

Interview subject: Hindu Prince

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: February 25, 2018

Location of interview: Subject's home in Flanagin Town, Trinidad and Tobago

Actual name: Kenneth Nathaniel

Other sobriquets/nicknames: Prince, Chicken Hawk (early)

Date of birth: December 22, 1950

Place of birth:

Awards (as of March 2018): Calypso Monarch National Semi-finals (twice), Humorous Calypso Finals

Best songs/best-known songs: "False Prophet," "Heartless," "De Gambler," "Animal Doctor," "Ram Goat Mentality"

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Individuals heard during interview:

HP: Hindu Prince

HM: Hunter Moore

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

Bulla: a gay man

Coki-eye: cockeyed, watching out of the corner of one's eye

Doh: don't

Douglu: an individual of African and Indian descent

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

Kentucky: Kentucky Fried Chicken, popular American fast food chain in Trinidad. Prince's reference to buying a song at Kentucky is a metaphor for singers who buy songs that are quickly produced and lack personality.

Lickrish: greedy

Mamaguy: a person who uses intimidating behavior to accomplish his or her objectives

Mih: my

Mihself: myself

Pukney: homemade gun (per Hindu Prince)

Sampat: an agreement (per Hindu Prince)

Sans humanite': a traditional calypso melodic refrain, often used for extempo lyrics

UTT: University of Trinidad and Tobago

Whey: what, where

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Subject sings: 16:15, 18:00, 19:20, 21:17, 23:14, 41:33, 42:04, 45:58

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Notes about interview: the original recording has been edited for length

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Interview: (recording begins mid-conversation)

HM: And then I'll check it before we actually start. And your date of birth?

HP: 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1950.

HM: December 22, 1950.

HP: Yeah.

HM: Have you always lived in Trinidad and Tobago?

HP: (Missing six syllables) Tobago (Laughs.)

HM: Always in Trinidad.

HP: Yeah. Flanigan Town, in fact. I lived in Jerningham Junction for one year. That was the railway thing when they transfer mih father. For one year.

HM: For one year.

HP: Yeah. But otherwise Flanigan town.

Visitor: (Four missing syllables) Belmont?

HP: Eh?

Visitor: Belmont?

HP: No. Jerningham Junction.

Visitor: Ah, junction.

HP: (Five missing syllables) that where they, all the trains used to meet.

HM: That's where they used to meet. This is where it branched off?

HP: Rio Claro's train will go there. San Fernando train, Port of Spain train. That was the . . .

HM: Main junction?

HP: . . . main junction. Jerningham . . .

HM: And it was called Jerningham Junction.

HM: Jerningham Junction.

HM: Okay. And what are your best-known songs, would you say?

HP: "False Prophet."

HM: "Paul's Prophet," like Moses was a prophet?

HP: Yeah. You will hear a piece. You know? (Laughs.)

HM: "Paul's Prophet."

HP: Yeah. Now, Mr. Hunter. I did a lot of songs, and, you know, all my songs went down good, you know. But this one, but, right now people rating "Gambler" as the better song.

HM: "De Gambler. Yeah, I saw that online 'cause, see that's, there's a YouTube online of that one.

HP: Yeah. Right? But "False Prophet" is ah . . .

HM: You like that better?

HP: It says a lot, you see. You want to hear it, you know?

HM: Are there any others that you want me to put down? This will go, when I type up the interview I'll put this information at the top.

HP: The first year I sang with Kitchener, I did a song called "Animal Doctor." That was a double entendre.

HM: "Animal Doctor."

HP: And I do, I had a song about incest, "Ram Goat Mentality."

HM: What's that again?

HP: "Ram Goat Mentality."

HM: How's Ramgood spelled?

HP: R-A-M G-O-A-T.

HM: G-O-A-D?

HP: A-T.

HM: A-, Ah. Ram . . . .

HP: R-A-M G-O

HM: A-T.

HP: A-T.

HM: Like ram goat.

HP: Yeah. Ram goat.

HM: Ram goat.

HP: You know how a ram goat does behave. And you know . . . .

HM: Like a ram.

HP: You know how a ram does behave?

HM: Like butts, butt heads.

HP: That was our ancestral fathers. You know?

HM: "A Ram Goat Mentality."

HP: Yeah. I did a song called "Heartless."

HM: "Heartless"?

HP: Yeah. I was showin' how people could live without heart. The kind of thing goin' on in the country. You know, just . . . .

Visitor: You can see that now.

HP: . . . just, how you call (three missing syllables) heartless.

HM: And I'll ask you, help me remember, but I don't know if you have any CDs I could buy. You know, just of your work. Anything?

HP: I don't have any available, but . . .

HM: Or where I could find your work, you know.

HP: I'll get, well, how soon you goin' back?

HM: A week from Tuesday.

HP: A week from, I'll call Short Pants and he have it.

HM: I know Short Pants.

HP: I lost all my CDs. A little (missing syllable) visit me, eh? (To family member.) (Four missing syllables), let me ask you something.

HM: So, also I was going to write down. Do you, did you win any crowns or place in the semi-finals or anything like that?

HP: The first year I sang I make the semi-finals, 1970, and then I made it back with "Gambler."

HM: So, in 1970 you were in the semis.

HP: Yeah.

HM: And then also later with "De Gambler"?

HP: "De Gambler"

HM: What year was that?

HP: (Speaks to family member.) What year was "De Gambler," do you know?

Family member: '91 or '92? I'll go find it.

HP: (To family member.) You mind check on that for me and I will get it.

HM: I'll put that down. So . . .

HP: And I made the humorous final, but I forget the song when I went on stage.

HM: Humorous finals.

HP: Boy, and they had me (three missing syllables).

HM: Oh, that's tough. To be in the finals, yeah?

HP: And I can't remember my own thing, boy. I start the song . . .

HM: And it just blanked out.

HP: I get a blank.

(Microphone is repositioned.)

HP: But Blakie tell me something, but I ain't believe this when he said them fellas (two missing syllables) thing, you know.

HP: I said "Blakie." He said but, I, he cussed me, he said, "Boy, I'm tellin' you (three missing syllables) they fix you."

M: What were some of the tents. You sang in Kitchener.

