

Interview subject: Shirlane Hendrickson

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: November 6, 2017

Location of interview: Queens Park West, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Date of birth: October 29, 1961

Place of birth: Trou Macaque, Laventille, Trinidad and Tobago

Lived abroad: splits time between U.S. and T&T, naturalized U.S. citizen

Awards (as of March 2018): four times Calypso Queen, 1998-2001

Best songs/best-known songs: "Understanding," "Teach the Youth," "Casava"

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Individuals heard during the interview:

SH: Shirlane Hendrickson

HM: Hunter Moore

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Trinidad and Tobago terms and expressions used in the interview:

Extempo: a form of calypso in which two singers take turns insulting each other via extemporized verse set to an established melody, known traditionally as picong or "war"

Kaiso: calypso, a "kaiso kaiso" is a true calypso

Mih: my

Nuh: you know

Pan: steel band music. Refers to both the individual musical instruments and the music as a genre

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

Soca: short for "soul calypso." An up-tempo, dance-oriented style of music originating in Trinidad and Tobago. Soca lyrics generally relate to celebration, particularly Carnival. Soca is currently the most popular form of music in Trinidad and Tobago

TUCO: Trinbago Unified Calypsonians' Organisation, promotes calypso and calypsonians

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Subject sings: :24, 19:20, 19:29

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Note about interview: At 4:45 the recording was stopped, the volume adjusted, and the recording was started again

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Interview:

HM: Okay, Shirlane. What age did you begin writing calypsos?

SH: I started after listening to Dad sing and Mummy write and we would all trump in little lines. 1985. I actually sat down and wrote my first entire calypso called "Victimization."

HM: "Victimization," do you remember any of it?

SH: (Sings and taps on table.) Victimization, oh-oh, but what is the plan, unh-unh/A psychology for having black man keeping down black man/And over centuries we were oppressed by the massa man/But true frustration we join these oppressors, understand/But we are striving as a nation, oh gosh, so these parasitic values spell degradation, unh-hunh/I am the senior girl on my job and I workin' hard, so hard/They put a junior man in my post. Look, I goin' mad, mad, mad/And then they walk about with disinterest, oh gosh/How we must love one another to force the black consciousness, mmm/But if we really want this reconstruction, oh gosh/Talk to your inner man and stamp out victimization. Hoooo!

HM: Nice. You remember it very well.

SH: (Laughs.)

HM: Did you perform it?

SH: One time. And then my dad took it.

HM: Ah, he started playing it, singing it.

SH: You know, and he actually recorded it.

HM: How nice. For you, I bet that felt really good.

SH: Oh Yeah. Oh yeah. You know, so, and that was when I had just started attending UWI, University of the West Indies, doing my first degree in Business Management and I started like, you know, being exposed from home upbringing, you're working, I was working at Ministry of Works at the time and going to school, so I had at least accomplished that kind of working experience and going to university.

HM: Yeah. That's good.

(Mic is moved away from subject to reduce volume.)

HM: Well, you obviously came up in a very musical family, so . . .

SH: Oh, yeah.

HM: . . . that was one way your family influenced you. Were, how else did it influence your writing, so, I mean you, your mother wrote, right, also?

SH: Mummy wrote, but we have been fortunate, my sister and I, to have grown up around that whole foliage of calypsonians. So, you would have Auntie Rosie, of course we would call her affectionately Calypso Rose, who would always tell us, "Baby girl? Write, write, write. Write your own stuff," because she has written her music, her calypsos. As well as Pretender. Before he passed, he would be like, "Rhyme, rhyme, rhyme. Write, write, write," you know. And we have been around all these elders in calypso before those who have passed, those were here with us, and as well as Lord Kitchener has always been my father's idol. He started singing there in 1967 with him, and Kitchener from the old school would tell you if you, he didn't consider you much if you weren't like a composer, calypsonian.

HM: That was part of the package.

SH: Yeah.

HM: Was writing as well as singing.

SH: You know? So that I've come out of that school of thought.

HM: You grew up with that.

SH: Yeah.

HM: So, you were. . .

SH: I was always like . . .

HM: . . . always encouraged to write even . . .

SH: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . even though, you know, as a female, not just a male.

SH: Yeah.

HM: As a female it was important for you to write just as much.

SH: To write. Because of course you know on the down side you would hear of all these stories of women who have to now go lovey to get a calypso from either the composer's crop or another fellow artiste and sometimes they were faced with challenges. But I was not that I have to say. I was thankful, well, God had given me that extra talent, you know, as well as when you study the elders in calypso they will tell you, calypsonians were like this: something happened in Trinidad now, you were supposed to write about that now. There was no waiting for the next season. No, so it was always topical.

