

Interview subject: Gypsy

Interviewer: J. Hunter Moore

Date: October 25, 2017

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

Actual name: Winston Peters

Date of birth: October 20, 1952

Place of birth: Trinidad and Tobago

Lived abroad: since 1968 has divided time between U.S. and T&T, naturalized U.S. citizen

Awards (as of 2018): 1997 National Calypso Monarch, Nine times National Extempo Monarch

Best songs/best-known songs: "Sinkin' Ship," "Little Black Boy," "Soca Train"

Individuals heard during interview:

G: Gypsy

HM: Hunter Moore

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

BG: British Guyana

Cobo: turkey vulture

Subject sings, plays guitar: 1:22, 7:35, 9:30, 13:22, 15:34, 22:58, 32:16

Notes about interview: the subject quietly plays guitar throughout the interview. Beginning at 28:26 a leaf blower is heard in the background.

Interview:

HM: Well, I'm sitting here now in the apartment with Winston Peters, better known as Gypsy, to talk about songwriting and let's start by talking about when you began writing calypsos, when that was, how that happened.

G: I started writing calypsos when I was four years old. I wrote my first song actually just by listening to people singing and falling in love with it. And my mother, being a singer, my mother's, yeah, my mother's singer, not a professional as we know a professional to be. But she was well-known in our, in our community in the circle there.

HM: As a singer.

G: As a singer, yes. See, and I was fascinated by that and then the calypsonians I listened to, all the calypsos that were being played on one of the little thing, we had that thing on the wall that wasn't a radio as we know it. It was called a radio fusion. Yeah, just one little speaker on the wall and I actually used to listen to those things and when I was four years old I wrote my first song.

HM: Your very first one that you could sing.

G: Yeah. So, I wrote it. It wasn't much of a song anyway.

HM: What was it about?

G: It was just a matter of putting words together. It was something called . . .

G: (Sings.) (Missing word) always mad/Here in Trinidad/She went to BG/She dance with a fried monkey/She went to Tobago/She dance with a male cobo/Now she eatin' some big rat/Like a (missing word).

G: (Speaks.) It didn't make much sense anyway, but it was . . .

HM: It was complete.

G: It was my song.

HM: It was a story.

G: Yeah. And it was my song and it was my story. And that was it.

HM: That was the beginning. Did you keep, continue writing from that time?

G: Yeah. I kept writing, and writing songs and I was, you know I was just fascinated by writing and never stopped from then till now. I just keep writing songs.

HM: Well that, so your first song was a calypso?

G: Yes.

HM: Did you write other kinds of music besides calypso, then, as you grew up, and as you . . .

G: As I grew up I wrote country songs. I wrote country.

HM: So you were writing specifically, "I'm going to write a country song."

G: I'm going to write a country song, yeah, yeah.

HM: That kind of thing. Well, talk about the difference then, how you know when it's a calypso. "This is a calypso I'm writing and this is a country song I'm writing."

G: Well, because I am, let me tell you, when I was a child, my mother loved country music. My mother loved Patsy Cline and Jim Reeves more than anything else. And in those days in Trinidad and Tobago we had, she used to buy the, for us, I must have been about ten, eleven at the time, or may-, small, younger than that, my mother, being a singer, she bought all the copies of the song record, of the song, not the recording.

HM: Not the record.

G: Right.

HM: Like the sheet music?

G: Right, right, just the sheet music, just the music for it. And she would be singing it, so we would learn that and then she encouraged me to do that kind of thing. And I would listen to the country songs because that's what she liked.

HM: That's what she was playing in the house.

G: Yeah.

HM: Well, if she didn't have the record, she was just singing it, does she play an instrument?

G: She played the guitar.

HM: So she would play the guitar.

G: My mother played the guitar and sing Patsy Cline and Jim Reeves, . . .

HM: But she would hear these songs . . .

G: . . . Buck Owens.

HM: . . . on the fusion. You would be able to hear the, where was she hearing the country music?

G: Well, I think she used to hear it on that as well because we had a lot of country programs here. You know . . .

HM: That's interesting.

G: . . . on that little radio fusion thing.

HM: So that was available to people here.

G: They used to play more of that than calypso on the radio, really. They still do. They still do play more foreign songs on the radio here than our local calypso.

