

Interview subject: Sharlan Bailey

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: October 31, 2017

Location of interview: Sharlan Bailey's recording studio, Jerningham Avenue, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Date of birth: February 5, 1979

Place of birth: Trinidad and Tobago

Awards (as of March 2018): NYAC Top Twenty Stars of Tomorrow, Best Family Song, 2008

Best songs/best-known songs: "Ready for the Truth," "Thank God," "Take One"

Individuals heard during interview:

SB: Sharlan Bailey

HM: Hunter Moore

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

Ah: I, a, or as an interjection: "ah!"

Crack-shot pannist—a steel band pannist who is exceptional

Dey: there

Doh: don't

Eh: ain't

Mih: me

Nuh: you know

Siddong: sit down

TTT: Trinidad and Tobago Television, television station

Subject sings: 10:51, 27:34

Notes:

Sharlan is the son of legendary calypsonian The Mighty Shadow.

At 7:37 the recorder was turned off and restarted due to an interruption.

Interview:

HM: So, let's start with what age did you begin writing calypsos? Did you write calypsos to begin with or were you writing something different?

SB: Well, based upon love for music, I was trying to write anything growing up, you know? Whether it be country, whether it be hip hop, whether it be R & B. I had a taste for disco, which was beyond my age range, but yeah. (Laughs.) But I could remember I did my first calypso at age seven or eight, which was a song called "Prince from Hell," which my father had a song called "King from Hell." When I first heard about the song, I listened to it on the record. I think I could do a version, which was "Prince from Hell," so "Prince from Hell" would have been the first song.

HM: Did your own version.

SB: That's right. (Laughs.)

HM: What would you say, you listened to a lot of different kinds of music, what were your main musical influences growing up?

SB: Main musical influences is a kind of hard thing to put my finger on, because I would have listened to anything and there are certain artistes and bands that would have probably influenced what I was doing because, like I remember growing up Trinidad. Then TV station, TTT, was showing these Beatles cartoons.

HM: Oh, yeah. We saw those in the States.

SB: Yeah. I was in love with the Beatles' music, yeah. So, that is one aspect of it. As well as, when I first saw Prince "Purple Rain," I sure that is what I wanted to be nuh. I wanted to be the artist who could pick up anything and play. I wanted to be the writer, the vocalist, you know? So, it kind of hard. I was, oh ho! Then 80s' I was growing up too, and I was a real big Michael Jackson fan.

HM: Yeah.

SB: Yeah, you know? But as I just said Prince, "Purple Rain," I could also acknowledge talented artistes as well. I mean Michael would have been the in thing in the 80s', but I could also acknowledge these other folks nuh. So as I say, the Beatles, I love The Beatles' work, ah was talking about young, which was a strange thing. Most people who knew me, knew that for my age I had a taste for music that was around before I was even born, you know? And I guess, too, that the household that I grew up in, 'cause my mom, she would have grown up in the

calypso and all the popular music of the time. My deceased oldest brother was a crack-shot pannist.

HM: Hmm.

SB: Yeah. And then my other brother, my older brother Shawn, he was, he started performing calypsos and things. So, you know it kind of hard to point and say it was this, that, because I wanted to be everything and everybody, yeah, you know?

HM: So, with all those influences, you've written a lot of different kinds of music, what kind, can you describe the different kinds of music that you've written?

SB: Whooo! (Laughter.) Well, before taking the songwriting thing serious and the performing thing serious. I did rapso. I did rock. I did country. I wrote, I made an attempt at the Bollywood style stuff. (Laughs.) I touch on everything because I guess too, in listening to all these genres of music and all these different artistes, I started to realize that there is something happening in the music that does make the music what it is nuh. And each understanding, each writer had a style nuh. You know, like for instance, I love Bob Marley work. Bob Marley had a way he would structure melodies. I mean, as well as like local artistes like Johnny King. The reason I'm saying that, Johnny King have a way that he does do stuff and the melodies is not like the same melody you know? But the sound, it is constant because these people putting their self into the work, nuh, you know?

HM: So, they were putting their, that attracted you. They were putting their personalities into the work.

