

Interview subject: Lord Superior

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: October 10, 2017

Location of interview: subject's home in Diego Martin, Trinidad and Tobago

Actual Name: Andrew Marcano

Other sobriquets/nicknames: Brother Superior, Superior, Supie, Uncle Supie

Date of birth: November 30, 1937

Place of birth: Rio Claro, Trinidad and Tobago

Lived abroad: lived in U.S. 1964-1970, naturalized U.S. citizen

Awards (as of March 2018): Southern Calypso Monarch, Hummingbird Medal (Silver), 2015, Honorary Doctor of Letters (University of West Indies, St. Augustine), 2018

Best songs/best-known songs: "Brass Crown," "Black Coffee," "All African," "San Fernando Carnival,"

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Individuals heard during the interview:

LS: Lord Superior

HM: Hunter Moore

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Trinidad and Tobago terms and expressions used in the transcript:

Ah: I

Meh: my

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Subject sings and/or plays guitar: 5:15, 7:12, 9:36, 12:03, 13:02, 15:28, 37:22, 38:15, 39:58

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Notes about interview: A breeze blowing through the open windows caused a periodic rumbling sound, particularly around 13:30 of the interview. As the interview begins, Superior is softly playing a guitar. He continues on and off throughout the interview.

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Interview:

HM: Okay. We are here at the home of Lord Superior, Andrew Marcano, to talk about calypso. And when did you begin writing calypsos?

LS: I started about 19-, like around 1950. Thereabouts. 1950. I started professionally in 1954 performing in the calypso tent (three or four missing syllables) at that time.

HM: That's when you would have begun performing your own songs at that point, in 1954?

LS: Yes. Yeah. But from very early I started composing. I sang other people's songs, but I started composing very, very, early because the tradition was, and this is what appealed to me, and was a very challenging something, that calypsonians were supposed to compose their own songs, lyrics and music, perform them, sing them . . .

(Microphone is moved closer to subject to increase volume.)

LS: Sing them and accompany yourself.

HM: You're supposed to do the whole thing.

LS: Yes, and also do the extempo, improvisation.

HM: That was part of it.

LS: That was the calypsonian.

HM: Were you supposed to always, was it always supposed to be made up on the spot or . . .

LS: No, no.

HM: But you were supposed to be able to do some of that.

LS: Do that. Yes, yes. That's what it was. And I thought that was a great challenge, you know. So, I tried to learn that, those different things. When I came to Port of Spain, some of the guys, some didn't go through the whole process. Some composed lyrics, some very good with the lyrics, although not very good with the music part. Some had the music part, and the lyrics not as good. Some could extempo, some cannot. And I discovered that, I observed that, and I thought I would try, I would give it a shot to be the real thing.

HM: To do the whole . . .

LS: And be the whole thing.

HM: . . . the whole thing. Did you ever compose any other kind of music? Or always just calypso.

LS: No. I was interested in calypso. I sang other little songs, Sinatra, and like Sinatra and Nat Cole, and that kind of thing, but the calypso was real. The other songs were basically fantasy. "I will love you, I'll give you the moon, I'll give you the stars," and all that kind of thing, but the

calypso was about life and used to hit me right, you know? I heard songs like, "If a man have money today/People don't care if he's got cocobay." That was a disease that was like leprosy or something like that. "If a man have money today/People don't care if he have cocobay/He could come with murder and get off free/And live in the governor's company/But if you are poor and the people tell you, 'Shoo!'/A dog is better than you." That to me, that makes sense. When I heard, "Man Smart, Woman Smarter," and that kind of subject . . .

HM: So, these were songs that you were hearing.

LS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

HM: These were songs you were hearing at the time . . .

LS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

HM: . . . that inspired you.

LS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

HM: . . . as a young boy. So, you kind of said it. That attracted you to want to do the same.

LS: That is . . .yes, yes.

HM: So, you began composing verse and doing that.

LS: Right.