HM: Do you think that country music being played here was the result of the American military presence. It was gone by then, but . . .

G: I think. I think so, though. I think so. I think that that influenced it a lot because I think they used to even get that radio station through the American base or something. I can't quite remember.

HM: It made me kind of think about that. Maybe that was, that was true.

G: But, it had some influence. Yeah.

HM: But how, talk about then, to you, your impression then, as a writer, the difference between writing a calypso, what makes it a calypso?

G: I think what makes a calypso is the thought wave that goes into it. When I'm writing a calypso, I know this is what I want to sing as a calypsonian. I write a country song I know, and the melody that you put to it is what differentiates it from one thing to the other, you know? When you're doing a calypso, it's structured a certain way, and when you're doing a country song it's structured a different way.

HM: So is it the structure of the lyric? Or the music that . . .

G: Both.

HM: . . . you are thinking about?

G: Both. I think about both. The lyrics are different, even though it tells a story, but it tells a story of a different kind, you know?

HM: So, the way the story is told is different with calypso? Or is it the subject matter itself?

5:00

G: Subject matter.

HM: What you are singing about is different.

G: About, yes. It's different. Both, both. I think it's combination of all of the above.

HM: All those things.

G: Yes.

HM: That makes them different.

G: Yeah.

HM: And I know it's something you don't think about so much when you're doing it. You have a natural feel for calypso, you have a natural feel for country.

G: Yeah.

HM: So, you're just doing it.

G: I'm just doing it.

HM: You're not thinking about, "Okay, I can't do this because now it's gonna be this or that."

G: Yeah.

HM: You're just, "I want to write something country because I love country. I want to write something calypso, because I love calypso."

G: Because I love calypso. Yeah.

HM: "So, here I go," and you're, you've got a certain rhythm in your head?

G: I do that. There's a certain rhythm in your head and I mean I'm fortunate in terms of me growing up and after growing up I mean I was exposed to a lot of country music even though I'm in New York City. 'Cause that's where I spend most of my time. But in New York City I learned, I listen to country all the time as well.

HM: I know there's a country radio station.

G: Oh, there're are many, many of them. And now they are even more accessible because you could get any station you want.

HM: With the internet now you can do that.

G: Yeah, you can get any one. And I tune into country all the time.

HM: You had a lot of country, you listened to country a lot when you were . . .

G: I still do. I still do.

HM: . . . when you're in New York.

G: Yes, yeah.

HM: Well, I was going to say, I mean one of the questions I ask in general is are you influenced by other music and you definitely are influenced by country.

G: Oh yeah. Country.

HM: Anything else, that you, outside, that influences your calypso composing besides country?

G: Well, not influences my calypso composing per se, but influences my compositions 'cause I also do reggae music. And I write all of them.

HM: Well, that's good to know, too. So you write reggae.

G: Yeah.

HM: So that, when you listen, I guess you . . .

G: The way you structure a song lends itself to what type of song you want it to be.

HM: Okay. So how it's structured.

G: It's (missing word).

HM: How does reggae, I mean, I know the sound of reggae's different. How does, but how does reggae, how is it structured different than calypso, for example.

G: Well, because reggae to me is a more revolutionary music than calypso.

HM: More the social-

G: Calypso could be very social but reggae has, when I want to do a real rebel song, like I'll do it with a reggae flavor. Because, like I did a song called "I'm a Warrior," right? And it was a big song, really. Yeah, sold a lot of copies.

HM: How does it go?

G: (Sings.) Don't free my hands and leave my mind in chains/Don't say I'm free and you still washin' my brain/To do the things that you want me to/I've got a mind of my own. I'm going to do what I want to do/'Cause I'm a warrior and I'm a fighter/For what I stand for and that's my total freedom/Said I'm a warrior and I'm a fighter/And I'm going to fight on for my freedom. Yeah

HM: Yeah. Yeah. So that's more of a uprising kind of a song.

G: Yes.

HM: But calypso is maybe more of a social criticism?

G: Social, so yes. More of a social . . .

HM: Kind of a commentary.

G: Social commentary.

HM: Rather than promoting . . .

G: Yeah.

HM: . . . resistance or whatever.

G: Right.

HM: Yeah, that's interesting. So, yeah, that's, it's really not necessarily the subject matter, but the attitude.