HM: Something . . .

SH: If something happened and that's why we say, "By calypso, our stories are told."

HM: While it was fresh.

SH: Yeah. Always fresh. You know, whatever the, if it's a social action, political action, it was a party atmosphere, whatever it was, right. (Laughs.)

(Edit.)

HM: So, do you write anything else besides calypso?

SH: Yeah, I write songs and you know . . .

HM: What other kinds . . .

SH: . . .poems.

HM: . . . what style of music besides calypso, would you say?

4:56

SH: Just about every and anything. I've written chutney. I went to the chutney, soca chutney . . .

HM: Oh, the . . .?

SH: Yes. I made it up to the semifinal. Yes. I've written slow R&B songs. I've also written reggae crossover with soca, you know, so I've touched a little bit . . .

HM: Several different styles.

SH: Yes. Yes.

HM: Well, how do you know when it's calypso, so when you're writing and you say this is calypso, what is the, what's the difference?

SH: Well, then, I may not be able to, let's say, define like, okay, "Calypso is this, calypso is that," but somehow you know because listening to the elders over the years, you know. Calypso has a certain rhythm, a certain way the lyrics are put together, you know, a vernacular, so then you must know, "Well, that's a calypso," you know, and then . . .

HM: In a way, it's in the music and the words?

SH: It's in music and sometimes in the words, you know, and of course you know we have so many genres out of Mother Calypso, you know, the rapsos, and the, you know, all these new wave whatever you call those things, you know, 'cause right now they're fusing R&B with a

calypso beat. As a matter of fact, on some of those, you would see, I would re-record, like some of the R&B's of yesteryear . . .

HM: Classic R&B.

SH: . . . with a calypso beat. So, you have a nice dancefloor style, but you know the song.

HM: But it's something distinctive, there is something distinctive about calypso.

SH: You must know a calypso when you hear it, you know.

HM: But it's, do you think a lot of it is just growing up with it, or just being familiar with it, that you know, "That's calypso."

SH: Yes, and no, actually. Some people, and yes, you are right in a way, because modern day, the children of this generation, they will talk about soca, and they will be able to, you know, call down some socas.

HM: Some different kinds of things.

SH: And then when you sing some calypsos, unless they have been brought up with a relative from yesteryear or they were around people who are familiar with the calypso art form, then they will be looking at you like, "What is she talking about?" And sometimes it's not too far in the past, you know. But because they are the soca children, we call them, the soca youths, you know. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HM: So, I mean part of that is an education and that education can come different ways. It can come through your family . . .

SH: Yes.

HM: Or just hearing the music, . . .

SH: Yes.

HM: . . . you know, or . . .

SH: And part of that is why we keep lobbying that the government take it a little more seriously, and have it as a curriculum, a part of the subject matter in school.

HM: So they are getting it regularly.

SH: Yeah. They say that they have started, but until I really see someone doing the essay exams and calypso is one of the subject matters, yes, yeah. I'm happy that UTT has that program Carnival Studies where at least part of it would be calypso, you know?

HM: When you compose calypso, when you're composing a calypso are you influenced by other kinds of music? Or just, or when you're, say, "I'm writing a calypso, so I'm really just focusing on that."

SH: No, sometimes what I try to do is become more and more innovative.

HM: Within calypso.

SH: Within calypso. So that, I'm listening to other new wave styles, whatever's happening, new in the market. It could be rock. Sometimes opera. I wrote a calypso in pan. We call those pan calypsos. But I was actually going up in some ranges, you know (Sings several ascending notes in an operatic style.)

HM: That's more classical.

SH: Yeah. Inside the, inside of it.

HM: But still staying in calypso.

SH: It's calypso, you know. So, I try to become more and more, because sometimes you have to move away from the bum-ba-dum-ba-dum (Demonstrates a classic calypso feel by humming and tapping on table.) You know?

HM: And there's a way to keep it fresh.

SH: Yes. Keep it fresh.

HM: But keep it calypso.

SH: And keep the people there with you. They admire that, you know. When you could sing like a kaiso kaiso, but when you hear the rhythm, you can dance to it, you know. It's different, you say, "Mmm, I like that melodic structure."

HM: So it's familiar but it's something a little new.

SH: Yeah.

HM: So it's not totally the same thing every time.

SH: Yeah.

HM: But it's not so strict that it's got to, that the first two lines have to rhyme.

SH: Yeah.

HM: That kind of thing.

