

Interview subject: SpiceY

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: October 23, 2017

Location of interview: National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Actual name: Tammico Moore

Date of birth: May 17, 1976

Place of birth: San Fernando, Trinidad and Tobago

Awards (as of March 2018): Calypso Monarch semi-finals, 2008, 2018, Arouca Calypso Monarch, 2015, Chaguanas Calypso Monarch, 2009, Best Musical Director-Best Village competition, 2018

Best songs/best-known songs: "Man in Dat," "The Whip"

Individuals heard during interview:

S: SpiceY

HM: Hunter Moore

Trinidad and Tobago terms and expressions as used in the interview:

APA: Academy for the Performing Arts, a school of the University of Trinidad and Tobago

Ah: I, I'm, or as an interjection: "Ah!"

Dey: there

Doh: don't

Eh: ain't, can also add emphasis at the end of a phrase

In two twos: very quickly, in no time at all

Meh: my

NAPA: National Academy for the Performing Arts, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Nuh: you know

UTT: University of Trinidad and Tobago

Whey: what, where

Yuh: you, you're

 Subject sings: 43:40

Notes about interview: the final (approx.) 30 seconds of the interview was on an unrelated topic and has not been included

 Interview:

HM: We're here at NAPA. I'm here with SpiceY, Tammico Moore, talking about her songwriting and other things, and why don't we start with your telling me when you began composing calypsos.

S: I began composing calypsos safe to say when I was a little girl (Laughs.) Let me see, I was in maybe Form One or Two which would have made me ten or eleven? And we had an assignment to do for the class, a group assignment and the topic was something "Then to Now" and to make a comparison. And the day for the presentation I realized that the group didn't really have anything, so, I was like, "Okay, so what are we going to do now?" and said, "Well, I have this piece of information, have that piece of information." I said, "Okay, calm down." (Laughs.) I took everybody's information and I wrote a song called "Calypso Then" . . . "Calypso Then to Now." Yeah, I think that was the name. But that was the assignment. "Then to Now" was the assignment. I think the calypso was "Calypso Long Ago," or something like that, and when was time to do the presentation, no one wanted to talk so I decided to sing it. (Laughs.) All on that day, all on that first day, all of that happened, all at once, and that was my first composition.

H: I'm just aware, too, this is a very sensitive mic and anytime you might hit the table . . .

S: (Whispers.) Okay.

HM: . . . we might get a sound so I just was thinking of that while we were talking.

S: Okay. (Laughs.)

HM: But this, it's so, that's why I have this over this, too, because even the air conditioning can make a sound if it blows on it, so I just want to mention that.

HM: Well, how do you know when it's calypso?

S: The sound?

HM: I mean what, I mean, first of all do you compose any other kind of music besides calypso?

S: I do all kind of music.

HM: What are some of the other kinds of music?

S: I write reggae, I have some soca parang, I did one chutney and here at APA, I studied classical music, so I did some classical music as well.

HM: So that being said, you compose several different kinds of music, so what makes calypso different? What, when you say, "Okay, this is going to be calypso." What is that, mean for you?

S: For me once it's home, I see it as calypso because it's home and I am doing it. I am a Trinidadian. Calypso is our thing so it's calypso.

HM: And that feels different when you are doing the other kinds of music, parang or . . .

S: When I'm doing, now my father, my father was also a, he is deceased now, he was also a composer. He was also a calypsonian, and parang was one of his favorites. So, I started doing parang through him because it was something that he loved. So when he started doing parang 'cause he started late, recording late, when he started doing parang I started to accompany him. I went to the studio and did some background vocals for him on stuff that he did before, the same soca parang. And then one day he said, "So, why you eh try one?" I said, "Why you eh write one for meh?" He said, "I eh writing for no writer." (Laughter.) Right? So, then I went home. I said, "I have to write a parang, yes?" And it took me about a year or two before I actually wrote a parang. And I did one and then when I did the parang I called him and I said, "Daddy dear, I write a parang." I said, "You have to come up the road to hear it." Because at that time I was living in Chaguanas and the studio was in a living room, alright, and so the producer was Mr. Bailey, Sharlan Bailey, and I said, "Bailey, hear this song, hear this song." And when I sang it for him, he just started building the beat. And I was like, "Yeah that sounding good. Yeah that sounding good," and before you know it I had a soca parang. So when my father came up and he hear it he says, "You trying to take my work now." (Laughter.) You . . .

HM: Competition.

S: Yeah, yeah. "So you trying to take my work now." I said, "No, eh you tell me you eh writing for no writers, so I showing you I could write."

HM: You're a natural, but that, but when you're writing calypso, what you're saying, is it just has, there's something about it that feels like home, I mean it's . . .

4:54

S: Yes it does, but not just that, to me music, music to me, because I've done all kind of music and I love all kind of music, because of that, music is just music. Because I'm in Trinidad, you know the saying when you're with the Romans you do like the Romans? So I'm in Trinidad, I have to do what's marketable here you know? And as much as I love calypso, I love calypso, I have a passion for calypso, honestly, if I were to do a reggae or some kinda thing it may not be as, I don't know, sellable, marketable in Trinidad as if I were to do a calypso.

HM: But calypso is not the most popular music in Trinidad.