HM: How, you've only done calypso, you've only written calypso, how would you define calypso. How would you, what would you tell someone? That this is calypso and this isn't.

LS: Okay, well, the definin' thing is the music.

HM: Is the music?

LS: Yes, yes, yes. The music. The way it is, it's phrased, the structure. The phrasing.

5:03

HM: The melody? Or the, is it the . . .

LS: Not the melody, the way, as I said, the phrasing, the way it's phrased.

LS: (Sings.) Ba-dum-ba-dum-ba-dum-ba-dum (etc.).

HM: Could you play a little and sing that, too? So you could give us a little bit of the feel? Something, an example?

LS: (Sings typical calypso melodic phrases while playing guitar.) Ba-dum-ba-dum-ba-dum-da-dum-da-dum (etc.)

HM: So, yes, it's the phrasing . . .

LS: (Speaks.) The phrase.

HM: I mean, the phrasing, it reflects the feel and the chords . . .

LS: Yes.

HM: . . . but there're certain, the lines are a certain length, you know.

LS: You got it. And it's, calypso is based on an old African tradition called the griots. They would, people who appointed them, they also appointed themselves, to know everything about the community. So, it was an aural kind of tradition, that they have in their mind, you can check them, to know about everybody business and family, and that type of thing. Some sang it (two or three missing words), you understand, some were like comedians and all that kind of thing. And, of course, it's African rhythms, polyrhythms, all kinds of rhythms, you know, calypso rhythms. Let me see. I'll take it from a song. (Plays guitar chords in calypso rhythm.)

HM: (Guitar continues.) That's a different one, right?

LS: (Guitar continues.) Yes.

HM: (Guitar continues.) So, that would be an influence?

LS: Yes, yes. And you have a, I learned this. (Plays a walking bass line on guitar.) I learned this from a guy called Lord Melody. Lord Melody is a guy who composed some songs for Belafonte like "Mama Look a Boo Boo," and what have you. And this how he used to compose songs.

HM: Like with a bass line?

LS: Yes. He couldn't play it very, very well. But . . .

HM: Just did that part.

LS: That part. And another calypsonian taught me how to play that in chords. And that was like I was in seventh heaven. It went like this. (Plays walking bass line, adding chords on top.)

HM: It's like you're playing the bass and the chords.

LS: Yeah. Yes, yes. So, I used to pick up from all the different calypsonians, from their . . .

HM: That were around.

LS: . . . their skills, you know. Making one that, I would say, trying to make one Lord Superior who can do the lyrics . . .

HM: The music.

LS: . . . the music, to accompany myself, do the improvisation, and later on I taught myself with a little help from some of the singers also to do the notation and all that kind of stuff. So I . . .

HM: Well, I was going to ask if you've been influenced by other kinds of music, you were influenced by other . . .

LS: Oh, yes. Yes.

HM: . . . calypso composers, but other kind of music beside calypso.

LS: I listen, yes, I listen, I listen, because that's how I, as a matter of fact I have introduce some different chordal patterns.

HM: That are unu-, that are different.

LS: Yes.

HM: That weren't common to calypso.

9:30

LS: Right. The calypso, this was the most popular: (Sings and plays chords similar to first pattern he played.) Ba-dum-ba-dum-da-dum (etc.) (Speaks.) And a lot of guys will sing that melody with a little variation sometime: (Sings and plays chords.) Ba-dum-ba-dum-da-da-dum, (etc.) (Speaks.) But after a while, I decide because I listen, wherever I go, I listen, to see how it, how the chords is structured. Then I started shift away. (Sings and plays guitar using different chord pattern.) Ba-dah-da-dah-ba-da-da, (etc.).

LS: (Speaks.) So, I introduced some of those things.

HM: Some of those chords. And where were you getting those progression ideas from? Were you just making them up, or did you hear them somewhere else?

LS: No, I sometime I hear them . . .

HM: In other songs?

LS: In other, in other types of music, you know. And I hear something that appeal to me, I will integrate it into . . .