SH: Like when I composed with Clive Telemaque of Massey Trinidad All Stars, he had written one verse and one chorus of a calypso he called "Excitement" and called me, that I remember in 2014, so 2013 for 2014. And they came second, the band came second. He said, he called me, "Shirlane, I have something here. And I want you to finish it." So I finished it, the next two verses, and it was the other year that one of the calypso judges spoke to me, a judge in music. And he said, you know, "You have gone a level up." Well, I didn't understand what the poor man was talking about. I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "You're not writing 6-1-2-5." I'm like, "What is 6-1-2-5," and he tried his best to explain to me musically. I'm like, "Oh!" I go to tell him 6-1-2-5 is the last four digits of my cell phone, but (Laughter.) I was so cool with that.

HM: But, yeah, you were using some different chords . . .

10:15

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . than just the usual pattern.

SH: Not the usual chords, yeah.

HM: You were just using your ear and bringing that into the more traditional . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . form.

SH: Yeah.

HM: And he was appreciating that.

SH: Yeah. (Laughs.)

HM: As a writer, where do you find your ideas?

SH: Well, it can come from just about, you know, any crazy thing and anytime. So it could be mid-day, one in the morning, two in the morning. Sometimes as I said, something could happen in the country, you know. Like one of my calypsos for 2018 would be "Property Tax," yeah, you know.

HM: 'Cause that's going on right now.

SH: Because it's ongoing. And even though it's kinda little quiet because of the budget, you know, it's property tax, but then I would look for a different angle to the property tax, you know. So I will have you thinkin, you know, it's a double entendre, but you will be wonderin', "Ah, she's going to sing about the property tax," you know, "What . . .," you know. And it's basically, one of the whatchamacall them, workers, government workers who came home to survey the property, you know. But when he saw my garden, the size of my garden, the levy just rose.

HM: (Laughs and claps.)

SH: (Laughs.)

HM: But this is a topic that everybody's interested in . . .

SH: Property tax, yes.

HM: . . . because it's affecting them.

SH: Yes.

HM: And that's a challenge. Some of the other composers I've spoken to say it's difficult because that's an open topic. That's a topic everybody's writing on and you know that there gonna be other, probably other calypsos about property tax.

SH: Well, this is why you have to look for an angle.

HM: And a fresh angle.

SH: A fresh angle. Yeah, no, yes. Something that is different, you know. (Laughs.)

HM: It's, well, that was a good example you just told me of a song. I was like, can you give me a specific example of where you got the idea.

SH: Yeah, you know. Yeah, you know. It was going good all the time until he saw the size of many things in the property, you know. The tax, the levy just kept going up. (Laughs.)

HM: Are you, in your writing, and kind of looking back on your writing, are you drawn to particular, any particular themes, you know, that stand out, in your songs? That you go back to, you know, time and again?

SH: That one, first calypso, understanding, you know? Because if we don't understand each other I don't know where we think we going. You know, if I can't understand you and you can't understand me, and then we can't understand each other . . .

HM: So communication.

SH: That's right.

HM: And interpersonal communication.

SH: As a matter of fact, that's the first calypso that I won the first Queen with, 1998, "Understanding."

HM: Was that one.

SH: Yeah. Was that one, yeah. And my act to go, my prop with it were three persons representative of the three political groups. So, if the PNM couldn't understand the UNC, and the UNC couldn't understand the NAR, and everybody fightin', and we were actually fightin' and crawling on stage and then they hug each other in the end of it. Yeah. (Laughs.)

HM: So, that's something you go back to frequently . . .

SH: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

HM: . . . As a theme. How has your music been influenced by your time in the U.S.?

SH: U.S. has been an eye-opener, as well as a blast, because what I learned more of was the administrative side of the business. The business side.



HM: The business part.

SH: The business part, you know.

HM: Music publishing.

SH: Because when we did our research and I studied that men like Michael Jackson, while we as calypsonians have to produce every year, a brand new calypso, every year, every year, every year. They would concentrate on producing an album and one of the songs on the album they would concentrate and taken five years to market that one song. So, you see there's a real, a different . . .

HM: Different approach.

SH: . . . approach. And then they would market this one song in many various, innovative schemes all about the place until they have gotten where they want the song to go, which Billboard chart, how many million viewers, that kind of thing.

HM: And then they do that with another song on the same album.

SH: Yeah. And then they would market the song with the brands. The hats, the cups, the everything.

HM: The commercials.

SH: The commercial side of it.

HM: The commercials with it, so . . .