HP: Alright.

HM: What other tents?

HP: I started with Victory. 1970.

HM: Victory. 1970.

HP: That tent run for three years.

HM: Three.

HP: That was where Hyatt is now, boy. Port Services Club. Then in 1965 I went with Revue. (HM note: Prince must have meant 1975 since he started in 1970.)

HM: 1965. Revue.

HP: Right? Now we had some tents run for one year. They didn't make it after.

HM: Yeah. They didn't make it.

4:56

HP: Then I went Kingdom of the Wizard. That was William Munro. Right? Then I sang with Spectakula Forum the first three years.

HM: That was a great one.

HP: I was one of the fellas there. Right? I sang with Malju. That was Errol and . . .

HM: What is that one?

HP: Malju.

HM: Malju?

HP: Errol Fabian. I know he, that a fella you should . . .

HM: I don't know that one. How's that spelled? M-

HP: M-A-L-J. (To family member.) Malju? (Two missing syllables) M-A-L-J . . .

Family member: A-L-J-U (Note: correct spelling in Maljo.)

HP: Eh?

HM: A-L

Family member: M-A-L-J-U

HM: J-U? Malju? That was the name of the tent?

HP: Yeah. That was the name of the tent. Now Malju is a cu-, is a thing that they say, "Wear blue." Like bad eyes. That what it means, eh?

HM: So like, if you had the glasses on, if you were blind? Is that what you're saying?

HP: No, now in Trinidad it has certain thing, like somebody watch your plan kind of thing.

Family member: (A missing sentence.)

HM: It's an expression.

HP: (Speaks to family member.) Bring me for me now. Hey (two missing words) bring me two book. (Speaks to HM.) You ever read George Maharaj's books?

(Microphone is repositioned.)

HP: On calypso?

HM: No.

HP: (To family member.) Bring me two books. George Maharaj. (Speaks to HM.) He's a Trinidadian, but he's living in Canada.

HM: Oh, George Maharaj. Somebody told me his name.

HP: I have two of the books here.

HM: I have to look for that.

HP: I own one of the (missing syllable).

(Recorder was stopped and started again to adjust volume. Recording begins in mid-sentence.)

(Edit.)

HP: (Four missing syllables), you know?

HM: So, we stopped with Malju. Just you were giving me the tents.

HP: Yeah. Then I was . . .

HM: Anything after that?

HP: . . . then I went with Kaiso House.

HM: Kaiso. Kaiso House.

HP: That was the last tent I sang good.

HM: The last time you were singing in the tents was at Kaiso House?

HP: Kaiso House, yeah.

HM: And when would, about when did that, was that, would you say? What year, at Kaiso House?

Family member: 2014.

HPL: Eh?

Family member: 2014.

HP: That was "Gambler." No, but I started before. That was when I, now, next thing again. When they used to, anytime a promoter looked to open a calypso tent in town, he really looked for a balanced cast. You know, because, I was one of the persons they always look for. To make up the cast. And then I went, but I went in Kaiso House when De Lamo and Luta won the crown. We did, that the first year. That was in . . .

HM: That would have been the first year.

HP: . . . City Hall.

HM: Oh, that was in City Hall?

HP: Yeah.

HM: That was in City Hall.

HP: That was when Kaiso House started.

HM: That's when they started. The first year.

HP: Then I was with them up in Deluxe. I went in some, I did some, I did a good three years with them. Kaiso House.



HM: I went to see them this year.

HP: I did a good few years with Kaiso House.

HM: And then "De Gambler" was in 2014.

HP: Yeah.

HM: At Kaiso House.

HP: Yeah.

HM: Was that the last year you performed?

HP: No. I didn't sing the next year, but I sing the year after that.

HM: 2016.

HP: Yeah. You will hear what I did then. (Laughs.)

HM: So that's almost, that's recent, yeah. I mean, that was just year before last.

HP: Well, then three years I didn't sing after that.

HM: Well, I just have questions. Anything else, in terms of accomplishments that you want to mention? That was the information that I wanted, you know, in terms of competitions, and things like that, but it's also really good to get the tents that you sang in. Anything else that you're particularly proud of, in terms of recognition that you want me to include?

HP: Well, I am proud of to sing in the days with Lord Kitchener, Pretender, Terror . . .

HM: Yeah, the great ones.

HP: Stalin, Black Stalin, Shadow. To come through these fellows.

HM: Those great, great guys.

HP: You know? That, to me, that is, . . .

HM: That's an accomplishment by itself.

HP: That worth more than money. You know? Because it have plenty of young calypsonians now that like to be. Pretender? The year I was singing in the tent.

Family member: Power.

HP: Power. You know, all the old, all the old. (Laughs.)

HM: Great ones.

Family member: Power was your boy, you know.

HP: Power was mih partner, you know? He used to make sure and take me up Chaguanas and make sure and drop me. You know?

HM: So, just to get to sing with those guys.

(Microphone is repositioned.)

HP: Yeah, but that achieve, that to me, money ain't worth it to me, because Pretender, the year I was singing in the tent, the song going down good. Now I (two missing syllables) always getting encore. They always call me back on stage. That why promoters used to look for me.

HM: Because you were popular with the crowd.

HP: With the crowd. And I wasn't getting the encore. And Pretender pull me. He said, "Two line in the last chorus you ought to change. He said, "But, I ain't telling you what to put there. He said, "You could compose. Go home and think." You know? He said, "You go home and think."

HM: Think about it.

9:54

HP: And, well, I go home and I study. And I get mih two lines and I go and get an encore. He come up to me and he hug me up. He said, "See what I tell you? He said, "I know what I could of tell you to put there."

HM: But he wanted you to do it.

HP: He wanted me, Terror, now, (seven missing syllables). At that time I had long hair, and the hair kind of around and Terror called me back and fixed my hair and things for me, boy.

HM: So, you were getting mentored . . .

HP: Yeah.

HM: By these men and taught (two or three missing syllables).

HP: When Stalin, when I went to Kitchener . . .

Family member: (Missing sentence).

HP: . . . when I went with Kitchener and Stalin brings me up. I didn't know Stalin. I younger, boy, you know? And Stalin pulled me and said, "You is a good kaisonian." You know, he ain't been (one or two missing syllables) a few years.

