Jocelyne Guilbault & Roy Cape

Roy Cape: A Life on the Calypso and Soca Bandstand. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2014. xiv + 286 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.95)

This book is interesting on several levels. It is an exercise in collaborative writing, a document of an artist's career, and an analysis of the relationships and work that shape that career. As joint authors, Trinidadian bandleader Roy Cape recounts and reflects on his experiences, and ethnomusicology professor Jocelyne Guilbault interrogates and frames his stories. At times one or the other speaks, and at times the writing takes the form of conversation between them. At the back of the book there is a selected discography, a comprehensive bibliography, and a link to a CD on line.

In the introduction Jocelyn asks, "What have (Caribbean) popular music studies been missing by focusing so heavily on lead singers?" (p. 3). This struck me as a good question, because I had seen Roy Cape, with his distinctive grey dreadlocks, playing saxophone in the Spektakula calypso tent in Port of Spain, on the road at Carnival, and at fetes—and yet I had never thought to ask who he was or what he had done. As a musician active in the Caribbean music scene since 1959, and a bandleader for thirty-five years and counting, Roy Cape is an eminence worthy of attention. As much as it is about Roy himself, however, this book is about the networks of people and scenes in which he has operated, and to which he has contributed.

The parts of the book where Roy shares memories are the most engrossing for me. They are full of vivid characters whom he admired and learned from, including bandleaders such as Ron Berridge, Frankie Francis, and Clarence Curvan; calypsonians such as the Mighty Sparrow, Mighty Chalkdust, and Black Stalin; and of course many many musicians. I also geeked out on the musical details. Suffice it to say that if you like to hear musicians talk shop—from chord progressions to gear to improvisation to collective arranging—this is a good read.

Jocelyne interjects her own questions and observations into Roy's stories, helping to reveal larger patterns. And in her longer segments she adds context, explaining, for example, how the growth of expatriate communities created more opportunities for Trinidadian bands to tour (p. 212). Her compositional strategies are laid out in the introduction and the afterword, and she also steps out of the story occasionally to reflect on her approach to writing, comparing it in Chapter 5, for example, to the techniques of documentary film. Such "academic moments" may interrupt an otherwise conversational narrative, but they will be interesting to scholars who do collaborative writing. All told, Jocelyne's voice adds depth and meaning to Roy's stories.

Some of the chapters are organized chronologically. Chapter 1, which focuses on Roy's time at St. Dominic's Children's Home, in Belmont, Trinidad, establishes a key theme in the story of Caribbean brass band musicians, many of whom learned their musical skills and discipline in orphanages. Chapter 2 recounts his early career as a side man, and Chapter 4 is dedicated to his years as a bandleader. These chapters give a vivid sense of the rigors, joys, and challenges of a musician's life. Roy worked as a janitor for several years in New York, and in road construction when he returned to Trinidad in the late 1970s—a reminder of how hard it can be for even the most dedicated artists to earn their living through music.

Chapter 3 addresses the importance of sound and style, focusing on body and instrument, stage, audience, and the quest to find one's artistic voice. Chapters 5 and 6 are more impressionistic—the first comprising a series of photographs, and the next a series of testimonials from Roy's bandmates and friends. They read as vivid illustrations of the themes established in the more chronological chapters. The affectionate and admiring regard of Roy's peers is especially touching. As trumpet player Michael "Lion" Lindsay testifies, Roy Cape is a man who "puts himself last, and makes sure everybody is well taken care of" (p. 202).

Chapter 7 is a summary written mainly by Jocelyne. It nicely ties the book together in a few simple paragraphs, reviewing Roy's career in terms of "four contrasting social practices of circulation" (p. 208): touring; playing in different spaces (calypso tent, carnival road, and dance hall); circulating through relationships with various communities; and passing on knowledge. This last section cites musicians who refer to Roy's band as "the University of Soca" and "the University of Local Music"—well-deserved accolades for Roy Cape, and an apt parting thought for a book that offers new ways of knowing for the academy.

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