G: The attitude towards it, yes.

HM: The attitude.

G: And the subject matter. And the subject matter because we do handle in that, in a calypso you'd have to handle it in a different way.

HM: You would go with that a different way.

G: But there's different kind of expression.

HM: And really the humor is always important in calypso, too.

G: Humor and that you can do humor easier in calypso than you can do it in reggae.

HM: With a reggae, yeah. You don't think of reggae and humor as well.

G: It doesn't lend itself as well, the melodic structure doesn't lend itself to that kind of perception.

HM: Yeah. And I, we could make different parallels with country and calypso. There's definitely humor in country music.

G: In country, and you could do that, I know (Sings.) Oh, Lord it's hard to be humble/To be perfect in so many ways/I can't wait to look in the mirror/'Cause I get better looking each day/To see me is to love me/I must be one hell of a man/Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, but I'm doing the best that I can.

HM: And you could hear, not a calypso version necessarily of that song, but that attitude.

G: Yes.

HM: You would also hear in calypso, so . . .

G: In calypso. Yeah, yeah.

10:02

HM: Where do you find your ideas? For songs, where do they . . .

G: I find it in my everyday life. I find it everywhere. Different countries where I go, you know. Like if you go to Haiti for instance, you would write a song you would see all . . .

HM: Different things.

G: . . . that, you will see more depression.

HM: Oh, yeah. The difficulty.

G: And then you have a more, that expression would come differently. If you go to New York City you look at the life in New York like that one that guy did that country song that says it's not easy to make it in New York City, you know, it's different than what I would do in Trinidad. I wrote a song in Trinidad called "Born to Survive," you know, so it . . .

HM: Depends on your situation.

G: Depends on your situation.

HM: Where you are.

G: And I think you as a songwriter, too, would know that wherever you go, if you're going to write a song in Trinidad right now it's not going to be the same way like if you're going to write it in Nashville. It would lend itself to something else. You know it would lend itself to that expression of mind. That . . .

HM: Your location.

G: . . . that you're in at that point in time.

HM: But what about the specific, the hook or the title, you know the actual thing in the song, where does that, where do those come from, you know? The, where did you, is it reading the news? Is it talking to people? Is it . . .

G: It comes from talking to people, it comes from listening to the news, it comes from seeing things. And then you, it comes from thinking what people would want to say when you write. You think about . . .

HM: Yeah, is there an example that you can think of? Like where you got a particular idea for a song, where it came from?

G: Yeah. You know. I think it's the environment. The environment gives you, lends itself to whatever you . . .

HM: And then the specific idea comes out, the title for that song.

G: Song.

HM: The central idea.

G: Yeah.

HM: Comes out and the certain words that you use, they occur to you and you think, "That's a song." You know, or it's, "Wow, I need to write that down."

G: You know the thing about me is that most thing I hear people say to me sounds like it could be put into a song.

HM: So there . . .

G: Because I think it has to do with your mindset as a writer.

HM: As you're listening to other people talk.

G: Yes.

HM: You're not conscious that you're looking for an idea. But somebody will say something.

G: Yeah.

HM: Yeah. I heard somebody just say this the other day that they were in a bar . . .

G: Like I was listening to this radio program a couple days ago and I heard them talking about how fake news and fake thing and there goes my, I got a song and I wrote a whole song about fake. I said it's a fakin' country with two meanings, really. Because people are not going to say faking, but I am, you know, I am in the writing of this song I'm inducing them to say, not say faking. I'm inducing to them to say other things.

HM: Think you, can you play just a verse and a chorus?

G: Yes. I've got to try to remember it.

HM: Oh, yeah. It's new.

G: I just did it. It's called . . . I know the chorus.

HM: Just the chorus is fine.

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) I tired of this fakin' country/I tired of this fakin' country/This fakin' country, this fakin' country/Everybody fakin' for we/I'm tired of this fakin' country/I'm tired of this fakin' country/I'm tired of this fakin' country/It drivin' me fakin' crazy.

G: (Speaks.) You know?

HM: Yeah. So that gets it . . .

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) I born in a country where everything is fake/Livin' in a country it's makin me feel, it make me feel my country's a mistake/Nothing that you see/You can get the feel/Nothin' that you're lookin' at/It ain't lookin' real/I tired of this fakin' country/I tired of this fakin' country.