HM: When he heard you.

HP: Yeah, he said I, he said "You a good kaisonian." That was when I sing "Animal Doctor," you will hear just now, right? And he tell him, he used to go on, he was the emcee. Stalin was . . .

HM: He was the emcee.

HP: . . . a boss of an emcee, yeah.

HM: Which tent was this?

HP: Revue.

HM: At Revue.

HP: With Kitchener. He was the emcee. And (three missing syllables) "Animal Doctor," the double entendre? (Four missing syllables) he said, "This fella come and sing a clean song, but all the words (two missing syllables)." That's the way he used to talk, eh? When I finish and I get mih encore and then I mash down de place. That was in Prince's building where NAPA is now? They had the old building there that when the Queen, that was when the Queen days.

HM: Oh, is that near the savannah?

HP: That was where we used to have the ball . . .

HM: That was across from the savannah, where NAPA is now.

HP: Yeah, where NAPA is. They used have all the party and thing in the . . .

HM: I've seen a picture.

HP: Okay. So, real old and (seven missing syllables) when I done singing I get all the encore, and he said, "What I tellin' you (five missing syllables), you know? But my joy was to be with Surpriser, too. That one of the first persons who recognized me as a little boy and started carry me Balmain. He give me fifty cent! That why I try to get him to tell you about the fifty cent. Fifty cent I get when we finished Balmain.

HM: That was a lot:

HP: We used walk, you must hear, from Balmain to Couva. Those days we eh have transport. We walk from Balmain to Couva (a one hour journey on foot, according to Hindu Prince).

HM: You walked, yeah.

HP: Fifty cent I got. That was first paying calypso tent there.

HM: That was the first paying calypso tent, yeah, for you.

HP: Right? But before I was with Surpriser, they had a children's show, Auntie Kay. You know about Auntie Kay?

HM: Oh, Auntie Kay! I've heard of that, yeah.

HP: I make second prize when I went with Auntie Kay. But that time, I had, before Hindu Prince, I give mih name Chicken Hawk.

HM: Oh, that was your name, Chicken Hawk.

HP: That was mih name. But when I went in town you know and, a gentleman that does play trumpet here, Conrad Syriac, he said, "Boy, you would (two missing syllables). Blakie open that tent."

HM: He'll like that?

HP: He take me in car and carry me. So, when I sing, now Blake used to cuss a lot, eh? He said, he's callin Fat Man, he was real fat, "Fat Man, come and hear f---n' Indian brown!" (Laughs.) I sing that song. I sing it about five times. So Blakie start to call for that. "Come and hear this man. Come and hear this man."

HM: "Come hear this," yeah.

HP: I got a contract, no audition. First time I sing there, they sign me up one time for Victory tent. And they advertise me, "Direct from India . . .

HM: (Laughs.)

HP: . . . Hindu Prince" And they give me that name. A musician of name of Lloyd Batiste. He was in the army. Everybody lookin' for a name for me. In (three missing syllables), up on Nelson Street they had a club there. Punkins was the owner of the club, a big fat fella, and they lookin' for a name and Lloyd Batiste come up with the name Hindu Prince. Blakie said (six missing syllables).

HM: That's a great name.

HP: If Blake said five words, three and a half is cuss.

Visitor: He was a real laugh, boy.

HP: Yeah. And so I, and they advertise, he put it in the newspaper, "Direct from India." Some Indian people come in the tent that night.

HM: And they start speaking Hindu to you.

HP: And they came to me and, "So, you really from India?" And I tell them (three missing syllables), since I was little bitty lad. I said, "No, boy." I said, "That is advertisement." You understand?

HM: Yeah, yeah.

HP: But I had good days in kaiso.

HM: You kept it, you kept the name, though.

HP: Hindu Prince?

HM: Hindu Prince. I mean . . .

HP: Well, everybody recognize me by that.

HM: Everybody knew you by that name.

HP: Yeah. So, I couldn't, I can't . . .

HM: But it was, you know, I think it's interesting because they saw that as being a positive thing to identify you . . .

HP: As an Indian.

HM: As an Indian. That this was a good thing for your career. To say yes . . .

HP: Now, I'm a Presbyterian, eh? I'm a Presbyterian.

HM: Presbyterian, yeah?

HP: Yeah? You know? Some people said, "You're lyin'." I said, "No."

HM: They figured you were Hindu.

14:57

HP: That was a name they give me. But they gave me, as I say, they gave me that to recognize that I's a Indian.

HM: That you had Indian descent.

HP: Because Chicken Hawk (Laughs.)

HM: They're like, "Ah, that doesn't make you special." But Hindu Prince, the name kind of made you stand out.

HP: Yeah.

HM: But it's also why they also said "Direct from India," because it kind of made, they thought that would make you special. People would be interested in you because of that.

HP: As an Indian.

HM: It wasn't a negative thing.

HP: Then after mih first three years, people get to recognize I's a good kaisonian.

HM: That you were good, yeah. And they would come see you because they knew you were good.

HP: Yeah. I always got, I always had that appreciation from the audience, eh, from the time I enter the stage I get mih, you know? I always get mih encore and thing, you know? So . . .

HM: Do you want to sing something?

HP: Oh, I want to sing something.

HM: Yeah, you want to sing "Animal Doctor," or something?

HP This one, I will start from 1970. (Strums guitar.)

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) I must say that I'm proud and glad/To be living in Trinidad/I ain't care who say that I mad/But I glad that I living in Trinidad/You may read on the paper or some maybe told/What going on in the outer world/Some of us may cry we catchin' we tail/But look outside and see if your conscience going to fail/Because in Africa, a place called Biafra/So much people die off from hunger/Cry no more, though we may be poor/But think of Vietnam and this endless war/And in India they cannot retreat/Millions there they can't get nothing to eat/So we in Trinidad should go down on we knee/And thank our Almighty. (Speaks.) That 1970.

HM: That's 1970?

HP: Now, through the advertisement I come from India. I made a song . . .

HM: What was the name of that song?

HP: "No Hunger," I used to call it. But people used to call it "Biafra." Well, it during the time of the Biafra war.

