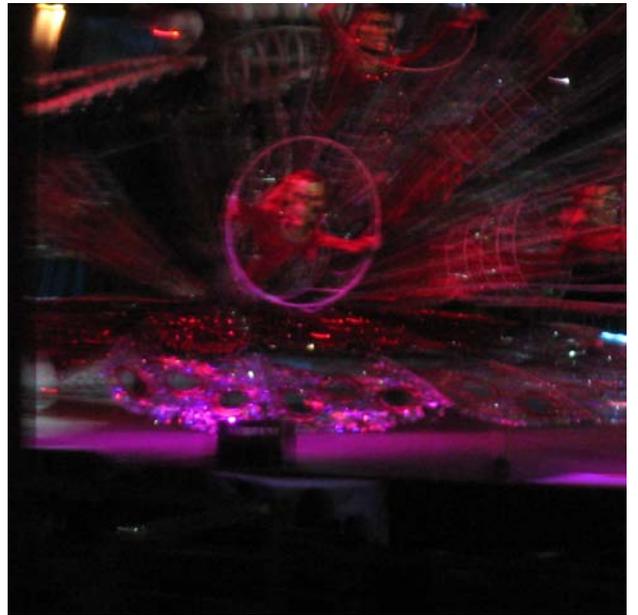




A costume collapse caused by the wind.



Gothic esthetic; details below. (Sorry about microphone boom – not part of costume)



2. **Jouvert:** At 3 am on Carnival Monday, revelers gather in their bands, eat some breakfast and drink some beers, and at first light, about 5 am, set out on the designated Jouvert route. Beer, much, much more beer is consumed. Sound trucks accompany the bands.

Bands are characterized by the liquid they use to squeeze all over themselves and on-lookers. Washable (and not-so-washable) water-based paint is the standard; some bands use liquid mud and apparently some jouvert bands from poorer and rougher neighborhoods employ used motor oil. There was even one chi-chi (and expensive to join) band that favored melted chocolate.

This is a true bacchanal – most participants and onlookers get fairly plastered. Inhibitions are cast aside and as people march, dance, and lurch along, there is lots of winin'. If you think you know the definition of “wining”, think again. It is a Trini term for two adults of opposite sex doing a stand-up lap dance. (Sometimes it is two girls, but never two guys.) Or a chain of people, alternating sex, linked front to back. When wining gets too explicit or intense it is called “grinding”. Wining is undeniably sexual but is usually light-hearted, with either sex in front and conducted between people who know each other,. It can be saucy or flirtacious or even complimentary; there are stolen wines, frenetic wines, dreamy wines and subtle wines. The touching is just from waist to knees – there is no touching above the waist. None. No kissing, either. I bought the Carnival ((memory book)) published after Carnival and the photographers seemed totally focused on wining– about 70% of the photos feature people wining or grinding. Which is a serious misrepresentation of Carnival. Most wining took place on bacchanalian Jouvert Monday and late on Fat Tuesday as the sun and liquid refreshments took their toll.

I hadn't planned to do Jouvert – after Dimanche Gras most folks party the intervening 4 hours until Jouvert. Me, I find it hard enough to sit 3-hour watches in our cockpit during night passages, let alone stand around and be sociable all night long. But at 6:30am I got an unexpected opportunity to join the Jouvert band of a friendly boatyard worker and I jumped at it. “My” band specialized in blue and green paint and I was really getting into it, when a woman in our band poured a half-gallon of blue paint all over a passing motorcycle cop. He was not amused. He pulled the driver's license of the sound truck and we had to drop out of the parade. Short but sweet. As you can imagine, I did not bring my camera along but here is a shot of my state upon returning to the boat.



Jouvert is a true bacchanal but a short one: by 9 am, with the sun getting hot, the action is all finished and everybody goes off to private fetes or to sleep, getting ready to . . .

3. **Play ‘Mas** on Fat Tuesday. But for that, you must read Part 4.