SB: That's right, you know? Plenty of them expressing what they want in sense of political issues, global issues, or even just party. The whole art of expression, that is really what kind of called me towards music, yeah.

HM: I have a particular interest in calypso, so when you would write calypso what made it calypso, what made calypso different than the other kinds of music that you were writing? What was different about it to you?

SB: I guess Trinidad, because actually that is what I believe about all the genres of music. All the genres represent the places that it was originated from and you could hear this in the music. So, when it comes to writing a calypso the things that I would speak about in a calypso, you understand, is, 'cause I mean, pop market not gonna talk about people hungry because of the people they vote for. (Laughs.) You understand?

HM: The party that's in power.

5:13

SB: That's right! But calypso will come out die hard and say that, you know? So, I mean calypso was a place where I could voice Trinidad problems, you know? But I mean, Trinidad is what make it calypso. The sound, the way we does speak The way we have our singing way we does speak that in itself, that is in the music. We energy, because I don't think the rest of the world could even understand what it means to jump up and wave yuh hand in the air. You have to

actually be born in that culture to understand, what sense that is to jump up and a wave yuh hand in the air, you know?. So, I guess Trinidad, Trinidad is what makes the music that way.

HM: So, it's distinctly where the others aren't. Calypso is distinctly Trinidad.

SB: Mm-hm. Trinidad. You could hear the way we deliver.

HM: Even the phrasing of the speech.

SB: Correct, correct.

HM: How did the other kinds of music that you were writing and listening to affect your calypso? So, when you wrote calypso, even though it's distinctly from Trinidad, was it affected by the other kinds of music that you were listening to?

SB: Of course, of course, of course. I mean come on. When you listen some of these progressions in sense of chord progressions, some of these people do. In listening to these other genres of music I understand how to convey emotions using music and it's a lesson I didn't understand. (A few missing syllables) until being an adult and doing production. You know? So, these things like, I mean c'mon, like John Lennon "Imagine." Before John Lennon opens his mouth and sing the first line, you could feel where the song going nuh, you know? Paul McCartney "Long and Winding Road," Prince "Purple Rain," and Sinead O'Connor "Nothing Compares to You." These, when you listen to these songs, 'cause you cannot write a happy song using minors, you understand? When using minors tempo does make a difference. 'Cause a slower minor could be melancholy and faster minors could be anger, you know. But you can't use minors to create a happy feeling you know? So, understanding these other genres help plenty in composing songs because up to today, even as much as this year, I wrote a song where I saw some serious emotional reaction from the audience and I know it was because of what it was doing musically.

(Knocking on door. Recorder is turned off and then started again after visitor leaves.)

(Edit.)

HM: So yeah, you were just saying that all these other kinds of music and how people were expressing themselves, then you were able to take and apply to calypso.

SB: That's correct.

HM: When you're writing, where do you find your ideas?

SB: Hmm. For me I believe a song does write itself for me. You know? Ah mean I don't ever set out to write a topic. I might have had to do that once in mih life because we was doing this theme song for a function, but other than that, I don't ever really write based on a topic. Usually how it does go is, I might be driving, or I might be siddong relaxing. It really don't have a particular way, something does just hit mih. Might be a melody, might be a hook, might be just a chord progression, and once I leave it alone it does manifest into a song.

HM: Is it, it can be either words or music?

SB: Words or music.

HM: Either way?

SB: Either way. Sometimes it might just be a bassline. Yeah, sometimes it might be a bassline and sometime it might be a drum pattern, it could be anything. So, for me, I does just allow it to write itself because ah mean it have ah lot of songs where I took like 15 to 20 minutes to write and based on the fact that it just come.

HM: Just there.

SB: Yeah it does come out and in some cases I have some songs that start off as a melody or a chorus that just wouldn't leave mih head. So for like a week, this just coming in mih head but ah can't write it and ah can't develop it so it just dey. So sometimes ah have to pay it no mind and eventually it would become something.

HM: Leave it alone. Like that. Can you think of a particular song, where you can think about where the idea, how the idea happened and then it became the song? As in an example. One of your songs. Like when it happened? Or, you know, the circumstances.