HM: Oh yeah, I remember.

HP: Right, that is when that song made. That song made about 1966. I had that song before . . .

HM: That was when you wrote it, yeah.

HP: That is, you know? I left school already. Then through the advertisement I make a song the next year.

HP: And then I . . . (Sings and plays guitar.) Anywhere I pass people asking me, "Hindu Prince, why you left India, your country?"/Anywhere I pass people asking me, "Hindu Prince, why you left India, your country?"/I told them this is private business of mine/But if they insist, I will not decline/I will tell you all the facts one by one/Then tell me if you're satisfied when I done/In India you can't lime on the streets whether day or night/In India you can't bus' a man face if you feel to fight/In India a real good fete is only now and then/But what I hate most of all in India, you can't make dougla children. (Laughs.)

HM: (Laughs.)

HP: You understand it, yeah?

HM: Yeah.

HP: You have the creole up there?

HM: That's what we were just talking, yeah.

HP: And then I came to . . .

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) They say we are cosmopolitan/And second to no other nation/But I say there's a division/Between the negroes and the Indians/Plenty people look at this thing simple/Thinking it eh causin' us no trouble/But through this we can't live happy/And we would not have perfect unity/Why the Indians and negroes cannot unite/And try to build up the nation, instead we would fight, my people/If this racial problem should spread everywhere/We'll always be divided because of the difference in our hair.

20:29

HM: (Laughs.) You're using humor, you know, to discuss a serious topic. So, I mean, that's typical of calypso.

HP: Calypso humor, you know. Even though, no matter how serious your topic is . . .

(Edit.)

HP: . . . you must put, you know, you have to, now it's (five missing syllables) put a little pepper (four missing syllables) the thing according to what . . .

HM: It's makes it easier to hear and to understand. And sometimes that's missing in calypso now. People are serious.

HP: Yeah. What else (four missing syllables) you making a political speech.

HM: Yeah.

HP: Even if you must sing a political song. But let's see how Chalkdust does do it. You know put something that the people, you know, a nice little . . .

HM: "Arithmetic," like the song, "Arithmetic,"

HP: Right.

HP: And when I went by Kitchener now. This the song I singing at the tent, Victory.

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) It was always the wish of mih father/For me to be an animal doctor/So he sent me to study in India/At the University of Calcutta/Well, imagine your boy studying hard/To bring a degree back to Trinidad/Now with my treatment anyone I could convince/So, to see me ask for Doctor Hindu Prince/A woman from quite down Penal Rock/Begging me to help she out please, Doc/She said she had to hide from the people/Because this pussycat would to put me in trouble/She said, "Doc, I know how mih cat lickrish, it always thievin' the neighbor fish/So them young boys and them plan a sampat/and throw ah set of wood on she cat/People comin' from near and far/To my office Cuncun Street in

Arima/Animal of all description/Come in for my medication/A fella with a half-dead cock in he hand/Said he tired, boy, by the obeah man/He said, "Doc, I would give you mih land and mih shop/If you could only make this cock stand up."

HM: (Laughs.) Stand up.

HP: Double Entendre.

HM: Sure, sure. You could say, "Oh, I was singing about this. I wasn't singing about . . ." That's how it started, you know.

HP: You have to dress it.

HM: Yeah.

HP: I did the next double entendre. Well, I crossing years. I did this long after.

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) My son was studying for exam/So, on the subject he wanted my opinion/He was doing a survey/The boy working hard/To know who was the biggest family in Trinidad/I said the Mouhamed, they sing in the alley/What about the Jones, the George, and the Murray?/Then he told me 'bout this visit down somewhere/He meet a big family with the surname Bulla/He said while traveling somebody whisper, "The driver is a bulla."/When he inquire 'bout the grocery owner/He and all is a bulla/It had some fella's sitting on the corner/Most of them was full-blooded bulla/He only met two Smith and one Greenwich/Was only bulla living in that village.

HM: (Laughs.) Ah, that's wonderful. (Note: Interviewer wasn't familiar with the term "bulla" at the time.) I'm really glad you're getting some things down musically, and if you think of an illustration as I ask you these questions please feel free to illustrate, but what age did you begin writing calypso, roughly how old were you?

HP: About eleven, from eleven years, in school. When they tell us do composition, I writing calypso.

HM: So, it was a school assignment and you wrote a calypso?

HP: I started to write calypso from school.

HM: Do you remember the first calypso you wrote? You would have sung, did you sing it in class? Did you sing it for friends?

HP: I can't remember it.

HM: Could be just a little piece, you know.

25:11



(Sings and plays guitar.) I eh have no pukney/I eh have no gun/But if you only touch me/Mih aim is to jump and run/But if you come peacefully/And accept my sympathy/Remember what Chicken Hawk say/Every hog have his Saturday.

(Speaks.) That's what I could remember. That is the chorus.

HM: That's one of the first ones that you wrote?

HP: That's the ca-,first song I write, mih, first song.

HM: So, you were Chicken Hawk from the beginning.

HP: Well, yeah. I put, I sang as Chicken Hawk.

(Edit.)

HM: So, what were you're musical influences. What, when you, you know, what influenced your musical tastes and, what were you listening to as a, what were you hearing as a child, but also as you grew up?

HP: Well, you know . . .

HM: Just calypso? Or other things?

HP: Well, I believe so because I mean it was only a little radio you had in my time. It wasn't like now. And somehow or other I get to like calypso. None of my family . . .

HM: Did calypso?

HP: I had an uncle. He used to sing classical Indian songs. But (three missing syllables) had nobody. But Blakie said something. Blakie used to say some spirit pass and take me (Laughs.) to sing calypso. You know?

HM: How did you hear calypso?

HP: On radio. Saturday night you used to hear a half an hour program from the tent. I used to make sure and listen to that. But other than that, I ain't hear nothin'. I don't know what really. You know? I don't know (six missing syllables) a guitar (six or seven missing syllables) guitar (three missing syllables). (Laughs.) You understand?

(Rain begins falling on roof.)

HM: Do you think hearing the classical Hindu music influenced you at all?