SH: You know, so I said, "Unh-huh!" And then too the business side of it will also mean the selling of you, your kit. Your bio must always be updated. You must have pictures. You must apply the technology. And you must advance with the technology, you know, and those sorts of things. And you must also be able in an interview to not be blundering, talk about yourself, and be fluent, you know, so you musn't have people looking at you wonderin' you can't remember when you started singing. So, you're in an interview, you know, kind of like (Sighs and shrugs.) So, learning the business sec- of this whole artform is very important. We tell the young people that all the time.

15:06

HM: How to be an artist. What's required.

SH: Yes. And in America I got a lot of that . . .

HM: You learned about there.

SH: . . . you know. I worked with people at Sony Records, who took one of my calypsos and actually did it in an R&B style.

HM: They changed it to R&B?

SH: Yeah, yeah. It was amazing to me, you know, working with these guys. As well as remembering the days I was just crossing over from vinyl records . . .

HM: To CD?

SH: . . . into CD. So every time I record up there I would go to a plant somewhere in Pennsylvania and then they would do the mastering of it so I would be open to the whole . . .

HM: Process.

SH: . . . process.

HM: Beginning to end.

SH: From beginning to end. And then from the end now to take it out of your trunk to the record shops.

HM: Then bring it back down here with you.

SH: Yeah.

HM: Did the music in the U.S. affect you at all in terms of your own music?

SH: No, not really.

HM: You were hearing that music anyway. Weren't you?

SH: Yeah, yeah.

HM: You didn't have to go to the U.S. to hear it. So, you could . . .

SH: No, no, no, no. So I was able, what was good for me was that whenever I was like featured in a show, even if it was for just a half an hour, I would do calypso the majority but then I will also do my R&B inside there, a little bit of the other pieces of music, African, whatever it is, so the audience would always look forward to a versatile, you know.

HM: So you could get a wider . . .

SH: Something tasty.

HM: . . . view of you.

SH: Yes. Yes.

HM: Instead of just one category.

SH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

HM: That you were versatile.

SH: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: What instruments do you play?

SH: Just the drums.

HM: Just the drums, so when . . .

SH: Drums and African drums.

HM: So when you write, are you . . .

SH: It's always like this (taps on table).

HM: You're just singing and tapping?

SH: Yeah. Sing and tap, you know? Sing and tap.

HM: So, you have the melody and the words and the rhythm?

SH: Yeah. And that's why, Leston Paul, one of our top arranger/producer, and then Kitchener, they said, "She mad." Because there I am, creating calypsos with melodic structures, not knowing if those were the right chords or not and when I reach there they tell me "What vibes hit you? Do you know that that is a *nice* chord?" and they were like "Play that, let me hear that again," and I'd be like, "(Sings.) Bah-ba-da-ba-da-ba-da-ba-da."

HM: So, you would sing the chord to them? I mean . . .

SH: I would sing the whole melodic structure, the song, everything.

HM: So not just the melody.

SH: Yeah.

HM: But you would sing the part underneath, too? So, they would know?

SH: Well, yes, all those fellas . . .

HM: All of that.

SH: . . . and Pelham Goddard, usually would take, said "You have anything for the bass line?"

HM: So you would sit with this musician . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . and you would sing the parts and he would say . . .

SH: And they would be like . . .

HM: Oh, you say, "That's an A, that's a," they would figure it out.

SH: They would actually take it. They stopped telling me if it's A, G, or what.

HM: They just said, "Okay, here it is," and then they would play it.

SH: And funny enough, when we go to the studios, the younger generation don't have that formal training as the elder arrangers, so some of them have, some don't. So, now you would find when I go to the studios I would normally just sing what I came to record, and the guy would be on the keyboard, and I would sing, if I'm singin', (Sings.) "Nah-ba-nah-ba-nah," (Sings and taps.) "Nah-ba-nah-ba-nah," (Speaks.) Until he get, and if he deviates, I can tell him.

HM: You can say.

SH: It's funny, anyway. "Not that. Not that."

HM: Change that.

SH: "Change that." It's so amazing. (Laughs.)

HM: Yeah. So, when you get into the studio, the musicians can tell by what you're singing what they need to play.

SH: Yeah. Yeah, once they have the melodic structure down, then we look for variations, harmonies all that good stuff.

HM: And you can say, "I like this . . .

SH: And "I like this," you know. Or we pick a piece from the middle and say, "Put that in the introduction."

HM: Okay, and then you can start moving it around. But you've got it all in your head, so you can tell them what you're hearing.

SH: Yeah, and then funny enough, sometimes only when I get to the studio, would I find a part that never existed before.

HM: That you hadn't even thought of before.

SH: But it would fit, 'cause from the time they start to get the sound, the background music, the bridge, what kind of rhythm would suit what I'm singing, and if the music we start to build, we start to build the whole background thing? Then out of the blue . . .