SB: Last year, 2016, mih performance in Kaiso House tent. I had, we had to donate, we had to submit the song that we were doing for the season and the deadline was passing and ah wrote this song that ah wasn't quite comfortable with. Ah does feel like, ah felt like ah was being forced to have to write something, so ah said this is the song, this is what ah going and do. Three days before the people rehearsal, I went outside with mih guitar in front the house because I am a night person. Most of the stuff that I write is during the night, after 2, 3 in the morning. I sit down outside in the yard in a place called Cocorite. And all of ah sudden, I hearing this song.

10:51

SB: (Sings.) "The problem is yuh face boy, the problem is yuh face."

SB: (Speaks.) Now my father, being the calypsonian that he is who happen to be the Mighty Shadow, alright? For his whole career has suffered under the competitions and the judges. Until he for a big part of his career wage a war against the system, right? And over my time as a performer I have written for people who for the first time saw the Calypso Monarch Semi-finals. Some of them the first time seeing a Monarch Finals you know? But somehow my work eh working for me. I never make a semi-final, I never make a Monarch final, so it have nothing to do with the music, nuh. So, for a while, it bother mih because most of the people who around me who "Boy, this year!" And I can't talk that talk because they never pick me for anything, yuh understand? And the song happen where I wanted to tell them that I understand why they don't pick mih. The problem is ah resemble something you don't like, you understand? And the song one time, two, three verses hit me at one time. And ah said this is the song! So I scrap the original idea three days before rehearsal went and did the arrangement over, sent it to the guy who scored it for mih and that was the song for the season and it turn out to be a really good season too. A real good season.

HM: Yeah, was that called "Legacy"?

SB: That's right, that is "Legacy" (Laughs).

HM: I heard that, I enjoyed that. In looking at the songs that you write as a group, or as a whole, are there particular themes that come out, that you go back to or you can say, "You know, this is something that I've written about more than once?"

SB: Hmm. I think there is a topic that I've touched more than once you know? Which is the only person that could fix the problems we face is ourselves, nuh. One of the songs, I had, I can't remember, I can't quite, "Faking Evil" where the ending line of the chorus I said "if you want to change the world, change your mind." You know? And then, there's this next one called "A Special Day," where I wrote for a young lady by the name of Stacey Sobers where she talk about "wake up and love your country enough to save it," nuh. And there are a couple other songs where I deal with more, "We could fix we," nuh, you know? We could fix we.

HM: So, sort of personal responsibility.

SB: Yes, yes.

HM: This is going, kind of sharp turn here, but what instruments do you play?

SB: Well, because I's a fella with no formal training (Laughs.), understand? Ah don't want to officially say ah could play something but, really and truly, I play guitar, I play a little keyboards especially for the sake of the production is keyboard usually. So, guitar, keyboard, harmonica. As a little boy I owned a melodica, I always promised myself to get back one. Actually, one time I played as a bass man for the "Love Circle" once.

HM: What do you write on mostly? On guitar?

SB: Yes, guitar. But mostly in mih head before the guitar.

HM: So, this was gonna come next. Was, so, we kind already kind of talked about how you start a song, and so when you're writing you don't pick up an instrument right away?

14:47

SB: Not necessarily, not necessarily. It's hard to prove anything I does, but because I was kind of introverted growing up, yeah. (Laughs.) So, I have a certain level of comfort with my own self. So, I mean even my family are quite aware of the fact that I speak to myself plenty, yeah. but it's not really speaking to myself. What is happen is that I would go into these images in my head and become, be in the space that I see in my head and carry on the conversations in my head, not really realizing that we in the real world and yeah!

HM: It was coming out, yeah.

SB: Basically, I introverted, so most of the stuff does be in my head. I would be sitting and having a conversation and sometimes you just see me zone out in the conversation, I am probably writing, you know? Or sometimes I'm talking to you and irritable, it because I'm writing. You know? And so I'm fighting to listen to you and . . .

HM: Trying to do this and carry on the conversation, it's really hard.

SB: Yeah.

HM: But how far along do you get before you actually put anything down in terms of recording or writing anything down? Will you finish the song completely before you do that?