S: No, it's not. No, it's not.

H: So, it might not be the most financially rewarding.

S: It is not financially rewarding, that is another thing.

H: But it's important to you.

S: It's not, it's very important. I just, I can't explain that but, I think this is what I was born to do and is why I'm still doing it, even though I haven't reaped any financial benefits from it. I think the reason I'm still doing it is because I have to.

HM: It's something in you.

S: So I try not to question it, I just do it until I could not do it anymore.

HM: But, you, from a very early age, in the home you grew up in, you knew what calypso was and it was just in you, right?

S: I grew up with Rastafarians, my entire family, everybody's Ras, and at the same time my grandfather loved calypso. So I would hear calypso in the house. I would also hear all the foundation reggae music in the house, and then there was my aunt, which is my mother's sister. She liked R&B, she liked pop, so I would get that music as well. And then I was very close to my grandmother. We all lived in the same house. My grandmother, we lived next to a church. She was Spiritual Baptist and that life was very important to her and I was mama's spoiled child, so I used to be up and down with her. So I used to be going to church with her. So the Baptist church . . .

HM: Was an influence, too.

S: . . . also influenced me so it was just a general all-round music. I had music from everywhere.

HM: You had so much going, yeah.

S: You know.

HM: Coming from different directions.

S: Yeah, from different directions and not one of them ever said I don't want you to listen to this, and I don't want you to do that, and so I was exposed to everything. Yeah?

HM: So that all went into the mix for you.

S: Yep.

HM: When you are writing calypso are you influenced by these other kinds of music? Or are you just thinking calypso, or are you bringing in other influences? Are you aware of . . .

S: It all depends on what the topic is. For instance, okay, for instance, "The Whip." When I did "The Whip," I wrote "The Whip" in 2008. I performed it in 2009. The composition was from an experience. Most of my work, calypsos, are from experiences.

HM: Personal experience, yeah.

S: And for me to get there I was travelling in a taxi home from a performance and the taxi driver almost raped me. He almost, (Laughs.) I had to stop, drop, and literally roll out of the car. And the expression, "Take that, feel cat/If is cat you want, is cat you going to get/I have the cat o' nine tail." It was me, it was how I feeling at the point in time when the man was slapping my breasts and asking me if that was real. I just felt like I coulda just be a superhero and just beat this man. So, the feeling never got out of my head and I always felt as though I had to do something about it, right? So where the music concerned and the melody, it was just a driving force at that time 'cause if you listen to the music and it's aggressive and it's angry and the whole persona on stage, the leather, the whip, it was just an angry song. Because that was how I felt.

HM: It represented the emotion.

S: Yes, yes.

HM: That you were sort of the physical embodiment of the emotion . . .

S: Yes.

HM: . . . that you were feeling.

S: Mm-hm. So most times when I am composing, the melody or the music that would go with the lyrics would be from a feeling from whatever feeling I'm having at the point in time when I'm writing the song. And then when I go to the producer, my latest work, most of my latest work here I have done it with Sharlan Bailey, Shadow's son, and he would give it a direction as in the sense of, "I don't think that would make sense for the song," or, "Yes, that would work," you know? Yeah.

10:14

HM: So, yeah, you're getting, you're bringing in the composition, are you, when you play it for him, your producer, are you playing him a version that's you singing accompanied by guitar or another instrument, or is it just you singing?

S: Just me singing.

HM: So, does he help, are you working with him then to come up with the chords, the music part?

S: No, well actually when I sing it to him I would have, I have brass lines in my head. I have a bass line, and I'm saying that I would have a bass line, but bass lines in Dread Wizard Production Studio, Mr. Bailey's studio, they synonymous with the Baileys (Laughs.). They all

have this driving bass line, so even though I go with a concept and go with what I want, it always ends up being, when you hear it, you know that's a Bailey bass line

HM: "Cause he's adding his . . .

S: Yes.

HM: . . . his musicality to it.

S: Yes.

HM: But you come in with a pretty distinct idea of what you want the music to be.

S: Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

HM: Ah, but then you work it out with him in terms of the final arrangement.

S: Yes, yes.

HM: So in terms of other music influencing you, would you s-, would it be accurate to say that when you're selecting the music for your lyrics, or building the music and the lyrics together, that you use whatever music seems to be appropriate to the feeling of the song? Or . . .

S: Yeah

HM: . . . more than a style, like, "I'm going to make this a little more reggae style, number, or something, I mean, you're not thinking that so much, you're . . .

S: Not necessarily, okay, when I was out in the cruise ship, 'cause I did some years on the cruise ship, so I was back and forth the cruise ship, home for Carnival, the cruise ship, home for Carnival. And I think 2011, 2011 or 2012, I did this reggae called "Forever," and when I wrote it out on the cruise ship, when I was writing it, it was a reggae. It sounded like a reggae to me.

HM: It sounded like that in your head.

S: Yeah. And then when I came home and I sang it to Bailey, he was saying, "This could be a real bad reggae, you know. You sure? You sure this is what you want to do?" I said, "Yeah, sure." But I was never totally sure 'cause the song still there, half-way recorded and I didn't do anything else with it.

HM: Wasn't really working for you, yeah.