HM: From, take it . . .

LS: Yes, yes.

HM: . . . take it from outside and bring it in.

LS: Four beats, four bars, or eight bars, and that kind of thing. So, I have a reputation of . . .

HM: Introducing kind of different chord patterns.

LS: Yeah, chord patterns.

HM: Where do you find your ideas?

LS: Oh, well I studied one of the greatest calypso composers, the late, great Mighty Spoiler. He sort of adopted me in 1953, '54, and he took me under his wings, and we lived in the same little house in Laventille. He had the best imagination. He's famous for that. So, I used to sing a lot of his songs. And I used to listen and see how he composed songs. And so for instance, here's a song of his (three or four missing syllables).

LS: (Sings and plays a portion of Spoiler's "Bedbug.") "Yes, I've heard when you die after burial/You've got to come back as a insect or animal/I heard when you die after burial/You've got to come back as an insect or animal/If that is so, I don't want to be a monkey/Neither a goat, a sheep, or donkey/My brother said he want to come back a hog/Not me, I want to be a bedbug/Just because I want to bite those young ladies bad/Like a hot dog or a hamburger/If you know you're thin, don't be in a fright/It's only big fat women that I'm going to bite."

LS: (Speaks.) And that you know, that's an idea he just pull out of the air. You know, and he was very, very good with that.

HM: So, you could watch him and kinda see how he did it.

LS: Yes. And the way he got his, some of his subjects from, from his imagination.

HM: Just in his imagination.

LS: Yes, yes, yes. Like, (Sings and plays.) "A scientist fellow, he made me to know/What will happen in the world of tomorrow/A scientist fellow, he made me to know/What will happen in the world of tomorrow/You wake up anytime in the afternoon/Invite your girlfriend to go to the moon/You will say Spoiler darling your making fun/We went to moon last week let's go to the sun/The scientist say so happy bliss/People will make children by wireless/Wake up in the . . .

LS: (Laughs.) (Speaks.) That's the kind of . . .

HM: Sense of humor.

LS: Yes. Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was one of the most popular people. Played with the imagination, so I picked up little things . . .

HM: Watching him and how he found ideas and then turned them . . .

LS: Yes.

HM: . . . into a song. Did you get to hear songs as they were in the process of being composed when you, would he play you part of a song, and then you would . . .

LS: No, no. Not, he compose his songs in his head.

HM: They would be finished by the time you heard them.

LS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's how we composed long ago. We had no tape recorders.

HM: To write them.

LS: All we had, we have to write, edit, change . . .

HM: To remember, change it all in your head.

LS: . . . and every-, yeah, yeah, so that was a very good experience.

HM: So, are most of your ideas for songs just sort of come to you or do you get ideas from outside, like the news . . .

LS: Both ways. Sometimes the songs like they compose themselves. You just have to do a little editing and adjusting.

HM: You don't change much.

LS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sometimes, sometimes the melody comes first. Sometimes, you know.

HM: The melody comes first.

LS: Yes, sometimes the melody comes first.

HM: Without any words.

LS: No.

HM: Just melody?

LS: Just the melody.

HM: And then you'll add the words.

14:57

LS: You'll decide to, excuse me, the subject matter to make the marriage. It must sort of, they must resemble each other. It must fit, you know. But this you pick up as the years go by. You choose the right songs, the right subjects and the type of mood. If it's minor something.

LS: (Strums minor chord on guitar.) (Sings a minor melody and plays guitar.) Dai-dai-dai- (etc.)

LS: (Speaks.) You see. So, it's . . . (Plays minor notes on guitar.)

HM: I also was thinking, is there a particular example that you can think of, of how you, how a particular song that stands out, that was sort of a story? That you could tell about a particular idea or song, how it came to be? That was, I don't know, unusual. Or one that just stands out in your memory?