SB: I actually, doh ever write it down. And it's a problem because I don't ever write it down. Because, if I like a idea that happening in my head, once I play a couple bars of it on the guitar or whatever instrument that's in front of me. Because the whole instrument playing thing for me is really, when I started off, you would have producers who telling you, you should do this or you should do that and being as stubborn as I is, I find I write this song, this way 'cause it have to be this way. Because that was a problem I realized that if I could do it myself then I won't have to depend on someone else to play it for me. So, the desire to always correct that was why I would pick up an instrument and I will play and do my own thing. So sometimes, it could be the song hit me now and I will do it one time. Perfect example: Ah, there's this song on YouTube called "I Come Out To Fete."

HM: I saw the title.

SB: "I Come Out to Fete" was one of the two songs that I did in a night last year between 6 to 10 pm. I came in here. I locked the door. I composed the song. I built the beat. I played some guitars. I laid down some guitars. I did the backing tracks. I sing the lead and then ah move on to the next song. So that night was two songs I completed to the point all I needed to do was mix now. I didn't come to the studio with an idea. I had no idea what I was going to do. I just come in the studio.

HM: You knew you were coming to the studio to do something.

SB: Something. What I'll say though is that the progression been haunting me awhile. So, I know exactly this is the loop I want to use and I started to structure stuff to it and while I was building the beat the song coming while I was building.

HM: So, it was coming while you were putting the beat, the loop together, the progression.

SB: Putting it together. I still I ain't write down that song yet. But once I hear the chords, I will play it and it just come back.

HM: So, you didn't really have it until you recorded it. I mean . . .

SB: Correct.

HM: You were recording it as it was being written.

SB: As it was written.

HM: That's interesting. So, do you, would you say that generally that it might not happen just like that, but that the song is pretty much finished in your head before you ever put it down?

SB: Yeah, because even when I'm working with clients as a producer, by four lines into your song I already know what I want to do, you know? And, and . . .

HM: It's all up here.

SB: It's always the package, you know. So, even when I'm hearing songs, with all the talk I'm talking about writing songs, once I'm hearing songs in my head, I'm also hearing music. I'm hearing a bassline. I'm also hearing a drum beat.

HM: You're hearing the production.

SB: Yeah. I'm hearing the production, you know.

HM: And arrangement.

SB: Where in, under theoretically they does call it the life motif, I have this joke we does have in the studio here working together with a lot people, where I does say, "The vision already there." The vision already there, just waiting for me to bring it to life. You know, 'cause a couple lines that you sing to me, I would already know what I'm gonna do with this song, where I'm going to bend it, what instruments I need. Yeah so it does be a quick process for me nuh.

HM: Well, because I'm just thinking it's sort of, you have the same approach with yourself that you do with somebody else. In a way when you, when the idea hits you, you're already, "Boom!" You're thinking production. You're thinking even when it's coming to you, for you. You're thinking the same way.

SB: That's right

HM: As if someone is sitting here singing it for you.

SB: That is correct, correct.

20:07

HM: You answered some of these like particular time of day. So, late at night is usual for you and location? Do you like to do it outside or you sound like you like to go outside with your guitar or just go outside to write, or?

SB: Ah always does like being outside with my guitar. Writing, I used to believe is an outside thing, but over the years I realized that it's not, nuh. It could happen anywhere.

HM: Anywhere, anytime.

SB: 'Cause some cases, noise does encourage it. There's been a crowded place and all kinds of things happening and ah do the thing where I turn the volume off in mih head.

HM: You get good at that, right? As an introvert. Just shutting everything else out.

SB: Yeah. Just shutting it out and I could just go on and on, you know? (A few missing words) What I know over the years, production, music production kind of slowed down the writing a little bit. And it have its advantages and disadvantages because when I was just a songwriter I, that

was all that I was doing every day, an average of three to five songs just writing, writing. Actually, I have about four micro cassettes full of material that I mean I've never listened back to yet. Well, but based on when I used to write, I have books, you know, and as I said because of the process of having these songs coming and how they come, well, one will come and while I sitting with the guitar working chords, all of a sudden something else hit me and I would just leave that and move to that, but in the process, I could end up forgetting what was before. And anything as simple as having to get up and look for a pen, and a book or page or something.