G: (Speaks.) You know, so . . .

HM: So that's the idea that you heard somebody talking about. . .

G: Yeah. I heard somebody talk on the radio about fake news. . .

HM: Well, we hear . . .

G: . . . fake this, and fake that, and fake the other so I just decided, you know, it's a fakin' country.

HM: That's a great example.

G: And that is better expressed in a calypso.

HM: It is, actually.

G: Than you might hear somebody say something else and it lends itself to a different kind of expression.

HM: Yeah, 'cause country you couldn't use the double entendre there.

G: Very, no, you wouldn't be able to do that with that. It wouldn't make sense. It wouldn't make sense.

HM: But it's totally permitted and expected even in calypso.

G: In calypso. Yes.

HM: So people are listening automatically . . .

G: Yes. Yes.

HM: . . . for that always.

G: Yeah.

14:51

HM: Are you drawn to particular themes in your work, that you can say I write kind of in this, I write about this.

G: Well, I am a social commentator, really. In whatever I do, but in the true sense of the word I'm very, what, versatile, I would say.

HM: That you're not limited to one or two categories.

G: Not limited.

HM: "I don't just do this kind or that kind."

G: I do everything.

HM: Humor, political. Anything . . .

G: I'll do anything that comes to me.

HM: . . . that comes into your mind.

G. Yeah.

HM: How are you influenced by your local community? In terms of what you write.

G: Big influence. Big influence. Big influence. Big, big, big influence.

HM: So, do you see, not think of yourself, but when you look at your work . . .

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) For years I'm on this golden sand/Watching as the waves
command/The early morning mist that it has made/Staring at the horizon far/Seems to say stay
where you are/Show for you a (missing word) is on the way/Then a breeze would blow out of
nowhere/And I watched the morning sun appear/That seemed to say "Hello, how do you
do?"/And I stand and watch the dawning of another golden morning/As I have done a thousand
times before/I say, "Morning, sunrise"/Waking up to greet the day, in that old familiar way.
Looking at her there's not much I can say/I say, "Morning, sunrise/You're going now to light the
day/Later on you'll fade way/Let me thank you for another Mayaro morning."

HM: I've got to ask you about Mayaro.

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) Want to thank you for another Mayaro morning.

HM: Somebody I interviewed said that he was important in your getting on stage. I interviewed
Clevin Romero.

G: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, oh yeah. He's my mentor.

HM: Ah, well, that's great. Talk about that.

G: So, what I want to tell you, like that song, . . .

HM: Okay, yeah.

G: . . . that song is influenced by my own environment.

HM: Of growing up?

G: In Mayaro. And being on the beach. And the boats and the sun.

HM: But coming from that specific place.

G: Yeah. That particular song, that particular song is about Mayaro.

HM: A country song about Mayoro.

G: Yeah, it's a country song about Mayaro. It's how I feel about Mayaro. It's how I, it's my
environment.

HM: One you associate with your mother, growing up with country music in the house, and being . . .

G: Yeah.

HM: So it's all wrapped together.

G: Definitely. Definitely. It's all wrapped together. Yeah, yeah. That's my mother's influence, right? Right there. And my own upbringing really.

HM: So . . .

G: All I had was the beach.

HM: To go back to the community aspect before I get you to talk about Surpriser. So I know calypso has a tradition of being, the calypsonian as a spokesperson, really.

G: Yes.

HM: For the community.

G: For the, yeah.

HM: For expressing what is on the mind and hearts of the community, so you see yourself as, not having to consciously think "I'm that, I need to," but do you . . .

G: I consciously think about that.

HM: Do you consciously think about that?

G: I actually consciously think about it, yes. 'Cause when I do a song I consciously think about the impact that it's going to have and I consciously think about me relaying what is happening to my community or my country.

HM: So, it is a conscious process.

G: Yeah. When I did "The Sinkin' Ship." I did "Captain, this ship is sinkin'," it had to do with the country, it had to do with I just akin the country metaphorically to a luxury liner because of the amount of money we had and then things just start falling apart, and they're sinking, it's like the Titanic, filled with all this luxury everything. But what I'm doing, what I was doing, is expressing the way I feel about my country and the way other people would feel about the country.

HM: It wasn't just you. I mean, when you were singing that song you're thinking of yourself as being just more than you.