HM: You'll hear something?

SH: It always happen, it happened with "Garlic Sauce," "body wine," you know? "She love the body wine"?

SH: (Taps and sings.) "Ah-ah-ah, take de body wine."

SH: (Speaks.) All those things were created right in the . . .

HM: In the studio while you were doing the arrangement . . .

SH: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: . . . on the spot.

SH: (Sings.) "Garlic sauce. All Rounder, he's the boss, spread it."

SH: (Speaks.) That was nowhere.

HM: Ah, you didn't have that yet?

SH: No.

HM: Yeah. Well, that's exciting. I bet it's really exciting.

SH: Every year, look we back into the studio this time around and one of Daddy's calypso's called "Whoop Whap." You know, it's a funny little one, like "Garlic Sauce" and the, well, we created something like that. I'm like, "Okay, I'm hearing," you know, "something else, Dad."

HM: "I'm hearing something right there," like this, and then you have musicians who can take that and run with it.

19:59

SH: Oh yeah. Oh, yeah.

HM: They don't need to say, "Well, that's not on my paper here. I can't play it," you know.

SH: I think, too, some of them are happy that there is someone who could come up with something, because sometimes they have to look to see what could . . .

HM: Sometimes they're having to do that.

SH: Yeah. Enhance the music.

HM: Yeah, they're having to figure out, "Well, we can take these eight bars and we could put 'em over there," but you're going, "What if we do this. We could do this," and they're . . .

SH: It's nice to work with guys. Yeah.

HM: . . . they're liking your ideas, too, so. That's really, that's really good. So, when you start a song, give me the process.

SH: Okay.

HM: So you have an idea and this idea could happen to you anytime of day or night.

SH: Yeah.

HM: Then what happens?

SH: Sometimes you have, like, two lines? Yeah. And then you're wonderin', "That's the chorus, and that's the verse. That's soundin' like the verse more than the chorus." So, by the time now, well, you know our traditional way of writing calypsos was that eight lines for the verse and eight for the chorus. Now, with everything that is new, if you have sometimes four lines for a verse, and sometimes sixteen lines for a chorus . . .

HM: It can change or vary.

SH: . . . and that can change, you know, a loop or something or something inside of there, you know, so that by the time I'm finished with that and then I would sit and say "Shirl, write three verses and write a fourth and a fifth because you could get encore with that. Don't go back out there, the crowd call you for, back for an encore and then you singing back the same first verse."

HM: You have to sing the same verse.

SH: No, no, no. Have something. And so I always try to have that at the side, as well as sometimes we constructed two verses and then you have a bridge where you're actually singing a different melody altogether, but it's working in.

HM: It's not traditional at all, to have a bridge.

SH: No, no, you know, yeah. And now we have, what do you call, quarters and semi-quarters. So, you have a quarter, which is a bridge in the middle, and then coming down to the end, after you finish the . . .

HM: A different one?

SH: . . . you have about four quarters, you know, where, you know, the crowd can sing along and dance along. Because if you're composing a semi-party tune, it's a social commentary, you can sing it in the tent, but when the DJ's are playin' it in the fete, you want the people to be able to dance.

HM: To that. The bar playing that.

SH: If you just record, three verses and three choruses, with just a little end . . .

HM: They don't have time to do that.

SH: . . . they have to go back now and, but you have to have something that they can go on . . .

HM: So, you leave room for that.

SH: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Or they might just take one of your hooks. One of your things that you found like out of the blues and mix that in in the tag.

HM: So, the DJ's are doing remixes with this.

SH: All the time, all the time. And that's why sometimes, as opposed to long time, or a DJ on air, a radio DJ who would be more familiar with calypso music, they would allow the whole music to play. Nowadays radio DJ's spin mih two verses into you into a next person, so you don't get all of your calypso. You know you hear a little piece and you say, "Thank God," you know? (Hits table.)

HM: That even got on there. So, it's not the whole thing.

SH: No, no, no, no.

HM: But go back. Let's say you got this idea. You've decided that, you know, this is the verse, this is the chorus.

SH. Yeah, yeah.

HM: So, how long does this process take? Do you, does it take several days? Does it . . .

SH: No, no, no, no. Not really. Sometimes I write it one time.

HM: Fast? For you . . .

SH: Fast.

HM: . . . a lot of times?

SH: And then sometimes I might think of something. I come back and I change. And I put it in here. You know.

HM: So you might change it. Go away from it for a little while. Come back and change it.