HP: I really can't say. I can't say. But after hearing calypso I end up playing guitar with a Indian orchestra. I played guitar with a parang side.

HM: A parang side?

HP: Yeah. Parang . . . you know? Christmas time? I played guitar with that. You know, somehow or another I got music in me. You know?

HM: A pan side? Pan?

HP: No.

HM: Parang?

HP: Parang. You know Christmas.

HM: Christmas music. Yeah. I like that, too.

HP: I used to play guitar. Guitar played. I play with an Indian orchestra every Friday, every Saturday night and Sunday we outside.

HM: Did you ever write any other kind of music besides calypso? Or just calypso?

HP: No. Calypso, calypso. I never sung anybody, mihsself and Merchant. You ever hear of Merchant?

HM: Merchant?

HP: He die. But . . .

HM: He's a calypsonian.

HP: Yeah.

HM: I think I have heard of him, yeah.

HP: One of the greatest composers they had. One of the (missing word). We were personal friends. And he give me songs. He said, I never sing one of his songs.

HM: You never sing any of his songs.

HP: He give me songs. He give me a book, said "Take songs."

HM: Ah, just to study? I mean . . .

HP: No, he give me a book to take a song from. He make a present (missing word). And he compose . . .

HM: Ah, it was a present. So, he gave you a book of his songs.

HP: And he said "Take a s-," Sparrow sing from that book. A lot of singers sing from that book.

HM: From Merchant's book.

HP: From Merchant. I never take any. And you know, he told me something that he said. Said, "Boy, (four missing syllables) take one of my songs." But I am like, what I sing comes from inside here.

HM: You want to be the one who writes for you.

HP: I am, I will be more comfortable singing what I write.

HM: To express yourself.

HP: Yeah. Express mihsself. I know what I write, you know? I think, I read a little, get mihs facts.

HM: Your observations.

HP: Observe, you know. And Kitchener told me one thing, too, in mihs young days. He said, "You want to get ideas, go in a rum shop, and sit down and just listen to fellas talk. He said, "They won't tell you direct but just listen to what they say and you could (six missing syllables) . . ."

HM: That's good advice.

HP: . . . and make a song.

HM: And some would say, that a true calypsonian only sings his or her own songs, you know. You're not truly a calypsonian unless you're singing your own songs. I don't know if that's true.

HP: Now (seven missing syllables) Pretender and all said that. You have calypsonian and you have calypso singer. A calypsonian is a fella who compose his own songs that he sing. A calypso singer . . .

HM: Can sing other people's work well.

HP: . . . is one who would sing a song . . . but now it common, according to some of the singers that says you go by Kentucky and buy a song. (Five missing syllables) you could buy a song, you know, but I . . .

30:02

HM: You always did your own songs?

HP: I wrote my own songs. I did, the only song I did two other people's song. You heard of Sundar Popo the chutney singer? UTT did a show for him after he died and Chalkdust called me and they give me one of Sundar Popo's songs to sing. I the onliest man to get the encore the night, eh?

HM: You were the only one.

HP: They give me a song called "Spanner." (Sings.) "Is the spanner she want." (Laughs.) (Speaks.) And then they did a show about three years ago for Sparrow in NAPA. I did a Sparrow song.

HM: You did one of Sparrow's song?

HP: They give me . . .

HM: Because it was a tribute. Which one did you do?

HP: One about them, the jammettes and them, what do you call it? "To Keep the City Clean."

HM: "To Keep the City Clean."

HP: Yeah. That's a song way back, eh? But Chalkdust is a true, you know, according to your, eh? So, that's the onliest two. But instead of sing somebody's song I will write mih own, write the songs I writin'.

HM: So. how would you describe calypso to someone who didn't know the music? So, what makes it calypso, what defines calypso for you? How do you know it's calypso?

HP: I think as a Trinidadian, you know? Now we are expressing ourselves, you know? As a true Trini, you know, you would say, "That's a calypso you would sing." Calypso, it almost like it have a meaning for everything. Every day in life it have a calypso for it.

HM: Every subject. So, it has something to do with the lyrics. About what the, how the lyrics, what the lyrics discuss. That it's, so would you say it has more to do with the words than the music? When your, someone is saying, "What is calypso?" It's more about the words? Than the music?

HP: The words are a lot, but the music has plenty to play in it, too. But, now for a long time they used to do most of calypso in the minor. Like the extempo now.

HM: The sans humanite.

HP: Yeah. Sans humanite. You know, because most of the calypso used to be in that long time. It's a combination of the words and the music.

HM: And the music that make it distinct. But if you're . . .

HP: Then Sparrow come here and Sparrow start to bring melodies from . . .

HM: Different places.

HP: Different . . .

HM: Different types of music.

HP: Different melodies, you know?

HM: So, there's room for outside influence, to bring it into calypso, but it's still calypso.

HP: It's still calypso.

HM: And if you're from Trinidad and you grow up with calypso, you just know what it is.

HP: Yeah.

HM: Is that what you're saying? This is calypso.

HP: This is calypso.

HM: I can, I just know it because, is that what you're saying?

HP: Yeah. That is my t'ing. That is our thing.

HM: That is "my thing."

HP: That is our t'ing, you know? Like you and the country and western. And you will have songs you will do . . .

HM: We'll say "That's country."

HP: . . . according to what going on in the country. Where you're living.

HM: In the contemporary (missing word).

HP: You make a song and you will do songs about that, like what going on.

HM: That topic.

HP: So, that is how we do it.

HM: It's simple.

HP: It's a form of expressing yourself. How you think.

HM: It's similar in that way. Country can discuss everyday topics.

HP: Yeah. I like country and western.

HM: I'm finding it's popular.

HP: Gypsy. Gypsy is a very good country and western singer, eh?

HM: I talked to him. He grew up hearing his mother sing country and western.

HP: And we had a fella from Tobago called Cowboy Jack. I don't hear about him again. He used to sing, Tobago had a fella Cowboy Jack, they used to call him.

HM: Boy Jack?

HP: Cowboy Jack.

HM: Cowboy Jack.

HP: Cowboy. I think you could find out.

HM: Yeah, I'll look.

HP: They would tell you, but I believe he died. I don't hear about him, but . . .