LS: Alright. Some years, somewhere, it must have been in the, I think maybe in the Seventies or the early Eighties there was a group of East Indian performers coming to Trinidad. And there

was a female comedian by the name of Tun-Tun. Now tun-tun in Trinidad and Tobago is the word for the female organ. And you know we play on words a lot, you know, and that song, just, I get to make that a song as I said it almost presented itself. But I did not sing the song because it was not my style, right? It was too close to the, it was borderin' on vulgarity, you know. And I gave it to another guy who . . .

HM: That's more of his style.

LS: More his style, exactly. And he made a hit. That, it was one, well it was the second most popular song for that Carnival. They had to bring back the female comedian to perform as a result of the song.

HM: Of that, because she was more famous now . . .

LS: Yes, yes.

HM: . . . because of the song.

LS: Yes, yeah, yeah.

HM: But she didn't mind. (Laughs.)

LS: No, no. Not at all. So, calypso, you'll hear calypso in conversation every day and you say, you know, as a matter of fact, not too long ago, I'd say it might have been in May this year, May of this year, I went to fix my flat tire and the guy was fixin' the tire and he saw, he realized Ah calypsonian and he started talking about (Clock begins to chime to tune of "Beautiful Dreamer.") the frustration of the steel band people and this that and the other and he was very emotional about it, because it was a serious, and I picked it up. He said that, "Steel band evolved to play music for Carnival days. That's how the steel band came about.

HM: That was the reason.

LS: Yes. Alright. And now you try to go to Carnival, you can't hear calypso, you can't hear steel band on the streets anymore.

HM: Because the speakers are so loud.

LS: Exactly! But you don't have the bands on the street anymore. They pushed out. And I said to myself, "I'm gonna make a song of it." As a matter fact, I'm just in the process of finishing it, and it says something like this. I said, "I've talked to a bunch of pan men who voicing all their frustration/Why no pan on the road for Carnival?/They say "Thank God for Panorama!" You know what Panorama is? Panorama.

HM: Oh yeah. The competition.

20:08



LS: Panorama. "That show is like our Lord and Savior/Without it, our pan is in a funeral/They remember the old rhythm section." That before we had the musical notes on the pan. The rhythm section was just knockin' . . .

HM: Different pieces of metal.

LS: Percussion. Yes, yeah, yeah. Ding-a-ding-a-ding-ding-a (etc.). But the old rhythm section, "Alexander Ragtime Band," that was a . . .

HM: I remember that song.

LS: Yeah, and the rhythm section (Sings.) "The rhythm section." (Speaks.) The tambu bambu days, the tambu bambu days.

HM: When they took the tambu, the bamboo sections and hit them on the ground.

LS: That's right. You're well-informed. "Had people amazed, but they never anticipated/This modern stupid phase/Carnival day, hear the town say," that mean the people in town say, "Where de steel band gone/Is only big trucks out there with their DJ's and carryin' on'/I'm sayin' bring back pan on the road, bring back pan on the road/From Joovay," Joovay's on Monday mornin', the break of the Carn-, "From Joovay to Wednesday," that's Ash Wednesday when you cut out pan, "The pan must be heard." I say, "The pan men say, 'Change your code'/Now I'm sayin' now Dr. Supie is spreadin' the word/Bring back pan, bring back pan, bring back pan on the road." And I am making a re-entry . . .

HM: Oh, good.

LS: . . . into the pan music. With a lot of chords and things.

HM: So, it's something that one of the bands might play.

LS: Yes, yeah, yeah. That kind of thing.

HM: (Three missing syllables.)

LS: So, I pick it up just from a guy who fixing his tire. A pan man who was . . .

HM: Just talking to him.

LS: Yeah.

HM: So that was the source . . .

LS: Yes, that was it.

HM: . . . of your inspiration. Thinking about that.

LS: Yep.

HM: Are there any particular themes that you find yourself drawn to more often? Or, you know, things you tend to write about, more about?