SH: Yeah, yeah. Come back, Change it accordingly. Or just add to it. You know, I say, "No that, take that line out, put that in. That might sound a little better," you know.

HM: So you refine, so in between the time that you write the song and the time you go into the studio with it, you'll make changes to it.

SH: Yeah. If need be. And sometimes, too, it all depends on the topic. Like I say if it's property tax, I will do some research.

HM: Ah, okay, you'll look, you'll do some . . .

SH: What is property tax? So I will take all the basic information about property tax, you know, from the time the person comes in, you know, you do a survey, what documents are needed for you to have to hand, a levy, what's a levy, what kind of tax it is, you know.

HM: Because you might use some of that in your song.

SH: And, that's exactly what's going on. So, you know what? You really, "She's really talking about property tax," but at the same time . . .

HM: She knows about it.

SH: She's talking about something else.

HM: Yeah, yeah. So, you do some research.

SH: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And, but you tend to write pretty quickly.

SH: Yeah.

HM: So, if you're thinking of a new song. Let's say you get an idea for a song today . . .

SH: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . that you like, does it stay on your mind?

SH: (A few missing words) what I try to do is get the melodic structure.

HM: So, go ahead and get the melodic structure.

SH: They go together you know. I don't write the lyrics separate and, no, no, no, everything goes . . .

HM: Does it all happen at the same time?

SH: Yeah.

HM: So, you don't get some of the words and then go ahead and finish all the melody, and then come back and fill in the words. It's like you're, they're together.

25:04

SH: No, they are there together, you know, and sometimes while even with the words I will reconstruct the melodic structure just to suit sometimes . . .

HM: So that, so while you're getting the words that could change the melody some, too, but it's hand-in-hand, it's going on at the same time. Does it . . .

SH: I prefer that because sometimes I would feel a little bit, you know, sorry for folks who, they can write, but they don't write melodic structures, so they write words.

HM: They finish all the words.

SH: And then they look for somebody, "Could you put a melody to that?" So, from that, I said, "No, Shirl. Construct a melody," you know, and with the words.

HM: At the same time.



SH: At the same time. So when you're going . . .

HM: They're really connected then.

SH: Yeah.

HM: Do you kinda get obsessed with a song, so that if it's in the process, you're thinking about it all the time until you're finished with it? Does it, or can you just kind of put it down and walk away from it?

SH: Yeah. Sometimes I put it down and walk away. And then you will see me walking up the corridor.

HM: (Laughs.)

SH: (Imitates a person talking to herself.) "Was that something there yet? Was that? Oh, yeah. Right. Uh-huh!" And then I gone again, you know.

HM: So, it stays on your mind.

SH: It stays. It stays. Most time it stays.

HM: Until you're done.

SH: It's a funny thing. To have all these different melodies in your mind. That's crazy.

HM: And sometimes people can look at you and say . . .

SH: "No, she's. Yeah, no, she's, she's, she's mad," you know?

HM: (Laughs.) "I'm talking to you. Can you hear me?"

SH: Yeah, yeah. No. Yeah: "Are you hearing me?" I'm like, "Yeah, I'm hearing you." Yeah.

HM: "Just a minute. I need to write something down."

SH: Yeah, you know.

HM: Well, that's another question. Are you, are you writing things down? Or do you kind of keep it all in your head?

SH: No, everything is written down.

HM: You write it down.

SH: All the sounds. I recently found a book from in New York what I had with calypsos and sounds I'd written a lot. Yeah.

HM: But while you're working on it are you writing it down? Before it's complete. Are you writing it down?

SH: No, you, I write down.

HM: While you're writing.

SH: And even more so now, I told myself, "Shirlane, you are older now . . ."

HM: You don't want to forget.

SH: . . . don't trust your memory." Daddy would always tell us, "Don't trust your memory," so I write down. And I look at it, look at it, "Oh-ho! This was that song with that melody."

HM: You could remember when you were reading it? Could you remember the melody when you were looking at the words?

SH: Yeah.

HM: That's good. Does being, because not every composer is also a performer . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . but you're both. Does being a performer influence your writing?

SH: Oh, yeah.

HM: So how does it, how does that work?

SH: Yeah, because it's like, you go out there, okay? You can write, you know that. You can even come up with the melody, but then, "God, I don't know if I could perform that, huh?" So, you start to study, "That song is in like a Sparrow something that he would," or, "That song in like a Shadow, Shadow would sing this good," so I have been fortunate again to be like a chip off my dad because he don't want to be singing anything that is up there, but when he done perform it? So, I have kind of like had that performance thing within me, you know? I'm really like the stage person in the family.

HM: You are.