HM: He was very, he had a lot of country?

HP: Country, yeah, he sing like the Americans.

HM: Well, and Trini Rio. Does, he did, does a lot of country, very country.

HP: Who?

HP: Rio.

HP: Rio?

HM: Yeah.

HP: I didn't know that.

HM: He does some country things too. But Gypsy, his song at Kaiso House this year, it could have been in Nashville.

HP: Yeah, he into country and western, you know. He have the melodies.

HM: So, but we were discussing . . .

HP: Now, calypso we got (four missing syllables) melodies.

HM: . . . some of the same topics and song structure and things are very similar. I was surprised.

HP: No, Gypsy, he like the country and western.

HM: Yeah, a lot. He's seen Merle Haggard in concert several times. But, so, where do you find your ideas for songs, where?

HP: I read a lot.

HM: A lot when you read?

HP: I listen to, you know, people talk.

HM: The news?

HP: The news.

HM: The paper.

HP: You know, and you get the ideas, you know?

34:52

HM: So, hearing people discuss a topic.

HP: Discussing, you listen a lot, and according to what (two missing syllables) Pretender (two missing syllables) listen, go into the rum shop, listen to them fellas. Somehow (six missing syllables), you know. Just an idea.

HM: Just kind of sticks, the idea.

HP: And you come now and you have to think as the composer. You know, you just think what you hear. You could change it. Shape it to suit you.

HM: To put it in different, to phrase it.

HP: How phrase it, you know. Get it to rhyme. Now calypso is a story, eh? What I hear some of them fellas singing, you don't hear the story. You're wonderin' what, but calypso is a story.

HM: But that's another similarity with country. There are a lot of stories.

HP: You have to tell a story, you know? You just don't sing, you know?

HM: On a topic.

HP: And then getting it together. Getting it to rhyme. Getting the right words. I like to rhyme proper, eh? I like to rhyme. My rhyming must be . . .

HM: Proper?

HP: . . . not no hard, you know, not no far away, some of them rhyming "bat" with, if you understand what I tell you, see.

HM: Yeah, so that the rhymes . . .

HP: My rhyming, so but you have to look for the words.

HM: . . . is tight. So, you have to find the right words.

HP: But somebody was telling me in England of a book with rhymes. I want, I tell mih daughter to check out and get one of them books for me.

HM: A book of rhymes.

HP: GB have one of them.

HM: A book of rhymes. Rhyming words.

HP: Even if it wouldn't tell you direct, but you know . . .

HM: It gives you some ideas.

HP: . . . you could rhyme.

HM: A rhyming dictionary.

HP: Because that is important. I think.

HM: Can you think of any specific examples of a time when you read or heard something and it became a song. You know, you can say, "Ah. That. I heard that here and that became this particular song." Can you tell me about that?

HP: You know the, *Punch*? I did a song about that.

HM: It's a magazine?

HP: A newspaper.

Visitor: a newspaper. Yeah.

HM: *Punch*?

HP: *Punch*. But they have sexy, a sort of sexy, men have, half-naked. I made a song over that.

HM: And you saw something, and what song did that become?

HP: "Sexy Newspapers," was the name of my song.

(Edit.)

HM: In your writing are you drawn to any particular themes, in your writing, that you can say, "Well, I sing about this and this and this?" Or when looking back at all your material, over your material, are there certain themes that you go back to.

HP: I like social commentary. Double entendre. Humor.

HM: And what's the last? Humor, yeah, yeah.

HP: Right? I did a song about "Change Your Name." That when I made the final and went and forget the song on the stage. (Laughs.)

HM: Ah, that was the humorous final.

HP: That was the humorous. "Change Your Name."

HM: And what was it about?

HP: According to your character, you should carry that name.

HM: Ah, so your name should fit your character.

HP: Fit your character. You understand?



HM: I like that.

HP: But I never did anything like the soca, like the uptempo beat? Like, I never adjusted. And like I can't do it. Right now, I have an idea for an uptempo, but I'll make it and I'll sell it as a soca single.

HM: Kitchener said he would never do soca and then he ended up doing it, you know, so.

HP: Yeah.

HM: Well, are you influenced by your community in terms of what you write about, what the feeling or emotion in your community, family, friends? Do they influence what you write?

HP: At certain time.

HM: In what way?

HP: Certain thing you see, you know, and your . . .

HM: Like what's going on.

HP: . . . and make a song about that.

HP: Right now I want to make a song about the cell phone.

HM: Yeah, About cell phones?

HP: Yes, this thing is I . . .

HP: Everybody looking at their phones?

HP: Oh, lord, boy! This thing I see I start to make a song about this thing, you know, this phone. Every time you talking to them they are on their phone. Everybody on a phone. You understand what I say? So I studied how I could . . .

HM: Make that into a song?

HP: How I could make that into a song.

HM: So, you are still writing.

HP: Yes.

HM: Still thinking about writing songs.

HP: Yeah. Now hear me. As a composer, every minute of the day. I think about a song.

HM: Still. Your mind still works that way.

HP: My mind work on a song.

HM: Well, when you write, do you write with an instrument? Do you write holding an instrument?

HP: No, I have the guitar there. I will start, I will get the idea. I will start to write. Then I take the guitar, look for a melody.

HM: So, you get the words . . .

HP: I go in stages.

HM: You get the words first?

HP: Yes, I start with . . .

HM: You get the words first.

HP: A certain amount.

HM: And maybe a little bit of a melody?

HP: Then I look for a melody and then I . . .

HM: And then you pick up the guitar.

HP: . . . I go forward, yeah.

HM: Do you get the melody . . .

HP: Now . . .

HM: Do you get the melody, a little bit of melody before you pick up the guitar?

HP: No.

HM: So you just have the idea for the words.

HP: I get the idea for the song.

HM: Idea for the song.

HP: I start to write, and what I usually do, as long as I write a verse, a verse and a chorus, I'll get to a melody. Get it together, make sure the lines . . .

HM: That works, a verse and a chorus.

HP: Works. And as a guitarist you will know what I mean, to suit the melody. Now, you never write a song straight, you know. Sometimes in my book your words three, four page. I'm going down but, until I could get, get it together. Getting words together you know?