LS: It would seem social commentary and it's, a lot of them about the problems in the culture, because we work under tremendous humiliation and all kind of stuff here. Calypso was created with a . . . I saw signs in Port of Spain, "There's no dogs and calypsonians."

HM: Wow. This was when you were starting out?

LS: Yes. Yeah, yeah, yes. I used to go in and you'd have it written on the wall in restaurants and I would get a little paintbrush and something and paint it over.

HM: Paint it over and run out (Laughs.)

LS: And run out. Yeah. Until they started to frame them.

HM: Ah, so you couldn't do that anymore.

LS: But I'd pull down the whole thing with the, and go downstairs and smash it up. And finally, they won the battle eventually. I brought down in, that was up to 1966. I brought my manager down here, a Jewish fella, came down and we went into one of these Chinese restaurants and it was on the menu.

HM: Ah, it was printed on the menu.

LS: On the menu. It was the most humiliating thing.

HM: No calypsonians.

LS: And dogs, yeah.

HM: And dogs.

LS: So, but the music was stronger than the insults and that kind of thing.

HM: It survived.

LS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HM: It survived that. Have you, do you play any other instruments beside guitar?

LS: No. I play a little pan, you know. I was forced to do that. But I like the guitar for the portability for one. I can go anywhere. I can go . . .

HM: Just pick it up and go.

LS: Any part of the world. And I can . . .

HM: Take it on the airplane.

LS: Airplane. I can go in the restaurant even if go in a strange town. I'm not gonna starve.

HM: That's right.

25:00

LS: I can walk in a restaurant and give you a quick demonstration of something. Get a job. I arrange a meal, a drink. What is your dead night? Yeah, and we can . . .

HM: We can pick things up for you.

LS: . . . have a Caribbean night. Cook some Caribbean food, and I bring the music, and so on. I did very well.

HM: Well, and the rhythm, too, I think it, with me the guitar gives you a chance to give it more rhythm.

LS: Yes, yes.

HM: You can hit the strings. You can mute the strings. You can strum . . .

LS: Yeah.

HM: . . . the strings. Do you like to write at a particular time of day? Does it happen when you're writing any time of day? Is there a time that you like to write . . .

LS: The best time is early morning, after twelve, one o'clock in the stillness of the night. That's when it invites more thoughts.

HM: So, after midnight.

LS: Yes. That's the best time.

HM: Quiet time.

LS: I can do it anytime, but that's the perfect time.

HM: The best time. How do you, when you're writing do you write with a guitar in your hands or do you, or are you composing in your head just walking around?

LS: Yes, yes, yes, but I'll end up with guitar doing it because the guitar helps to formulate the melody, when you strum some chords and thing, you hear things. And you can vary as much as possible because sometimes you don't want to copy a melody. You have to vary it as much as possible because sometimes as I told you, you have only this (Strums chord pattern on guitar.) But you can . . .

HM: You can add to it.

LS: Add, and go anywhere, start anywhere.

HM: Will you have an idea and then pick up your guitar or just sit down with the guitar, start playing and get an idea? What is it, how does it work for you?

LS: Whichever comes first.

HM: Either one. It doesn't . . .

LS: Sometime you might be walking in the street, and something comes to you, and you start to compose it in your head (a few missing words).

HM: Before you ever pick up the guitar?

LS: Before you pick up the guitar. And then you pick up the guitar and see where you're going to vary the melody, the chords and thing.

HM: Find it.

LS: Yeah. Mm-hm.

HM: So do you write anything down before you finish the song or do you finish the song and then write it down?

LS: Before.

HM: Are you writing ideas down, crossing things out, you know, kind of playing with it on paper, or . . .

LS: Both ways. I do that sometimes. 'Cause as I told you before we did everything in our head and . . .

HM: You had to do everything in your head when you were starting out.

LS: Yeah, yeah. But now whatever is easy to do. Make it easy on yourself.

HM: (Laughs.)

LS: But that's one of the reasons why I learned to put, to jot down a melody.

HM: To learn how to write the notes down so you could . . .