S: I just, it's a beautiful song. It would be a big song on the market if it were to be finished, and released, and marketed properly and all of that and I just, it didn't feel right.

HM: For you as an artist.

S: Yeah, for me as an artist.

HM: Maybe somebody else as an artist.

S: Exactly. So I've been trying to shop the song, but I just, I need to part with it first.

HM: Oh, I know it's hard to let 'em go.

S: Yeah. I need to part with the song, because I actually gave it to two people and take it back already. So I need to part with the song because I find that they're not doing what they, what I think the song could do. So I wasn't comfortable with their delivery, and I was saying, "Nah, I don't think that gon' work."

HM: Maybe you need to be a producer on this one (Laughter.) Where, you've talked about some of this some already, but where do you find your ideas? Generally, how, where do they come from?

S: Anywhere and everywhere because the vibes always in the atmosphere anyway. Alright, so, "D' Advice." I got "D' Advice" a Sunday morning. It was about a couple weeks, three weeks before the tent opened. Now, right now, I don't audition for the tents anymore, thank God. I don't, you know? But I am lucky that they said, "Okay, SpiceY you just drop in a CD so we will hear what you have." Right? So I doesn't have to worry about auditions. But it was about three weeks before the tent opened and I hadn't dropped in a CD yet, right? So I was a little bit worried and I said, "Look, Bailey, (three missing words). I feel I have to go outside and just go outside and just sit down and it go come, I'll find it somewhere." And I left home like about quarter after seven this Sunday morning and we stop by a bar in Belmont. I started to drink a beer. You know people go to church on a Sunday morning? I stop to drink a beer. (Laughs.) And I stop by the bar and I having this beer and these three men having this conversation. And one guy was complaining that he had this wife and he's doing everything for her and she just nagging and she nagging and she wouldn't stop. And his partner tell him, "That is you. Once you know how to come, you have to know how to go," and when he said it, I said "Okay, thanks, bye-bye." (Laughter.)

HM: "Thank you for that."

15:07

S: And that was the song. Sometimes it's, it's just one word will trigger an entire song and at that point in time I needed that particular song because that same year we had like an upsurge of . .

HM: Domestic violence.

S: . . . domestic violence and it was heartbreaking, and I do a lot of songs on relationships because I try to do songs for women to get awareness and to uplift the young girls and, you know, to talk to the teenage boys, you know? I try to do those kind of songs. Things that positive in my sight. They positive, right? And to me that song was necessary, so when it came, I said, "That is the song dey." I sit down and listen to them a two minutes again and I said, "Alright, thanks, eh, ah go see all you." I went home and in two two's I had the entire song with, including encore verses, right? So it is just take an energy, a force that's somewhere up there. It always floating, you just have to be at the right place at the right time and catch it . . .

HM: So . . .

S: . . . absorb it.

HM: . . . it can be, in that case it's inspired by what somebody said and my next question is gonna be are there certain themes you're drawn to? And you just said specifically . . .

S: Yeah.

HM: . . . women's issues, that relate to women and/or younger women . . .

S: Yes.

HM: . . . facing some of these issues. What other, are, are there other themes besides relationships and directed specifically to women, I mean obviously some of these songs also address the men, right? In the relationship.

S: Well, in the songs that I talk about that I say for women, I always have a couple of verses for the men because I don't want them to feel like I'm bashing them, and I don't want them to feel left out, because SpiceY's, I don't just come on the stage and look sexy for the ladies to be happy, right? I want the men to be happy, too, even though you are looking at me and know that, I know that you can get happy from that. (Laughs.) But you know I still want to be able to send you home with something . . .

HM: To think about.

S: . . . to think about, you know? So most times, like for instance in "Ah Want to Know, Ah Got to Know Yuh, Before Ah Know Yuh," I have a verse for the men that telling the men, "Don't feel it's just so, you have to know the woman too before you know her. You just see some breasts and you get excited like you never seen a breast before, that is not how it does go. (Laughs.) You have to take your time, find out is she do mammogram, find out if she went and had all her tests. Make sure all her teeth right, you know? Just, you know?"

HM: Care about the whole person.

S: Yeah.

HM: And so . . .

S: And then I always try for the entertainment value of it, too, even though it's very serious topics. For the entertainment value I always try to make it funny, but by nature I am a shit talker. By nature I does talk plenty shit and some people does tend to laugh. It is not a joke I'm making, I'm serious, it's just how I say it. People tend to laugh. So I does put myself in the right thing so I might write things that you may find funny. Because, frankly, I make some humorous finals with these serious songs . . .

HM: That's interesting, isn't it?

S: . . . because people are laughing.

HM: 'Cause they're laugh-, I think part of that is your presentation is, you're not, it doesn't feel like you're pointing fingers, even though the lyric is addressed to people. It's not like you're

preaching. The way that you deliver it makes it very attractive. It makes the audience come to you.

S: Yeah. It makes you want to listen.

HM: It's a very interesting thing you're doing on stage. Because, we're, I'm wandering a little bit from composing, in that you consciously, like you say, look attractive on the stage and present yourself that way, but you're not doing it, you're doing it to me in a strong, from strength, not trying to please.

S: Mm-hm.

HM: And it's just interesting to me to watch. "She's doing that. How does she do that?" (Laughs.)