40:33

HM: When you get the verse and the chorus. Do you get the words for the verse and the chorus and then the melody?

HP: Yes.

HM: Okay.

HP: No, not usually the chorus. The verse.

HM: The verse. You get the words first.

HP: Yes.

HM: Then you find the melody.

HP: Then I find the melody.

HM: Then you look for the chorus

HP: And then I look for the chorus.

HM: Ah, interesting. Because the title, what we call "the hook," the title, which is what you would remember or sing along on, that's usually the chorus. So, you don't get that first.

HP: No.

HM: Yeah, you get the verse. Which sets up the chorus.

HP: Sets up the song.

HM: Yeah. Yeah. And then, so then you look for that phrase . . .

HP: Yeah. And then go to the chorus.

HM: . . . like "Change Your Name" whatever it is.

HP: Yeah. And then go to the chorus. (Strums guitar.) I'm going to do a song for you called "False Prophet" (six missing syllables).

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) Doo-be-die, doo-be-die-die-die-die (Speaks.) I love to sing in minor, too, eh?

HM: Yeah. Minor. Yeah.

HP: I makes mih song, I love minor. I think calypso is minor. But, it doh have to be a whole minor song.

HM: You can change to major.

HP: You know you put your other song, you know, in major, and thing.

HM: You can go major in the chorus or something.

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) Somebody call on the master please/I sure he seeing the human race on their knees/Everyday the world face a next disaster/So if he can come, well, send back the Savior/Good Lord, so much men using religion/To oppress other fellow humans/Father it's a shame, they're using your name for their dirty game/A title like reverend and pastor, but for land will kill their brother/Things like this must leave us to wonder/If they're serving God or the almighty dollar/My friends you don't need glasses to see/It have more religions here than coconut trees/Saying them could save you but their plan is to leave you broken/Yes, to be saved you must live different, so they make their own commandment/Dress nice and making big speech/But half of them ain't practicing what they preach/They does tell you how lust and fornication/Is one of the biggest downfall of man/For a sin like this you could die/Instead they watching your wife leg coki-eye, Lord.

HP: (Speaks.) That "False Prophet," right?

HM: That's good. That's good.

HP: Now I sing it a little low, eh?

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) This country have so much false prophet/They're using religion to run their racket.

HP: (Speaks.) I can't remember all them thing. I'm getting old, you know (Laughs.)

HM: Calypso has so many words. Is there a particular time of day that you like to write? Or does it matter? It doesn't matter.

HP: Time I write that song, two o'clock in the morning. I get up. I get, I know, like I get up with that idea.

HM: You wake up.

HP: I wake up and write that song.

45:00

HM: So. It's just whenever the song hits you.

HP: When that feeling? It's not something you could say, "I'm going and do that."

HM: You have to wait until you feel . . .

HP: You have a feeling.

HM: It's pulling you.

HP: According to the saying, the vibration. You get the vibe.

HM: For me it's almost like a magnetic attraction. It's pulling me . . .

HP: Sometime I may sit down be working and something come to you, say, "I think I can make a song with that." Because, a time I was painting a house, that is the work I do, and boy I get a idea. I come off the scaffold, and I tell the fella, (seven missing syllables) I said, "Let me have paper and a pen." He said, "Whey?" I said, "Just a minute, I tell you why. I have a thing." What come in mih head I jot it down. And when I come home and this is the song, eh?

HP: (Sings and plays guitar.) My grandson Tristan came to me with a serious question/Grandpa what's the qualification to be a successful politician?/I said my son, I want you to understand/This is my personal opinion/But if you are to enter politics/Like monkey, you should know one hundred and one tricks/Son, you have to lie/And be an expert in mamaguy/Know to make a good speech/But you scarcely practicing what you preach/Under oath you swear you have a clean hand/But underground you're dealing in corruption/My son when you meet these criteria/You could become a junior prime minister.

(Speaks.) That was grandson there, Tristan. But I put it to "he," you know? The idea come to me you know, to say he's questioning me. You understand where I come from? You know I didn't want to say I saying so.

(Singing and playing guitar.) During the conversation/I had to remind him of his education/I said doctor, lawyer, and trade unionist/Who like to go into this business/You must have some yes man as your follower/Who would worship you like the Messiah/But my son in your quest for fortune and fame/Always remember politics is a nasty game/You must kiss babies. (Laughs.)

(Speaks.) You know, remember all them politicians who go around and hug up babies and thing? That the last song I sing I did in a calypso tent.

HM: That's the last song?

HP: That's the last I did in the tent, yeah.

HM: Was that one. Do you, at what point do you write something down, actually write something down, or, and do you record anything before it's finished like on a cassette recorder or anything like that?

HP: No, I write.

HM: Do you just write it down?

HP: I write.

HM: How do you remember the melody?

HP: Well . . .

HM: Just on your guitar. Because you've got it up here.

HP: With mih guitar. I get mih chord. You know, I get the . . .

HM: So, you don't write down the music. You just write down the . . .

HP: I can't write music.

HM: And so, you don't even record it. You just have it up here.

HP: After, when the song reach a standard, I'll record something.

HM: And where do you do that?

HP: Right here, you know.

HM: You have a recorder?

HP: Yeah, you know home, we do it right there. You know, with the phone.

HM: There's a studio?

HP: No, we have the phone and thing.

HM: Oh, you use the phone.

HP: My daughter record it.

HM: Oh, before you had the phone what did you use.

HP: I never recorded.

HM: You just had it in your head.

HP: Yeah. In the earlier days we never had those things.

HM: Well, I hope you put all these down, you know, the ones that you don't have recorded. At least on the phone. You could sing it into the phone.

(Edit.)

HM: Does your being a performer affect what you write? Versus someone who just writes for other people to sing. Do you think your being a performer affects what you write, knowing your going to perform the song onstage? Do you think about being on stage while you're writing the song?

HP: Yeah. I always see that audience in front of me.

HM: You see it in front of you.

HP: Yeah. While I writing I seeing the audience and how their reaction would be.

HM: So, it does affect how . . .

HP: Yeah.

HM: Because you know you're going to be the one singing that song onstage.

HP: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And is it a topic that people . . .