G: It's communal. It's communal.

HM: A communal emotion or thought.

G: Yes. Yes.

HM: And it comes across that way.

G: Actually, it's a national . . .

HM: A national . . .

G: National. Yeah.

HM: . . . thing. But it comes across that way, I just didn't know if you consciously thought about it.

G: Oh yeah, consciously. Very consciously. You know I'm a very conscious person whenever I write. I consciously set out to do what I do. Very, very, very.

HM: Beyond just the words and the music.

G: Beyond just the words and the music.

HM: "What am I, who am I speaking for, where's this saying, how are people . . ."

G: That's the first thing that I do when I write a song. I say, "Who am I speaking to? What do I want to achieve with this that I am doing here?"

HM: So you're thinking on a very large . . .

G: I write songs really to achieve no monetary, you know, no kind of monetary . . .

HM: Commercial.

20:06

G: No. No kind of monetary feedback. No kind of monetary gain. I wrote it because I think it's the right thing for me to do. I think that this is what I want to do, this I what my talent should be used to do.

HM: But, and not just for you . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . right? It's for a larger group.

G: Yes, yes. For the better good of a lot of people.

HM: Yeah. So you're thinking on a very broad level.

G: Yes, I do.

HM: As a writer. Which isn't always true. You know, some artists are just, "I'm just trying to express what I'm feeling in this moment and whether it's for me or for someone else, then that's out of my hands," but you're doing it in a, you're consciously thinking about it.

G: A lot of times I'm, yeah, most of the times that is what I do, but I have written songs that are just purely for my own, you know.

HM: It's something you wanted to say . . .

G: Yeah. I just wanted to say that.

HM: . . . at that moment.

G: Yeah.

HM: I'm going to get onto some other influ-, other writing questions, but because I interviewed . . .

G: Clevin Romero.

HM: Surpriser, to talk about that because he's from Mayaro as well.

G: He's from Mayaro. He's one of the . . .

HM: He's obviously older, twenty years older than you.

G: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And he's one of the people I knew when I was a child. When I was a child he was one of the first calypsonians that I was exposed to. People like him and Zandolee and Superior himself. Superior and my mother grew up together, you know.

HM: Ah, no.

G: Yeah, they grew up together as children. And those are the people I was exposed to as a child.

HM: Were you influenced by. And then when you wanted to begin your singing those people were active already.

G: Those people were already active, yeah, and I was fortunate enough to meet Kitchener and Sparrow and Stalin and these guys.

HM: The Young Brigade people.

G: At a very young age, when I was ten years old, I'm talking about I met these guys.

HM: Well, he said he remembers he'd just hear this voice . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . saying, "Clevin, Mr. Clevin," . . .

G: Yes, yes.

HM: . . . and turned around and it was you . . .

G: It was me.

H: . . . and you wanted help getting up on the stage.

G: Yes, yes, yes.

HM: . . . but he remembered that. And I'll show just a little clip of him, I recorded of him performing . . .

G: Ah, oh wow.

HM: . . . about two weeks ago in his daughter's home.

G: Yes, in . . .

HM: In Mount Lambert.

G: Oh, he was up in Mount Lambert?

HM: Yeah, he came up for a doctor's appointment.

G: Okay, okay.

HM: So we sat for two or three hours and he sang.

G: Yeah. Yeah. He has . . .

HM: He hasn't lost anything.

G: . . . a wealth. No, no. He still remembers everything. He's very good.

HM: And his songs . . .

G: I go to him still when I want to know certain things.

HM: Oh, well, good. You're still in touch.

G: Oh yeah, yeah. I go and look for him all the time. He's right there in Mayaro.

HM: You'll have to tell him that we were together.

G: I will tell him.

HM: So was your music infl-, is your music influenced by your time in the U.S., beyond, outside of country music?

G: Yes. Yeah. I mean . . .

HM: How?

G: . . . all the time that I'm there I'm looking at what's happening in America.

HM: So, you're looking at the news.

G: Yeah.

HM: And what's going on in the U.S.

G: And what's happening in America. Yeah. I wrote a song. I'll see if I can play it.