S: Sometimes I don't even know what I'm doing until somebody says, "You know what you be doing on stage does look real mischievous on stage." I does say, "Me?"

HM: Yeah. But, it's attractive in a good way. I think it brings people to your lyric. It brings people . . .

S: Yeah.

HM: . . . into the song, where it could be something else. It could be off-putting or hard to receive. You encourage people to receive your lyric.

20:08

S: And then I have been told many times that my lyrics are kind of raunchy and some people find that sometimes I am a bit too harsh. But I think it's just about being real and I think people understand you better when you are real. You don't want to go up there, you singing to this group of people, this group of people right here. You seeing the group of people. You know where they come from. You think they want to hear you use big words? They come to enjoy themselves so they want things that could just, they could catch it quickly and they have to think too much to understand what you really trying to say and "What she talk 'bout again? That's some kind of thing with history in it?"

HM: You need notes.

S: Yeah they don't want that, you know, even though calypso is how the stories are told. It also has to be entertaining.

HM: True.

S: And if you want the entertainment value to be of value, then it must be interesting. You have to do something to hold them. And in my case, because if you ask anybody about SpiceY, and

they, you ask them, "So what does she look like?" You s-, "She wear dress and boots." Because SpiceY synonymous with dress and boots. I don't go on stage without boots.

HM: So that's your, that's sort of a trademark for you.

S: Yes.

HM: So you want to have something they can identify and I think . . .

S: So, and the men does be looking out for that. They does look out for me to come out in some kinda sexy outfit. They looking out for that.

HM: For that thing.

S: Yeah.

HM: Well it works, definitely works. Are there any other themes, though? I mean I didn't hear you do anything political for example.

S: I try to stay out of politics, but I did one or two, not, it wasn't the punch that we do and make a final or win a Monarch with here. That's probably why I never make a Monarch final. (Laughs.) I'm laughing about it, but this is serious. Yeah, but I try to tend to stay away from politics because this entertainment, this is my job, so whatever government in power and the administration, whichever administration it is, wants an entertainer they can afford to call me because I eh going to sing about PNM, and I eh going to sing about UNC. I eh singing 'bout the Partnership. I doh, people, sometimes people don't want to hear what they read in the papers every day.

HM: They want to be enter-, like you're saying, entertained . . .

S: Yes, yes.

HM: . . . taken somewhere else. But you make them think, but you're focused more on relationships.

S: Yeah and then when you leave Trinidad and Tobago, what, so you only want to be a Trinidad and Tobago artist? You can't sing the political songs outside, nobody knows about that.

HM: No Doctor.

S: Nobody knows about Kamla, Keith, and Manning, and Eric, you know.

HM: They don't know all the names of the people. But that's a long tradition in calypso to sing about very specific things like that.

S: Yeah.

HM: Like even Chalkdust's song this year was a local issue.

S: Yes, it was.

HM: But that . . .

S: Yes, it was.

HM: I'm not, I just was curious sort of what your take on that was. How are you, you are not political, but how are you influenced by your community? How does the community, 'cause I've always thought of calypsonians being really in touch with their communities, though, kind of reflecting their community in what they're singing about.

S: Okay, so I grew up in Marabella which is in South, south part of Trinidad, really nice place, and when I was twenty years old I moved to Enterprise in Chaguanas, which is now deemed a "hot spot." Now for the past nine years I've been living in the West, Cocorite, which is also deemed another hot spot.

HM: So now, explain what a hot spot is.

S: So a hot spot is supposed to be a area where a lot of crime happens and the citizens don't feel safe in the community, and the citizens kinda have a self-imposed curfew, because basically, as what I said in the third song that I sang in the set, "Afraid to Go Outside," basically, and that's how it is. But for instance, Enterprise, when I moved to Enterprise it was not what it is today, right now. And the image that is painted in the media is still a whole lot more than what really going on. Because most times they doing these things in the media to sell the papers.

25:14

HM: More the higher profile, or it's sensational. That's, they want, they pick sensational things.

S: Yeah, yeah. And it's the same thing that's happening in Cocorite. Now I am happy that we have so much police patrol and the presence of the police in the community at present, but it eh doing nothing for me that they are there, because they're just there.

HM: It's not really changing anything.

S: You know when they come? When the person's already dead. While the shots going on, they not coming you know. They staying away from that you see, the minute it done and they making sure that whoever was shot dead first before they come. So then they making the area a hot spot. You know, so I think that it's unfair to label these places as a hot spot, but like in the Enterprise community, when I perform, like when I just moved there, and I, and they know me performing and that kinda thing, I got full support because they never really had somebody from the Enterprise area.

HM: A singer from there.

S: Yeah, that was a calypsonian that was, that coulda been seen on TV and seen competing in a competition, so it was something good for them. It was something uplifting for them. So . . .

HM: They were proud of that

S: Yeah, so every time I go out to perform. Some people I have never even spoken to from Enterprise does be like, "SpiceY, that is we girl, you know. When you see she go on stage, she mashing up the place, you know," and that is what it was for them, nah. So I am thinking, when you deem these places hot spots and you take all of these things, because when you does deem it a hot spot all these things not gonna happen in the area no more, because I could remember our tent, when I was at Klassic Ruso, the tent travelled to Enterprise to have a show. Now nobody not going to Enterprise to have no show. So you taking these things away, so what you expect to happen?