LS: Yes. Yes.

HM: . . . record, you could put the melody down and go back to it.

LS: Yes. And put the chord . . .

HM: Before you had tape recorder or whatever. You needed to write it down.

LS: Yeah. But if you're in an awkward place and you don't have that, you could jot down a line. (Sings a melody.) Bah-da-bah-da-bah-da-bah-bah (etc.). (Speaks.) You could write that down because sometimes they go back from where they come from.

HM: If you don't do that then it's just gone.

LS: It's gone.

HM: And you're searching for it.

LS: And you don't, (Claps hands.) you can't find it, you know?

HM: (Laughs.)

LS: So that was a very . . . (Laughs.)

HM: That was helpful to know that.

LS: Yeah, yeah.

HM: Does being a performer and a composer, rather than just a composer, does your performing affect what you write? So, do you think that there's, you know, being able to perform your songs also affects your writing in a way that wouldn't if you were just purely a writer.

LS: No, I don't think so.

HM: You don't think it matters?

LS: It doesn't matter. I can visualize the performance. I do everything. I'm not a very demonstrative kind of performer. I don't like too much gimmickry.

HM: Move around all over the stage.

LS: The power is in the lyrics and how you express it.

HM: You let the song do it.

LS: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I don't like people who run all over the place . . .

HM: (Laughs.)

29:57

LS: . . . like they don't know what they're doing, you know. But that work very well for some performers. That's certainly a big thing for them. But I don't like it particularly. I . . .

HM: It's not your style.

LS: Not my style. Not my style.

HM: Do you think the internet and the, all the social media, facebook, and all the communication, people texting, has that change calypso, the reason for calypso or do you think it will affect calypso, when people communicate so freely now using social media?

LS: Yes, it affect calypso a bit. (Missing word) calypso was like the newspaper before so it will take away.

HM: Where people got the news.

LS: A subject would last a whole year.

HM: People could just talk about it.

LS: Yes. The whole year you could, something happen in March, May, you can sing that next Carnival. But that doesn't . . .

HM: Now the people would have forgotten it.

LS: Yes, yes. In ten days. So that affect that a bit and is one of the reasons why the soca music, it doesn't have that power for me. The rhythm is more the driving force.

HM: That's the attraction.

LS: People want to dance more than anything else. So, the calypso is in a more theater kind of setting. So, like what happened with the show on last Saturday? (Note: a concert in Port of Spain featuring the calypsos of Roaring Lion and Attila the Hun.) That's where the calypso belong now. I tell all . . .

HM: It's in an auditorium like that, with an audience sitting.

LS: Yes, yes. With your undivided attention.

HM: It's an artistic performance.

LS: Yes.

HM: And like you're saying, it's almost dramatic, it's almost theatrical.

LS: Exactly, exactly. And I tell people, calypso seem to be fut-, the future of calypso is in its past.

HM: What do you think about that?

LS: Well, nothing. It is what it is. You have to just (Laughs.)

HM: (Laughs.) That's funny.

LS: You just do that then.

HM: I mean, yeah.

LS: You know?

HM: Does that mean you stop? No.

LS: No. No, you just, like, what they did. Look, they spoke about basically two calypsonians, Lion and Attila, and it was a whole show about that and what the history of (several missing syllables).

HM: Why it was important and . . .

LS: Yes.

HM: And getting to hear the music, though.

LS: Hearing the music was, man, that touched my soul.

HM: And it was still fresh, you know even though it was about events, well at least the Graf Zeppelin was something that happened way back in the 1930's, it was still fascinating to hear the stories about it.

LS: The stories and a lot of people don't know these stories. It's part of your history, a lot of, you know. I heard things that I didn't hear about before. You know, so calypso document the history of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean and the world to a certain extent, you know. I remember songs about boxin', about the fight with Joe Lewis and Max Schmeling and all this kind of thing. I remember that.

HM: So that it would get a calypso or maybe more than one, you know.