HM: Would slow it down.

SB: Slow down the process so I just throw that whole thing and stay dey. Sit writin' in the same position and as it comes ah put some chords in and move on, put some chords in and move on. So, when it start to slow down, then I would go back to them, each of them and listen back to what I was doing.

HM: And even the ones that you jumped from one to the other, you would . . .

SB: That's right.

HM: . . . go back and listen to where you started and what you started with.

SB: That's right.

HM: Does being, because you are also a performer as well, . . .

SB: Yes.

HM: . . . does being a performer affect what you write? Does it influence what you write, rather than if you were just a pure writer for other people?

SB: Yeah, 'cause as the song I referred to just now, the "Legacy" song, nobody else coulda sing that song because of what it was saying, you know?

HM: No. Because it was about you.

SB: Yeah, so being a performer really does affect it.

HM: What about just being on stage and having the experience of being on stage? Does that influence what you, how you write?

SB: Kind of, you know? Because ah mean, when I on stage performing my work, I am a different person in the sense of, I actually believe in what I say now so, the person who delivering. I am more connected to delivering the song rather than connecting with the audience.

HM: You're more focused on the material.

SB: Yeah.

HM: When you're performing rather than speaking to the people that are right there.

SB: Because I sometimes could have a little ego too, sometimes so that when ah finish the song, the only reason why I'm performing it is because I believe that it ready.

HM: Because why?

SB: Because I believe it ready, you know, and I wouldn't perform something that I don't believe not ready. So, when I believe it ready I kind of cut the whole reaction from the audience thing in half, you understand? And then I think over the years I understand the science of making people laugh, making people move. Because I will always remember, I had some years ago, I had this song called "Head of State," right? I don't wanna call what genre it is because it could be considered as rapso as well as calypso. So, I don't have half clue as to what it was. It was me experimenting. But in "Head of State" there is this line that was recommending myself as a president for life and I was stating the things that I would have done, if, had I been their president for life. And in the third verse, there is this line where I was explaining to fix the heavy marijuana culture Trinidad and Tobago has, we should put a law in place that "Marijuana would be legal for religious use/ 'Cause that's how you control substance abuse/So all them youth men who just pulling hard/Watch them one by one start finding God," you know? And I remember that line in particular was a difficult line for me, because I'm going to sing this in the calypso tent and the audience in the tent is not 16 and 25. It is a mature crowd. (Laughs.)

HM: More like 60.

24:57

SB: (Laughter.) Yuh understand? In order for me to perform the song I had not think about the audience, I had to think about the song. And I go out there and this is what I want to say and deliver what I want to say and they go understand it. And so said, so done! Every night when I would say the line this audience would be laughing, ah mean ah understand, the humor of it is because they expect me to say something like that because I said, "Make this rasta yuh president," you know, and so it was more or less anticipated at some point he going to talk about marijuana, you know? So, when I get past that whole audience thing, I coulda deliver the song the way I want, I, this is what I want to say, nuh.

HM: Why, how you meant it, how you intended it.

SB: Yeah. and they took it, they enjoy it. And actually "Head of State" is a song that I could perform anywhere because ah mean, ah test it in a mature crowd and it work. I remember once there was this little party thing happening in the back of Phase II where they had a lot of these beat men who was chanting, doing the dancehall thing, nuh. And they were doing a little dancehall chanting thing bum-bum-ba-bum and the guy who was Trini it well he knew me and asked if I could do a little one or two songs. I said I would do one, so I borrowed somebody guitar and did "Head of State" and flatten that place! Under all the dancehall thing that I was worried about that they might not be into this. It work. It work.

HM: It worked.

SB: Yeah, and if I keep studying the audience you wouldn't perform half your material, you just have to do the song. This is what you're goin' to do, this what you want to say, you don't need to fix nothing, go out there and deliver it.

HM: It worked. When you're writing for yourself, do you write differently . . .

SB: Yes.

HM: . . . than you write for somebody else?

SB: Definitely. Definitely.

HM: And how is that different?

SB: Let me see, my approach is what I want to sound like, what I want to say . . .

HM: Personally.