HM: So it's almost self-fulfilling. You call it a hot spot, and it becomes a hot spot.

S: Yeah, it definitely will. And as for Cocorite, now I recently moved there like about eight or nine years, right? So as for Cocorite, so they now getting to know me. So the few semi-finals that I've made within the time? I'm like everybody favorite person in Cocorite right now. (Laughs.)

HM: You're a personality. Well does that come into your writing? What you're just telling me about, has that shown up in your writing? Or how you write, or the emotion in your song, these, the fact that your part of this community that's proud of you? Or how does that affect your, does it just give you more reason to write?

S: It gives me . . .

HM: Or more inspiration or encouragement?

S: It gives me encouragement, it gives me encouragement, because when I go out there, I must say that I am from this community and this community doesn't only do those things that all you talking about. This community also have people that do bachelor's and master's, and sing calypso, write calypso, and produce calypso. This community have that, too.

HM: So you feel the burden, and not a bad way, burden of responsibility to represent them. To . . .

S: Definitely.

HM: . . . to give people a different idea of what this community is.

S: Definitely. This is why sometimes is very disappointing as a artiste coming out of the "hot spots." That when, like when you don't make a finals, you feel disappointed not only for you.

HM: But for them.

S: You feel disappointed because, "Oh, gosh . . .

HM: I let them down.

S: Yeah, because these people . . .

HM: They were cheering for you, and they wanted you to do well . . .

S: Yes, yes. Very much so.

HM: That's the hard part of that. That's great that you have the support of your community.

S: Yes, I do, I do, I do. And most recently I have just found a new family in another "hot spot," (Laughs.) the Malick Folk Performing Company. I am now the musical director there. So they had the Best Village Competition this year and I won Best Musical Director, and I had to arrange songs for the choir, arrange songs in the play, and it was a first experience for me but it was . . .

HM: Exciting.

S: . . . fabulous. I really, really enjoy it.

HM: Yeah, I've heard a little bit about the Best Village competition. That's a big deal.

S: Yeah.

HM: That's a big deal for the communities that participate. I know you said you're learning to play guitar, are there any other instrument that you play?

30:08

S: Yeah, keyboard. I'm learning to play keyboard as well. I'm just learning . . .

HM: Working on both of those.

S: . . . because I have a couple students that I do vocal coaching with, so it's easier for me to run scales with them . . .

HM: On the piano.

S: . . . on the piano, right? So when I say I'm learning, I am making sure that I can run those scales well, (Laughs.) with ease, with all the exercises that I do with them. And that's why I practice the exercises I do with them. As for the guitar, I have a guitar. I actually have two guitars, alright? I'm learning to play the guitar for one, two reasons. One of them is that I want to be able at some point in time, because I do small concerts and stuff, right, so I want to be able at some point in time to do an acoustic set and sit and play for myself.

HM: Accompany yourself.

S: Yes, I want to achieve that as a personal achievement that I must have, and another one is when I am writing, I think that if I could play an instrument it will help me to develop more the kind of ideas and thoughts that I have when I am writing because sometimes I feel like I'm limited because I can't really play anything.

HM: You're just singing to yourself.

S: Yeah, like right now I know about five chords, so it's like the same thing over and over, you know, so.

HM: But that might limit the kinds of songs that you write or . . .

S: Exactly.

HM: I knew a songwriter, friend of mine who is very good, who knew how to play guitar, but he actually took lessons to learn some new chords because, some new progressions of chords, because he felt like he was just recycling.

S: Yeah.

HM: You know?

S: Yeah.

HM: And I thought, "That's really neat," you know?

S: That's why, up to now, I don't try to write just because I know just these four, five chords. I don't try to write with the guitar . . .

HM: You don't want that to limit you.

S: Yeah, because then I would be limited to just those four five chords that I have, you know?

HM: Yeah, I've heard somebody else say that same thing. So, are you taking lessons or are you just teaching yourself from a book?

S: No, well, Bailey kinda helping me. Sharlan Bailey.

HM: Kind of showing you some things?

S: Yeah, yeah.

HM: Yeah. So you've kind of told me this, about how you start, 'cause this, these last few questions just have to do with kind of the actual process, that you'll get an idea and, but you said some of that before I turned on the tape, so once you have an idea like overhearing the men in the bar, what happens next?

S: (Laughs.) Well, then I would, well I start writing from where ever I get the idea until I get home. So it's all in my head. If, or if I have a book, I start writing then and there and most times 'cause I always have a big hand bag. I always have a book in there. I always have a couple pens in there or pencils and I will start writing from where ever I am, right? So like that particular song on that day, I started writing from in the car to head home. And by the time I got home I had two verses and choruses. I didn't even take off my shoe, I didn't say good afternoon to anybody or morning to anybody in the house.

HM: Ran in the door.

S: I just went straight inside, my little daughter was like "Mummy." I was, "Not now, Anesha," and I just went straight to the bedroom and I sat there and everything was just coming out. And that's not always the process, nuh, you know, so like for that particular song? After that I read over what I had and then I sang over what I had, and then I said, "Nah, I feel this line could

change and I feel that line could change.” So then I flipped those pages and I start writing it over again.