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) America, be careful of the things you do/America the whole world have their eyes on you/Don't be, take some advice, my friend/Don't feel you know it all/As there'll be no one around to pick you up when you fall/So you invaded Grenada. You aid the rebels of Nicaragua/And you deem yourself the protector of democracy? Ooh-whee/But be careful of what you do 'cause the whole world looking at you/The Bible says to your own self you must be true/So America, be careful of the things you do/America this whole world has their eyes on you/Take some advice, my friend. Don't feel you know it all/As there'll be no one around to pick you up when you fall.

HM: Oh, yeah. Oh, well, that speaks to me. (Laughs.)

G: Yeah.

HM: But it's good to hear something from someone who's outside.

G: Yeah.

HM: Or you're inside and outside.

G: Yeah.

HM: But that gives some perspective on how you're viewed.

G: Yeah.

HM: By friends, by people, someone who's friendly.

G: Yeah.

HM: Not an enemy.

G: No, no.

HM: Someone who's friendly and saying "hey," you know?

G: "Have to be careful" is good advice in my songs.

HM: Pay attention.

G: That's exactly what I was saying.

HM: Yeah.

G: You know, because . . .

HM: So, I mean, what's going on in the U.S., just in terms of socially, politically shows up sometimes in your songs.

G: Yes. It does.

HM: So, do you play anything besides guitar? Is guitar your main instrument?

G: Yeah. I don't play anything else. I mean, I fool around with everything else.

HM: But that's your main instrument . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . when you're writing.

G: Just play the guitar.

24:50

HM: Are you pretty much self-taught? Did you take any lessons?

G: Not one. I've never taken a lesson in anything. I just did it all by myself. Whatever I learned, I'm always thinking now about doing it because I think that I need to improve my guitar playing.

HM: It might help?

G: Yeah.

HM: I had a friend that, who had written, was an established songwriter.

G: Yeah.

HM: But he went and took guitar lessons, I was so impressed by this, to learn some new chords.

G: Yeah, well that's . . .

HM: So he could stretch his songwriting.

G: Well that's what I want to do.

HM: That's a really good idea.

G: That's what I want to do.

HM: And it ended up in one of the songs that we wrote, so.

G: Yeah.

HM: So when you're writing, how do you start? Is just it in your head? Are you writing in your head? Do you pick up the guitar? What's the process?

G: I write in my head. I do it in my head, and then I, when I have an idea put it on some . .

HM: On a tape.

G: . . . my tape and stuff. And then I go and I put it on, then I sit down and really write it.

HM: So you get the basic idea down.

G: Get the basic idea.

HM: You're sitting with the guitar and a piece of paper and write?

G: Sometimes I sit with the guitar and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'm traveling somewhere and I get an idea and I just something down and then I sit down after a while. On that phone right there I have . . .

HM: You use, on the phone. Yeah, use your memo function?

G: Before the phone I used to walk around with a small tape, but I don't have to do that anymore because of the phone . . .

HM: I do. I started using the phone, too.

G: The phone, the phone, has . . . you don't have to walk with anything if you've got the phone.

HM: You don't have to worry about the cassettes.

G: Yeah, and you put that thing on there and then when I sit down I just write after that.

HM: Is there a certain time of day or location that is better for you is it . . .?

G: Not really.

HM: Anytime?

G: I like to be quiet. Once I'm quiet, anytime.

HM: Get away from noise and distraction . . .

G: As long as I'm quiet.

HM: . . . television.

G: Well, I could have the television on and write, that's not a problem. I could do that.

HM: But, so, when you mean quiet what do you mean?

G: I mean away from people and stuff.

HM: Ah, just the . . .

G: To be with myself.

HM: What's going on. Be by yourself.

G: Yeah. To be by myself.

HM: You need to be by yourself. Time of day isn't important to you?

G: No.

HM: Do you write anytime, it just depends . . .

G: I write anytime.

HM: Do you have ideas, do you wake up in the night with ideas?

G: Yes, I do.

HM: "I better write this down."

G: That I do, yes. I put, I do ideas on little matchboxes on anything, anything, anything.

HM: Anything that you have to put down.

G: Just scribble it down so in the morning I wouldn't lose the idea.

HM: So, the idea won't be lost. Yeah, that's happened to me.

G: I guess all writers do that kind of thing.

HM: Does being a performer, because you're also a performer, . . .

G: Oh, yeah.