LS: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Any subject you can think of. You can do a few shows with Part One, Part Two, Part Three in calypso.

HM: I know you traveled with Lord Kitchener, Lord Melody . . .

LS: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

HM: . . . as a young man, did you, did that influence, did you learn anything about writing songs from them, composing calypsos from being around them, or your friendship with them?

LS: Yes, yes. To a great extent. I learned some things from, like from Kitchener in particularly. He was a good musician, a natural musician. He heard things. And he didn't take the time to study it scientifically. But he would play a song and follow the chords naturally. I have to do it a little different. I have to listen a little more and figure out what is the second chord and that kind of thing.

HM: Where he would just be intuitive about it.

LS: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

35:02

HM: Well, that's about all the questions I had. Did you, anything that you would like to add to that? Or that you wanted to sing or? Before we close?

LS: (Strums guitar.) What could I sing for you boy? (Sings.) Trinidad the land of calypso/That is something everybody know/But in the land of calypso. (Speaks.) I can't remember this song. I did in 19-, in '64.

HM: That's way back.

LS: '64. With a social commentary because there was something here, you know the Lenten season? At that time one of things they hated calypso, that you can't sing a calypso during the Lenten season.

HM: After Ash Wednesday.

LS: Yeah, yes. Cut off. It was almost against the law. The radio would not play it. A friend, if you start to sing a calypso, a guy could brutalize you.

HM: Wow.

LS: Under an unwritten law.

HM: And they wouldn't be arrested.

LS: No. And I changed that. The, well, I was in the competition in 1964 and I almost got chased off the stage. Now, they didn't do it, eh? But the, very little applause. Nobody put their . . .

HM: You could tell they were having a problem with it.

LS: Yeah. They had a problem with it. They barely tolerated me, but it was important to me to sing that song. And I always felt that, that was one of the beauty and the power of calypso.

HM: 'Cause it changes . . .

LS: It's not pop. It's not pop music. You will have some popular calypsos, but it's not the popular culture. I follow that. I'll remember the chorus.

LS: (Strums guitar and sings.) Play calypso in Lent/For its love as entertainment/If is so immoral, don't play it no time at all/But in Lent they will play rock and roll, meringue, and mambo/And some these songs more vulgar than calypso.

LS: (Speaks.) And that was the beginning that caused the whole revolution, now they don't think about . . .

HM: So that changed it.

LS: That changed it.

HM: It changed after that.

LS: After that.

HM: Wow.



LS: I had the gall to face Catholic Trinidad, the most powerful institution in this land here. And I sat there, and they barely tolerated it, but I got the message across, you know. So, anyway, here's the chorus.

LS: (Sings and plays guitar.) So, play calypso in Lent, yeah/For its love as entertainment/If is so immoral, don't play it no time at all/In Lent they will play rock and roll, meringue, and mambo/And some these songs more vulgar than calypso. (Laughs.)

HM: That's wonderful.

LS: I must give you another one.

HM: Oh yes, please.

LS: I, when I saw all these problems I pick up the fight to represent calypso. Sometime they used to call me the Butler of Calypso, the Butler of Calypso. There is a guy from Grenada who came to Trinidad and he was a union leader. Vibrant, kind of rambunctious kind of fella. And he had a combination of like a preacher and a politician. And with courage, man, he had people following him and, you know, they used to call me that. Because I made the first application for a broadcast license in this country. After I left New York and I wanted to do something for the calypsonians 'cause I know about all these problems, and I wrote a song to Eric Williams. It goes something like this.

39:58

LS: (Sings and plays.) The right and the honorable Doctor Eric Williams/Pan and calypso in trouble, get me out of this jam/Eight years now I'm trying to get/A broadcast license from you/To help out the culture, but nothing yet/Tell me, what must I do?/As a born and bred Trinidadian get me out of this bind/All I'm askin' is a token, just a piece of your time/Doctor, if you name the time and if you tell me where/Your humble servant Superior will be there/So here what I want, Doc. I'm seekin' permission/To make my contribution to the indigenous cultures we have in this land/Talkin' 'bout calypso and pan, local Indian composition/And anything that evolve in this land, like parang/That's how we need our own local radio station for local culture promotion/We must, you must stop the cultural assassination/Doctor lend a hand, I said stop the cultural assassination.