HP: Yeah.

HM: . . . would react to respond to.

HP: I try to keep away from a topic that they wouldn't, like the political song I just did.

HM: You kind of stay away from political?

HP: Yeah, but this . . .

HM: That was political.

HP: That was political but it is, notice how I did it.

50:01

HM: But it wasn't about a party, it wasn't supporting one party.

HP: I think about politicians.

HM: About generally, all politicians.

HP: All politicians. And I try my best to keep from ever calling names.

HM: Yeah, by saying Rowley or Manning.

HP: Yeah. I eh calling any name.

HM: Or Williams.

HP: But what I would say, you know who is that person I singing about.

HM: You could say you, that people would know who you were talking about.

HP: I believe that is calypso.

HM: It's more (five missing syllables).

HP: With the humor. With a little humor. And then you could say things that you don't have to call a name.

HM: It's almost double meaning also, because . . .

HP: Yes.

HM: . . . you're saying this, but everybody's, "Oh, he's talking about . . . "

HP: Yes, you know, let them say who I talk about.

HM: Without saying it.

HP: You know?

HM: Without you being so obvious.

HP: Yeah, you know, without I don't call the name, you know.

HM: Some people, some composers have told me they believe that because the news is so, it's everywhere, 24 hours a day, Facebook, internet, that that is changing the role of calypso, because calypso is no longer the newspaper.

HP: Yeah.

HM: And that calypso has to change because it no longer . . .

HP: Can meet these times.

HM: . . . has the same function. Do you believe that's true?

HP: Yeah. Because we was the people who used to inform people. Things they never used to hear about, a calypsonian would hear and bring it out to you. But now according to what you say, with all this information now, people eh, you know, they don't hear that.

(Edit.)

HP: But the fella who sit out there in the audience . . .

HM: Who's listening.

HP: . . you have to, you know, come to he, what he want, you know, what he would like to hear.

HM: Yeah, so you're thinking about the audience, person in the audience.

HP: Always thinking. When you, as I tell you when I making a song I see the audience.

HM: So, you're not just thinking about what you want to say.

HP: Not what I want to say. What I want to say is important but it's not important. So, if they eh appreciate what I saying, the song eh have make no sense. Okay?

HM: It's no good just to be singing for yourself.



HP: Singing for yourself. I have to sing what I think. That one of my biggest critic, eh? Mih madam? What happen, when I finish a song and I sing it and she will tell me. You know what I mean?

HM: Yeah, You need that.

HP: She's one of my biggest critic and she said that eh good.

HM: Because she'll tell what she thinks.

HP: What she thinks. That is important. And sometimes she still vex with me when I go on and sing the song on the road for them fellas to hear, but it important.

HM: Sometimes you need . . .

HP: To get opinion from different people.

HM: You get it so, yeah, 'cause not, one person's not always gonna have the same point of view.

HP: But get it from different people.

HM: But you have to have people that you trust.

HP: Well, yes. You know, there are people who talk stupid, you know. But still you listen to them, too. You know? But remember that you are not making that for you alone. You know? There's some people who could, you know, think what and say, "Yeah. What he's talkin' is true." Now, "The False Prophet" song. You know why I made that song? Remember Jimmy Swaggart? And Jim Jones?

HM: Yep. Oh, yeah.

HP: That's how I made that song, eh? Set in those days.

HM: Speaking directly to a Christian audience.

HP: I get that idea and so I put it . . .

HM: You wrote that song . . .

HP: . . . in a song. "False Prophet."

HM: For that. And Jim Jones being in Guyana . . .

HP: Guyana.

HM: . . . was right there.

HP: Right, you know?

HM: You know, it was very close.

HP: And then Jimmy Swaggart.

(Edit.)

HM: So we talked a little bit about your being of Indian descent. And how that was used to market you early on until people got to know you, that you were a real calypsonian and they liked you as a performer and entertainer. Did your being of Indian descent, were you seen as being different, or once that you were kind of in the club, once you were accepted, it didn't matter anymore. It didn't really matter anymore?

HP: In my book it didn't matter. Now, you know in the beginning there was, "Watch that little Indian come." You know? That is why Superior went and tell, when Superior heard me, he was singing with Kitchener. That wasn't far apart, and Superior came in Victory tent and he hear me. And he went and tell the fellas in the tent, "Hey, (two missing syllables) there's an Indian singing by Blakie. He's singing like a n----r." That's his exact words, eh?

HM: That was a compliment, right?.

HP: Exact-, he said that, "If you stay outside and listen to that fella you wouldn't know it was an Indian singing there."

HM: And that impressed him, right?

HP: You understand? But after them years. After my first year, my second year, I had a-, they appreciate me. They never showed me . . .

HM: Treated you differently.

HP: You know? Yeah. They treat me as a calypsonian. You understand? Because like, they got to realize mih ability and how I do it. And then years go by people stop thinkin' about Indian.

HM: It didn't matter, you were just one of them.

HP: They had calypsonians to tell 'em, people that, "He's a little n-----r." (Laughter.) You know, not saying, you know, not being racial.

HM: Yeah, they were just saying he's one of us.

HP: Yeah.

HM: Basically.

HP: But they appreciate me. Let me tell you something. They had Indian calypsonians before me, eh? They had Indian Prince.

HM: Indian Prince, I've heard that name.

HP: They had Mighty Indian.

HM: I'll just write these names down.

HP: Yeah. Take down their names.

(Family member off mic.): You will get that in the George Maharaj book.

HM: It's in that book, too.

HP: I eh know if you could get two copy of that.

HM: Yeah, I might be able to. Indian Prince.

Family member: They might have it in Chaguanas.

HP: Indian Prince. Mighty Indian.

HM: Mighty Indian. And these guys are gone, right?

HP: Yeah, I believe. But they had this boy, Rajah.

HM: Rajah.

HP: You could remember some, Skyler, boy?

Visitor: Mm-mm

HP: Rajah could sing good. They had one they called Shah.

HM: I heard his name. S-H-A . . .

HP: H. S-H-A-H.

HM: H. Oh, like Shah of Iran.

HP: They got other fella, but I the fella last the longest.

(Edit.)

End of interview