SB: . . . and how I want to say it you know? When I'm doing work for other folks, yes it's my opinion still, but these people have to perform the song, so I have to find a way where they could deliver with the same comfort as if I was writing for myself, nuh. And as well as, too, it has certain styles of calypso that I wouldn't touch because I totally find it boring. Ah mean honestly I find some of it boring. You know, we have, it have a, 'cause really and truly, it have the traditionalist aspect of calypso where when a person writing a calypso, it have these standards that they use.

SB: (Sings.) "Pa da pam pi day/ Pa da pam pi day dai."

SB: (Speaks.) And you will hear about five or six songs using the same movement.

HM: Using the same pattern.

SB: Yeah, and I wouldn't go there.

HM: That doesn't interest you.

SB: Yeah, it doesn't excite me in anyway, so my, well as I tell you because of what influence me growing up, I always wanted to be a game changer. So, whatever I do, the sound must be different and I think that I accomplish, accomplishing that.

HM: Yeah, you don't want to do, I mean you respect tradition, but you don't want to just copy it.

SB: Yeah. I think and I guess because I understand how necessary change is, nuh. And, yes, we have to respect, but my thing with tradition is that we have to acknowledge it. We have to understand it and then it could move on. Like I could remember there was this joke ah does give folks. My second year in Calypso House, Kaiso House, sorry. I had this song called "Shadow Son." The song was based on that I could, I doing this nice music. "I do this vibes that you would like to hear/But I know you going and miss this one/ Because you busy listening to Shadow son/You not listening to Sharlan, nuh." Right? And the thing with the song, it had this groove, where I was doin' this drum pattern line (imitates rhythm). The bass line is (sings bass line). And the bass was blow mind. And I remember when I was sitting with Mr. Thomas scoring it, the tent manager at the time was explaining to me that the chords that I was using should have been sevenths, and I told him, "No!" He said, "No, it had to be sevenths to get the funk flavor out it. I said, "But I was never writin' funk." He said, "No, but you have to understand how

chords does work and thing.” I said, “But I didn’t write it that way.” He said, “O God, understand what I tryin’ to say. I’m not trying to challenge you. I understand what you’re doin’, you gotta know . . .” Really and truly in all fairness, he’s one of them folks who has been supporting what I been doing over the years, even though he’s not the manager no more. But he kept insisting that I must use sevenths and I just rebelling, “No,” and he come to this point where he said, “You need to understand, in order to break the rules, you have to understand the rules.” I tell him no, in order to break the rules you have to believe that you have no rules at all. Understand? (Laughs.) Ah mean the final thing was I get my way because it was my song. It was my song.

HM: Ultimately, you get to choose. How often do you write? Are you writing right now? How often do you, is it every day? Or is it once a week? Or what would you say? Right now.

30:25

SB: It could be a couple songs a week.

HM: A couple songs a week. Generally, kind of average.

SB: Yeah, because of the production. I think how, with what creativity is, if I throw in some of that energy behind songwriting and I throw some of that energy behind production, none of these things get 100%.

HM: You have to divide your time.

SB: Yeah. So, the writing slow down because of that aspect of it.

HM: Because you might be really working on a production project.

SB: Correct.

HM: That’s taking all your time and energy.

SB: Correct, correct.

HM: But then when you’re done with that then you can go right back into it.

SB: Yeah, go back to it. Back to normal, normal.

HM: Well, that’s all I have, but is there anything you’d like to add that we, that we didn’t talk about or you wanna go back to?

SB: I think I recall you talk about the influences. Oh-hoh, I was a big David Bowie fan. Yeah, which kind of weird because people my age growing up aint know nothing about David Bowie, ah mean who the hell is David Bowie, you understand? But I’m a big David Bowie fan and another point, ah love Nina Simone, you know, the influence is so great. My thing is, my intention is never to really fuse calypso but use the elements of the other stuff that I like.

HM: Just to pull them in.