LS: (Speaks.) Now listen, at the time we had two radio stations in this country, one owned by England and one owned by the government.

HM: Two radio stations.

LS: Two radio stations. You had oil boom money pass and they would not play the culture. So, I did this song and Eric Williams ignore me completely. I ended up, (four missing syllables) eight years now I trying to get a broadcast license. After eight years . . .

HM: Eight years. Still nothing.

LS: Still nothing. But I was sort of scared of him. I didn't go toe-to-toe with him. So, right after that he died. So, we had a new prime minister. And I said, I think I could deal with him and I wrote the new Prime Minister and he followed up just like Eric Williams. So, I took them to court.

HM: You took them to court?

LS: Took them to court on a constitutional motion. Well, boy, well, of course, they (missing word) me, "Who's this little fella with no education and no political connection, nothing?" I last minute, I stayed in court for about, after three years, they threw me out of court. And charged me, the court.

HM: Wow. Three years. That must have been expensive, yeah.

LS: (Two or three missing syllables) Well, I was broke at the time. Still broke.

HM: (Laughs.)

LS: But what happen was I talk about it. I didn't even find out how much money it is because I didn't have any money to pay, but common sense told me, what should I do is to buy some time. I appealed the decision so it is not closed. So, I am before the Court of Appeal now (Laughs.)

HM: You won't go away.

LS: No, no. I wouldn't go away. And the government come and change. So, the new government, you know when a new government aspirin' to come in they begin making promises. So, they spoke to me and thing and I was feelin' good, you know? Won! (Claps hands.) So, I went out of the country during the, that's how I learned to beat pan. I was broke I went to a little tourist country, there was plenty work in Virgin Islands, tourist industry. So I played pan in the day and sing in the night. I used to work about 8-10 hours a day. So while I up there, the government, the new government put a ad in the newspaper, statin' the government is not recognizing any old applications for broadcast license. Anyone who is interested will have to reapply in seven days. I got this message on a Monday. I flew down here by Wednesday. And at 3:45, the deadline was four o'clock on Friday, at fifteen minutes before four I lodged my application. It wasn't filled or anything because I could not do it, but I thought better a half-finished . . .

HM: Turned it in, yeah.

45:26

LA: . . . in than none at all. And you know, then they opened up from, they gave out about fifty-something license, because the new government had their friends who supported them, who wanted radio license, but I was in the way. So, I got my license, too. Now (Claps hands.) No bank is lending me money now because those people ownin' some of the banks, older people . . .

HM: They don't want the competition.

LS: No, no, no. They stole meh format for the culture and everything. I catch my royal. I only knew, I survive because I was determined. And I got it eventually. That's how. I beat pan. I smuggle in some equipment.

HM: Some, bringing some equipment in.

LS: Yes, I subscribed to the (Claps hands.) the radio magazine. The trade magazine and there's a station in Cincinnati that is closing down, and they have a console here, for four hundred dollars, an old, good Rolls Royce, RCA, was very cheap.

HM: So, you were able to bring that equipment in from the States.

LS: Yeah, yes, yes, yes.

HM: So, you started a radio station?

LS: Yes, it's still in existence.

HM: It's still, which one is it?

LS: 94.1

HM: 94.1 That's exciting. That's an exciting story.

LS: The Boom Champion? Yes, yeah. I'm still on the board and I sold a couple of pieces. I'm still a shareholder.

HM: You're still involved.

LS: Yeah, but I want to get out of it now.

HM: Well, I'm going to turn off the mic.

LS: Yeah. Good, good, good, good.

HM: Thank you.

End of interview