HM: Copying it over.

S: Copying it over again. So then I would start from the first line of the very first verse and I write straight down the page.

HM: Top to bottom.

S: Flip again, same process, and then I would read it over again and then I would say, “Okay, the second verse could take, I need to change this word, maybe I need to change that concept, as that’s not really what I want to say,” you know? So then, “I think those last three lines could strengthen.” I would write over that entire verse and chorus again. So by the time I’m done with one song is like one note pad or one book for one song. But when I’m done, I don’t need to learn the song . . .

HM: Because you’ve looked . . .

S: Because that’s how I learn. Even when I’m studying my academics and stuff, even though we have notes, we have slides and that kinda thing, I have to . . .

HM: Write it.

S: . . . write it in my book. Look at my book. I have to write.

HM: There’s something about writing it down.

S: Yes, and then when I see it. . .

HM: that’s important.

S: . . . I remember it because I remember seeing it.

35:07

HM: But, and that’s your editing process. You’re editing, when you’re copying it over and over like that.

S: Yeah.

HM: You’re actually in the process of revising and editing.

S: And tweaking. And a calypso is never done. It’s never done because there are times that you are sometimes you on stage all right, so for “I Want to Know Yuh Before I Know Yuh” there is this line where I say “I already take meh test.” Before, it was “I already take meh test/I want to know.” I had a line that was, “I going and take meh test,” and then another calypsonian said to me, he said, “The song strong and it powerful and you giving this advice, so give this advice with authority. You already take your test, you eh going and take it.”

HM: That was more definite. That was more in keeping with the attitude of the song.

S: Exactly, exactly. So that song wasn't done until that night. And that night was the third week into the tent, the season was almost done, you know?

HM: But that somebody, it's great when somebody's paying that close attention . . .

S: Yeah.

HM: . . . to notice. That wasn't (Bumped mic.) a big change, that was a small change.

S: Yes, it was a small change . . .

HM: But it was important.

S: But it was a very important change, you know? And "I Want to Know Yuh" is a song that I will do everywhere that I go because I feel that is relevant all the time. Because we tend to always want to have careless sex and you don't just jump into things. There are so many diseases that we have out there, some things we can't even pronounce, (Laughs.) you know? Why, why, why chance going and get these diseases? Doh, live life, live life happily, live life safely.

HM: Well it's such a obvious thing in terms of common sense, but if that's all it took, there wouldn't be a problem.

S: Exactly.

HM: So you're presenting it in a way . . .

S: Exactly.

HM: . . . with humor and in rhyme . . .

S: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . that kind of lets people take a fresh look.

S: The humor, the humor in it was for them to listen because when they start to laugh they say, "Why she really saying?" and then they pay attention to that, that point in time. "Did she just say that? She say that?"

HM: I saw some young people to the side of the stage, you saw them.

S: Yeah, yeah.

HM: They were listening.

S: Yeah.

HM: You know, they were in their teens probably some of them, you know.

S: Like I went to . . .

HM: They were kind of giggling, like "Hee-hee-hee." But I bet . . .

S: They were listening.

HM: . . . they were listening.

S: I went to Barbados for Carifesta with Malick group and we went to perform and I did that song, I did that song in three different, at three different venues. And the Barbados people want me to come back because now I did that song and I did "D' Advice" and they were like, "We could do some lectures with you in the schools to talk to our teenagers, you know?" And I was like, "Yeah, that would be wonderful." (Laughs.)

HM: Using it as education.

S: Yeah.

HM: I've heard other people say this, too, that calypso would be a great way to teach just about any sub-, I mean you could teach so much just using calypso, you know.

S: Yeah.

HM: Any particular time of day or place in your home, or time of day? Or is it just any time of day, any place, it just depends on where the song happens?

S: Any time, any place . . .

HM: You have to be ready.

S: . . . anyhow. Sometimes it may even be in the toilet. (Laughs.) Sometimes you may be in the bathroom.

HM: You just have to do it.

S: And while, you just get something and it happens whenever it comes, it comes.

HM: You can't make a scheduled appointment for it.

S: Yeah, yeah. You can't say, now like for me I can't sit down and plan and say, "Okay, tent opening tomorrow. I need to get a song. Oh gosh," that is not going to happen. Like all now I start getting, because for the past four-five years like since I started studying, right? I have been having a lot of problems to just write.

HM: Have time and the space in your head probably.

S: Because normally when I'm doing something I am so focused on the something that I am doing, that I really don't have . . .

HM: The brain space.

S: . . . for anything else, so I been really pushing it. I've been really, really, really pushing it, doing this degree for the past four years, and now starting the master's. Now the purpose that I'm doing the master's now is to get all the academics out of the way, so that I can concentrate on what I really want to do with my life. (Laughs.) I'm just doing these things because I have to have it.

HM: Just get it done.

S: Yeah, you know? So I just want to get this out of the way and I going to concentrate on my life as a calypsonian, my life as an artiste, because I'm more than just a calypsonian, you know?

40:12

HM: Are you writing anything for the upcoming season right now?

S: Yes.

HM: Okay, so you're in the process of trying to write . . .