SB: Yeah, because I think the problem with calypso right now is calypso missing growth because it losing writers. You know, and we, as a youth man growing up, watching Dimanche Gras shows and stuff, well I could tell you because technically I grew in calypso based on my father. And also from a age, single-digit age I know what a calypso tent is and I understand the concept of that, you know. And one thing that used to stand out with calypsonians for me was each had a personality, nuh. But when you checkin' people who had their own personality in their work, with their own sound and style, it was the writers who was performing their own work, nuh. So you have guys like Watchman, Johnny King, and my old man, he is the epitome of that. Kitchener (a few missing syllables) and what he was doing. And that stayed constant with me nuh so when I make the decision to want to become a performer as well as a writer, I wanted to have my own brand and that missing. Plenty people who jumping in now will go and buy a song and they will go by a producer and he gon' build a beat and then he going out dey and we gon' get into the semi-finals and Skinner Park because we gonna make plenty money. But their heart's not in it nuh and calypso right now missing its personality, nuh.

HM: So, because the performers are not writing their own material . . .

SB: Not writing their own material.

HM: . . . it's losing some personality.

SB: Yeah, when you have the same three people writing for everybody, eventually the music going to sound the same.

HM: Right.

SB: And in all fairness the same three people that writing for everybody not talented with melodies. They just writer writers, or authors. They not writing their own compositions.

HM: They just recycling melodies.

SB: Yeah, because they not really that good at it and I think calypso right now really need that, nuh. So, it be scary right now when I look at the juniors coming up and I don't see writers, you know. So, what will happen? According to my father, said "Ah man hand get sick you will stop sing?" You understand?

HM: So, you lose that personality

SB: I think that is something now. You have an argument, the people who don't write have an argument, where as soon as they're talkin' about songwriting and writing calypso, they refer to Michael Jackson. Which some of them don't realize that Michael actually write some of his work.

HM: Yeah, he did.

SB: You understand? And they try to point fingers at the business, international business, where the songwriting culture is a different thing from the actual performing. But what they not connecting that Trinidad with we tight, little, small world, a calypsonian is a title, 'cause somebody performing rock, we just call them a rock musician. Somebody performing country, a country artist, you understand? But a calypsonian . . .

HM: That means something.

SB: Means something. Is like saying I is an emcee. I is a rapper. You have to be deliverin' your own, can't have a ghost writer and talking emcee talk. (Laughs.) You understand? You know? And it's not that I'm against the people who don't write, I think the problem is that they don't respect the people who actually writing calypso. That is my problem, that they don't acknowledge, that it is an important thing to be able to write.

HM: That if they're an artist, do they know it's important to write.

SB: Yeah. The sad part is they know because most of the people who don't write and might purchase a song from someone, when you bring up the topic they does get real sensitive. So that means they acknowledge the importance of being a writer. You know, but they just wouldn't take the time because their interest is not the music. You understand?

HM: So, they're not being encouraged to write at a younger age. It's more about the performing.

SB: Performing. And that is the thing, I didn't come through the junior monarch as much as I started writing at a young age. I didn't come through the junior monarch situation. Who knows, I might have been the same way too. Because the junior monarch situation promote go get a song from your school teacher sort of thing.

HM: Just to focus on performing, get a song from somewhere else.

SB: That's right and nobody's encouraging these youths to write, you know, because they not realizin' that by tomorrow you setting up there. So, if you encourage tomorrow them to write you will save tomorrow, but if you not encouraging to write the future kind of scary. Like that thing, the culture of buying a song when it comes to calypso is a little too much. Because now is a whole name brand culture happening to calypso music, because if you don't go by this man you don't have a good thing to compete with. Come on man! You know and when you check out people like Spoiler, Spoiler was making Monarch finals and thing doing humor. We don't see that happening again. If you not crying on the stage, if you not serious or you attacking the government, is a waste of time for you, you not seeing no Dimanche Gras and we need to fix that. That is a big, big problem in calypso, but other than that, kaiso, people does say sometimes kaiso could be dying, but kaiso can't die. No music could die.

HM: It's too deep a tradition.

SB: That's right. It's already embedded itself in soca, so if soca live kaiso can't die, you understand? (Laughs.) You know, and only thing, if rapso live, kaiso can't die because that all, is the mother of all, you know?

HM: Kinda like the mother.

SB: That's right. Yuh understand? All these little offspring running around the place and, yeah, there are new faces on the block, but the mother is still the mother, you know?

End of interview