SH: Because I studied theatre, theatre arts, introduction of theatre, and when I for small, growing up, whenever Daddy had some of his calypsos, like I played football, I was a person who was a footballer.

HM: Ah, you were into sports.

SH: I was a vagrant on stage when he sang about vagrancy.

HM: (Laughs.) Oh, you played the part. You were like the acting, acting it out.

SH: Yes. I was the prostitute on stage with him when he sang about Jimmy Swaggart, "Innocent Jimmy," you know. I was, that got us into a lot of trouble, but it made the song bigger, you know. I was like many things over the years. I was Wonder's granny, when she sang "Granny's Prediction," which I wrote, one of my early calypsos for her. So, I just transform into Granny, in a

rocking chair, from being on stage with two plaits. It's so funny, so it's always that theatre part of me.

HM: So, you're thinking of that when you're writing, so you're, while you're writing . . .

SH: Yeah. So, while you're writing . . .

HM: . . . you're thinking about that?

SH: Yeah. So, okay, like "Property Tax," you know, well, you can't bring a house on stage, but at least . . .

HM: How would I do that?

SH: Yes, but at least if, let us say, that is the song that you might use when the judges come, you would have, of course, a drawing of a building somewhere there. You know, and you will have, you must have a man on stage there with you somehow.

HM: He's the appraiser, or whatever.

SH: Yeah, you know and the levy would be rising, you know, because you've seen the percentage going up.

HM: So, you're visualizing when you're writing. You're, before the song is even finished, you're thinking about how it would look on stage.

SH: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: And go back, because I want to make sure I understood that you referred to your dad . . .

SH: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . that he didn't want, he would never sing a song that, or he would, say, I didn't quite understand that, so what you were saying in, you were saying you were like him in that way, in that the song . . .

30:00

SH: In his performance, he's very theatric, you know, so that he would onstage, he would become whatever the song is.

HM: So, he had to become the part of the song. He couldn't just stand on the stage and sing it.

SH: Right. No, he's not gonna stand like you know . . .

HM: Just a stick.

SH: . . . rah-ba-dah-ba-dah. You're wonderin', "What is going on with that man?" you know.

HM: So, you're . . .

SH: He would make you the only, he would have the audience looking at him.

HM: So, he's acting it out.

SH: Yes.

HM: I saw him on stage, at City Hall's the first time I saw him, so I could see . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . he really gets into a theatrical . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . presentation of it.

SH: Yeah. And lot of the calypsonians can do that very well and some of them, you know, you would rather buy their record, yeah, and say, "Okay, you, thank you very much I'll purchase the CD."

HM: Yeah. It's the song. It's the song.

SH: It's the song.

HM: And the performance.

SH: But the performance, you know?

HM: You can't just stand and sing it.

SH: You're like, "Ooh, boy. Wonderful voice, but . . ."

HM: And a really good song, but . . .

SH: Yeah, I'm like, I'm like. . .

HM: The dramatic part's . . .

SH: Yeah, yeah.

HM: And when I saw you at the Shadow tribute was the first time I'd seen you perform and that was a very strong part of what you did . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . and it struck me because I saw a number of people on stage that night so you saw different kinds of presentations . . .

SH: Yes.

HM: But you had a very strong dramatic angle to what you did that I thought was really effective. So, you're still writing regularly.

SH: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, we're into the studio right now again for 2018, you know, so.

HM: That's great. Is that, when would that, when do you hope for that to be out? By Carnival season?

SH: By December.

HM: I mean like everybody.

SH: Because it's shorter, you know.

HM: Seems like it's just a month . . .

SH: Closer. It's a month, but it's closer.

HM: Everything is kind of . . .

SH: So, you know how everything is going to be like.

HM: Boom, boom, boom. (Laughs.)

SH: And now actually the nights in the tent have been reduced because of the whole financial challenges. Long time tent would start Boxing Day.

HM: Right after Christmas.

SH: Yeah. Now we can't do that anymore.

HM: So, it's, now you have to wait to start.

SH: So now, most of the time it's like Thursday, Friday, Saturday, possibly on a Sunday of each week, and right now it's cut down to three weeks into Carnival.

HM: Three weeks.

SH: Normally, it would be a month, but again, you know, pray and help us if we get a subvention.

HM: So really, that's kinda helpful actually that Carnival season isn't long this year.

SH: And then, too, remember we would have all of these inclusive fetes and parties. People have other options. You know, so we have to always to make it attractive. That they would come to the tent. Not feel bored. It would start on time. Eight o'clock. And it would end before twelve o'clock so that persons can afford to, even if they have to go to a fete or party . . .

HM: After that.