HM: . . . does being a performer influence how you write? Versus a person who is just writing for other people all the time. So, knowing that you might perform the song, or your experiences as a performer, do they affect how your . . .

G: Yes, it does. Yes, it does.

HM: How does that work for you?

G: While I am writing the song, I am visualizing the atmosphere that I'm going to be doing it at, and also visualizing what kind of response I'm going to have from that audience. Now when you write a song like I said before, I ask myself, "Who am I writing this for?" If I'm writing a song for American it's not going to be the same as if I'm writing it for Trinidad. But then in a general sense you, I write for people, so I would write a song in a general sense that would encompass everybody, you know, so that's how it is. But sometimes you do a song that is people specific. That is . . .

HM: To the group of people . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . that you are writing for.

G: You have to understand the culture in which you're doing the song for.

HM: So, do you imagine yourself onstage, singing the song while you're writing it?

G: Yes.

HM: Okay.

G: Yes, I do.

HM: Now, I've never done that and I spoke to someone the other day who even imagines, she's gonna imagine what she's wearing.

G: Yeah.

HM: For that particular song. I mean, so it's even more involved. But I just never even considered . . .

G: Well, sometimes the wearin' thing comes into play long after I do the song. The wearin' thing will come into play.

(Microphone is repositioned.)

HM: What you're gonna . . .

G: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: . . . actually have on.

G: Yeah. Well, that comes into play a long time after.

HM: So, you're still writing, that's obvious. You're still writing songs.

G: Oh yeah, yeah. Of course.

HM: Well, I'm glad we're . . .

G: I'm getting ready to go in the recording studio right now.

HM: Are you doing, are you working on a new project?

G: Yes, I am.

HM: Great. I look forward to hearing that. Does it have any particular direction? Overall, like . . .

G: Well, it's calypso.

HM: It's a calypso album.

G: It's gonna be done for the Carnival season.

HM: It'll be done for the Carnival season.

G: But even though I write songs during the Carnival season which is the high time of the calypso, for the calypsonian here . . .

HM: Let's lean in a little bit because of that blower.

G: Even though I'm doing it for the calypso season I still write it with a consciousness that Carnival is only a few days. And my songs has to be . . .

HM: You want it to last more than just, beyond Carnival

G: Has to be written in a certain way that it's going to go way beyond Carnival.

HM: Yeah. That's interesting.

G: That's how I do it. And that's how it's done, yeah.

HM: Is there anything that, I've covered all my questions, is there anything that I haven't covered, or we haven't covered with my questions that you want to say about your writing, or what's important, or how you write?

30:05

G: Well, no, I'm, we have said basically everything but primarily I'm a conscious writer. I write conscious songs regardless to, in what genre I do it.

HM: Conscious, meaning?

G: Conscious meaning songs that would make people sit, and sit up, and listen or sit up and think about what I'm saying

HM: You're consciously thinking about their reaction . . .

G: About their reaction.

HM: . . . and their response.

G: So they would sit up and think and know that what I'm doing. They would sit up and say . . .

HM: You want to make people think.

G: Yes.

HM: No matter what genre you're in.

G: What genre of music. Yeah. They would just know, you know, sit up and take note about what I'm saying. It's like Bob Marley's songs, most of Bob's songs are songs, that is, they're about reality, songs that are realistic, you know. A lot of country songs are like that as well.

HM: Yeah. I think that's another, . . .

G: That's why I'm in debt to country music.

HM: . . . a common thing between the two is, as I've thought about things, is they both deal with real life, or everyday . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . experience. It's not the typical pop music, you know, up in the air, "I'll love you for a thousand years."

G: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: You know, kind of, that's part of the appeal of pop music, right?

G: Yeah.

HM: It kind of takes you away into something way out there, but . . .

QG: Yes.

HM: But country's rooted . . .

G: Is rooted.

HM: . . . in the immediate.

G: Yes. And so is calypso.

HM: And so is calypso.

G: So is calypso.

HM: Sometimes as much as even to the point of talking about the price of milk going up . . .

G: Of course.

HM: . . . or whatever. The taxi fare or something.

G: Yeah.

HM: Or a particular politician.

G: Country will do that, too. Country will do exactly that.

HM: Yeah, that wonderful Harlan Howard song, "I'm Busted."

G: "I'm Busted," I mean, I don't know . . .