S: Yes.

HM: . . . and think of things for what's coming up.

S: I have the idea. I have a couple ideas, as a matter of fact, so I'm not sure which one I am going to run with yet, whichever one comes first. So like I jotted down and said, "Okay, this year this issue really bother me, and I'm going to do something about this." And that is my number one idea right here. And then there is something else that does just kind of get to me. It would be good if I can write something about it and if it comes it come. And if it doesn't come, well.

HM: Then you'll go with the other.

S: Yeah

HM: Well, that's good. And do you have a deadline of when you're trying to be (Subject laughs.), I know, it's coming, right? What's your kind of target right now, to be, to have it.

S: Well, I heard that they have auditions for the tent coming up on the nineteenth of next month, so that would mean that they would need CD's by next month end, so I should be ready by then. That didn't happen last year, though. Last year I wasn't ready by then, well, not last year, for this year. I wasn't ready by then. I was ready like two weeks before the tent opened.

HM: Does it help you having a deadline? Do deadlines help you?

S: No. No, they don't. They make me very on edge . . .

HM: And tense.

S: . . . very uncomfortable, and you wouldn't, I would never give, I can't get the best writing out of that.

HM: So really you . . .

S: I just have to be . . .

HM: . . .doesn't help your writing.

S: No, I have to be, my best writing is done when I am most comfortable.

HM: When you're kind of relaxed and not pressured, feeling the pressure.

S: And I'm most comfortable with a glass of alcohol. (Laughs.)

HM: And just relaxing.

S: Yeah, and relaxing, most comfortable.

HM: Just one more question then I'll ask you if you can think of anything else yourself. Does being a performer, because I have interviewed some writers who don't perform, they're just writing for other people. Does being a performer influence what you write?

S: Yes, it does, because most of these topics is because I'm a performer I am able to do them. If I wasn't performing I don't see anybody else doing it the way that I would have done it. And even if I had given them the song to sing, it would not have been the same. So it does influence.

HM: Knowing that you can get up on stage and sing this song effects what you write . . .

S: Yes.

HM: . . . because you know you have an outlet.

S: And then most times too, I think you should hear this, because most times too when I write? Sometimes before I have an entire verse and chorus, I know what I'm going to wear.

HM: You're seeing that.

S: . . . yeah, so the song for instance "The Whip." So like when I had the first verse and chorus I was like, "Take that/Feel cat/You want to be every young girl's nightmare/But come by me I have cat to tear. I say, "Eh-heah. I wearing a leather mask and that eh gon' be complete if I eh have a leather outfit," and then I turn around and said, "Mother-in-law? You could make one of them cat-o-nine tails." (Laughter.) So I envisioned the entire outfit.

HM: The whole outfit? Before the song was finished?

S: Before the song was finished, and then I wrote to suit the outfit. Another song I did that for as well. There was another song that I have called "Check D Signs."

HM: I've seen that one, yeah.

S: "Check D Signs," and for "Check D Signs" all of that season, I wore fittin' with flare dress and boots for the entire season, all different colors. And I was like, there's this little mischievous walk

that I'm told, that I have been told that I do on stage. So while I'm writing, 'cause sometimes when I'm writing I walk all over the room . . .

HM: And you're pacing around.

44:57

S: . . . and I perform . . .

HM: Like you're on stage.

S: . . . saying the words. Yeah, yeah.

HM: Like your SpiceY persona.

S: And I remember I got to some part of the song and then I fling my dress, so I said, "Oh ho!" So I had to get a dress that was flared down there.

HM: A dress that you can do that.

S: Yeah. And . . .

HM: That's interesting . . .

S: . . . that was where that came in.

HM: . . . because, too, I haven't really spoken to anybody, but that you, in a way, I mean it's not separated, you're writing for this artist. You're the writer, I mean you are envisioning yourself as the artist, but you have a stage persona and your presentation's a certain way, so in a way, it's your, you're writing for the performer that's on the stage. You're envisioning, you're both, obviously, but . . .

S: That's right.

HM: . . . but you're envisioning her in your mind.

S: That's right.

HM: So in a way it's like, "Okay, this is something she would do."

S: Mm-hm.

HM: I've noticed some artists, it seems strange to me, but they talk about themselves in the third person, they'll say . . .

S: "I'm SpiceY."

HM: "And SpiceY gets what SpiceY wants."

S: Yeah. (Laughs.)

HM: You know, that kind of thing. And I'm, "That's really odd. She's talking about herself like she's a different person" . . .

S: Yeah.

HM: . . . but I understand how that could happen . . .

S: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . because in a way you divide, separate yourself a little bit . . .

S: Mm-hm.

H: . . . because you're standing back watching yourself over here.

S: Sure, right.

HM: Well, that's all I have and this has been a wonderful interview. Do you, anything else that you would like to add that we didn't get to, that you think would be important about your writing or?

S: I don't know. Oh, I have done, I have also done beside a couple of patriotic songs, like I have one called "Tell Meh Whey Yuh From." That song is talking all about Trinidad and Tobago. So for someone who doesn't know about Trinidad and Tobago this song would tell them all the lovelies that you could get in Trinidad and Tobago. All the nice things, of course. (Laughs.) And I did another patriotic song in 2012 when we celebrated our 50th Independence. They had, the Ministry of Culture, had a competition for composers, just composers, so it could have been any genre of music. And I did this piece, but I don't know what genre it would have fit in, but I wasn't able to perform the song because I got called out on a contract to go back out on the ship and I gave it to a young woman called Lady Adanna to sing. And it made the top six finals for the competition.