SH: . . . whatever, they can go.

HM: They can get to that. So, you have to kind of take into account the other things that are going on. But at the same time like you're saying making sure that they're getting a good value for the time that they spent there.

SH: And make sure, too that your program is productive and innovative. That your program has a brand. Because if you have to do a video for your program you have to study who would want to buy that and see it. So, it must be tasty.

HM: And how would it be different.

SH: Yeah.

HM: That makes it different than what everybody else is doing.

SH: Than everybody else is. Yeah. Yeah.

HM: So, there's a marketing . . .

SH: Mm-hm.

HM: . . . aspect to it.

SH: You must have a proper marketing plan.

HM: To all of that.

SH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HM: Well those are the questions I have, but is there anything that you would like to add about writing and about you as a writer that we haven't talked about?

SH: I think what I had suggested to TUCO years ago so that we need to really implement it is that we should look into our membership and get a pool of writers, so that instead of you having the same three or four persons whose songs get to the finals written by the same people, give the others an opportunity to write. We have writers. Sometimes we have young talented writers, but sometimes they just stare, they need encouragement.

HM: They need encouragement and support . . .

SH: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: . . . and you could, that could be kind of an organized approach . . .

SH: Yeah.

HM: . . . to supporting the composers, encouraging them to write.

SH: As well as during the year, have workshops just on writing, writing calypsos. Encourage persons, you know. Get newspaper articles, things that are, you know, and study writers in the

past, like Attila the Hun. He was a politician, you know. Executor and they. Those people would just write. And sometimes the extempo. That is the other area I want to start venturing into, extempo, you know? Because then to extempo properly you must be a reader, a good reader. Read every topic across local, regional, international, so that if you pick something from a basket . . .

HM: You're ready to do it because . . .

SH: You're not thinking, "What in the world?" And you're looking up in space and . . .

HM: "What is this? I've never heard of this about Seabridge."

SH: Ah-hah. Seabridge! (Laughs.) Seabridge. What is Seabridge?

HM: Yeah, you have to be ready if it's a current topic.

35:00

SH: You have to be, and rhyme, rhyme, rhyme. You know, because of the sans humanite'. And you know, you see now they're driftin' off into "Rum and Coca Cola."

HM: Doing different melodies.

SH: Oh, Myron B. loves the "Rum and Coca" thing. And you see, too, it helps with the commercialization of extempo 'cause people then will look forward to, you know, these new . . .

HM: Different melodies. The melodies could change.

SH: Yeah. Yeah. That is so cool.

HM: It was really, I thought it was entertaining.

SH: Yeah. And now you see the young people have taken it up. Kevon Calliste is Stalin's grandson, you know.

HM: He was good.

SH: He was good. He was good. They were good. And it's nice to see them brave, being brave, you know.

HM: Taking risks.

SH: And then the extempo warpath, you know, that's when you sing on me and I sing on you, and you know.

HM: Like the old-fashioned picong.

SH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

HM: It was really good. But anything else about you as a writer that you want to share?

SH: Just to continue on this path so that because you know that every day is a learning process, you know, you can't get too diva-ish, where you think you know . . .

HM: Know it all.

SH: No. You don't, you know, so that learn and apply new technologies, musical technologies, you know, to the music, and I always say I still want to do like a formal course in music, you know, so sometime down the road when I get a little chance, maybe I go to UTT, you know, and get . . .

HM: You could learn more . . .

SH: May, could learn more.

HM: . . . the theory.

SH: That's why I was so attracted with, when your program, you know, so I'm hoping, would you be coming back again to continue the program? Or is it going to be . . .

HM: I'm going to just be working with a couple of people directly . . .

SH: Okay.

HM: . . . when I come back. There are a couple of students at UTT that I would be sort of like a coach. So, not a class for credit. But I'm gonna be just getting together with people.

SH: Well, don't worry. We, you know, I really would, you know, whatever I can say or do to make it happen because we need it. We have to stop taking ourselves for granted, that we know this and we know that, and I mean because we have to, you know empathize with our elders in the past, you know. Because of lack of certain things they were not privy, you know.

HM: They didn't have the opportunity.

SH: And that is why I admire their talent so much. They have raw talent. That's raw talent.

HM: Just developed it totally on their own.

SH: That's like the pan man and pan woman who have not had the . . .

HM: Formal education.

SH: . . . the formal education and they can just pick up a piece of music.

HM: That's really like you're saying, raw talent.

SH: No, no, that's raw talent. That's amazing to me, you know? So, that's what. (Laughs.)

HM: Well, great. Thank you!



SH: You're welcome.

End of interview