HM: You don't know that one? I can't sing it for you, but it's about everything being too expensive, my car's broke . . .

G: Of course.

HM: My kids need shoes to wear

G: That's country. Yeah. Yeah. Merle Haggard "The Gambler," man. Not Kenny Roger's "Gambler." Merle Haggard. You know, "A gambler never wins."

HM: Yeah. So it's a specific situation.

G: Yeah.

HM: And people that it's talking about. That's another thing. It's specific, it's not about a general person out there. It's about this person.

G: (Sings and plays guitar.) Fights in the morning time for breakfast/Fights in the evening, too/
You never really took the time off to appreciate the things I do/I never leave you lonely, but you
listen to your friends/This torture is getting too much for me, baby, so this is where we end/Even
though I know leavin' you behind is not one of the things I really want to do, leavin' you behind is
not one of the things I really want to do/But it's me, only you, only you . . . (Speaks.) I'm
forgetting that.

HM: Yeah, yeah, but . . .

G: (Sings and plays.) Force me to do the things I have to do. (Speaks.) I'm forgetting that song.

HM: Yeah, that's alright.

G: (Sings and plays.) Leaving you behind is not one of the things I really love to do/But I know
it's only you that . . .

G: (Speaks.) I can't really remember it right this minute. See, when you write these things, you
wrote so much songs. I write hundreds of songs.

HM: Yeah. When you have that many the lyrics . . .

G: And then you're tryin' to bring it up, and you can't remember it. But those are all personal songs.

HM: Those are all, you know, like a real-life situation.

G: But your real-life situation applies to other people as well.

HM: Somebody, I heard this said, is, and they were talking about why love is so often the subject of songs and the reason is, he called it the universal specific, so everybody can relate to it, but it's about a specific, you write . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . about the specific heartbreak, . . .

G: Yes.

HM: . . . difficulty, but if you write it in a certain way.

G: Yes. Yes. But at the end of the day your circumstance is not unique to you and that's why records sell so much because other people understand.

HM: But country and calypso I think do that particularly by being very specific about what they're talking about . . .

G: Yes. Yes.

HM: . . . that, no, I might not have been in that person's exact situation, but I can relate to . . .

G: Right.

HM: . . . I can relate to Sparrow singing . . .

G: Sometimes it might very well could be that you too have been in that very . . .

HM: In that situation. But even Sparrow singing "No, Doctor, No," . . .

G: Yeah. Yeah.

HM: . . . you know? That's totally, I don't know about, you know, that situation, but, Dr. Eric Williams and the taxi fare going up, but I get it.

G: Yeah. Yeah. Of course.

HM: And the country music situation. You haven't been in Merle Haggard's situation . . .

G: Right.

HM: . . . exactly.

G: But just listening to his song . . .

HM: You can totally relate to it.

G: And we relate to it. And that's what I love about country music in general and I love his songs. But most country singers sing songs, the ones that write their own songs that is, sing songs about their life.

35:00

HM: Yeah, "the Coalminer's Daughter," Loretta Lynn.

G: Of course. Loretta Lynn. That's great.

HM: Or Dolly Parton's . . .

G: Dolly Parton. Right.

HM: "Coat of Many Colors." That was her real-life situation.

G: Of course, of course.

HM: The other children made fun of her.

G: And that one I was doing about Mayaro just now. That's my personal experience. That's how you write.

HM: Well, this has been wonderful. I really appreciate your time.

G: Well I'm happy, and I'm happy that you, you know, I hope you get a lot out of it.

HM: Well, I did.

G: And any time when you're here. Just call me. You could come down, we can go down to the house.

HM: We'll do that.

G: If you ever want to go up to Mayaro. Ray wants us to go.

HM: Oh yeah?

G: So if you ever want to go up to Mayaro.

HM: I'd love to. I know it's a pretty good trip.

G: It's okay.

HM: But I'd love to see more of the island. I've just been in Port of Spain and . . .

G: Right.

HM: . . . a little bit outside. So I'd like to . . .

G: Right.

HM: . . . I'd like to see more of it, but we'll definitely connect.

G: Any old time.

HM: We've got a strong connection with the country thing.

G: Oh, yeah. Thanks. Thanks. I do. I love country music.

HM: I'm going to turn it off.

End of interview