HM: Did well for her.

S: Yeah. And that too is a very beautiful song. I am in the process of getting someone else to record it, to do over the song. You know, just change the fifty years to now, yeah, and I want to put that song out. So I was just stressing there that I am not only a calypso writer.

HM: Well, and you did the song at Movietown Plaza the other night about "has the nation changed or have we" . . .

S: "Missing the Nation."

HM: That was, you know, that was making a comment, you know, you said you're not political, and that wasn't, it was more about people, but . . .

S: Mm-hm.

HM: But it was also speaking about the country so that was another example.

S: The state that the country . . .

HM: It was making a social commentary.

S: . . . was in. Yeah. And when you listen to that, now, that composition is not mine, very important to know.

HM: Yeah, so you do some that aren't yours.

S: Yes, very rare, but I do. That song was Sharlan Bailey, Shadow's son.

HM: That was Shadow's son wrote that.

S: Yeah. My influence on that song was because I was here at UTT. I think the classical music because I just came out of doing the classical music and stuff? When he was recording, when we were at the studio recording and I was putting on the background vocals. And I said to him, I said, "Bailey, I hearing so much more than what this is." And he said, "Yeah." He said, "You know what this would sound like if you put some opera inside of dey." I said, "You would call that an obligato. Calm yourself." And I came back to school and I spoke to my voice lecturer. And she said, "Why don't you talk to the young ladies in your year?" because I had some awesome singers in my year group, right? And six of them, I spoke to them, and they came into the studio and this LeAndra (Head) oh my goodness, put down this beautiful obligato in the song. And then it ended up, now I did that song in the tent for the Carnival season. It was very controversial in the sense that I didn't get the background vocalists in the tent to sing it, because they said it would make them hoarse so I had to work with my own background vocalists and those girls worked with me for the entire season, yeah. And it was beautiful, but performing it was a first time for me, performing somebody's song, so it was how to put SpiceY . . .

50:18

H: How do you get your personality into that, right?

S: Yes, yes, so it took some getting used to . . .

HM: For you to think about that.

S: . . . but I got used to it before I hit the stage. So, I practiced a lot. I practiced a lot and I mean I had to practice using the space and imagining the stage and what I had to wear, for it was different from SpiceY persona as well. And it was hard, hard, hard, work.

HM: That was a challenge.

S: It was really hard work, but I pulled it off, because people saw a different side of SpiceY. And they really enjoyed it, so whereas I thought I was put in a box and I couldn't move because that's what they were expecting . . .

HM: Almost too narrow, right? Could be.

S: Yeah. That's what people expecting, they expecting me to come with something humorous and they expecting me to do something on relationships, or just do something humorous, that's what they expecting. And when I came with that and the first night and I heard total silence, not a pin, you didn't even hear a pin drop at the cinema, and it's when I was finished and the loud uproar, I was like, "Oh my God." My heart just melted.

HM: I bet.

S: I was like, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Father." But . . .

HM: Well that's the challenge for an artist, is to go outside of what they've done in the past . . .

S: But . . .

HM: and do something new.

S: . . . I think that also defines an artist, because if you could only be you, right? Now being you is not something bad, but you are an artist, so because you are an artist you're supposed to be able to . . .

HM: Be doing something . . .

S: . . . maneuver.

HM: . . . creative and new. Fresh.

S: You're supposed to be able to . . .

HM: Bring in new ideas.

S: Yeah, and if somebody just gives you something to do, you supposed to be able to jump out the box at any point in time, you know? So, and that is how I see writing, composing as, you should be able to do that.

HM: Have that freedom

S: To just jump out of the box. 'Cause I attempted a rock & roll (Laughs.) while I was out there on the ship. And I came back home and sing it for Bailey. And he was like, "Yeah, you write that, eh?" and I said, "Yeah." He said "Alright." I said, "Wha' happen? You don't like it?" He said, "It's okay." (Laughter.) But you have to start from somewhere.

HM: You have to have the freedom to try.

S: So, exactly. And the only how you'll be able to do that is if you listen to other people's music. So you can't just sit down and say, "I am the best and there is nothing better than me."

HM: I don't need to change.

S: And, "I don't need to hear anybody else," because that eh good. Then you won't get anywhere. The only how you will be able to get better as a composer, better as a performer, is if

you know what came before you. You know, where you want to go and you know what you want to do, so that means you have to do some history, right? So you have to do some research.

HM: You have to do, and that's what you're doing now.

S: And because it's music, you have to do a lot of listening, right?

HM: A lot. You've gotta, you can't just listen to the same things forever.

S: You can't be bias, you can't be bias with music. Because music is not bias. Music is for everybody. (Laughs.)

HM: It is. Well, thanks very much. I've really . . .

S: Thank you very much.

HM: I've really enjoyed it and I've enjoyed getting to know you better through the interview.

S: Thank you. Thank you.

(Edit.)

End of interview