Hope Munro

What She Go Do: Women in Afro-Trinidadian Music. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. 219 pp. (Cloth US\$65.00)

What She Go Do takes its title from a 1973 song by the legendary calypsonian Calypso Rose. In a delightful postlude to this book's publication, the 77-year-old singer underscored its importance with her popular feminist anthem for the 2017 carnival, titled, "Leave Me Alone." Hope Munro's most important contribution is the biographical detail and the insight she provides into the aspirations, challenges, and accomplishments of Calypso Rose and other female musicians in Trinidad, including Singing Sandra, Denyse Plummer, Denise Belfon, Destra Garcia, Fay-Ann Lyons, Michelle Huggins-Watts, and Natasha Joseph. The book also serves as a good overview of the culture and politics of Trinidad carnival and its associated musical genres of calypso, soca, and steelband.

Munro begins by outlining (in Chapter 1) some of the ways that women have taken independent and assertive roles in Trinidadian society, from nineteenth-century musical practices like *bele* and *cariso*, to the labor movement of the 1930s, to the modern workplace and its feminist implications. Chapter 2 then focuses on calypso, noting the absence of women from calypso tents in the early twentieth century, and documenting pioneering female calypsonians in the 1930s and 1940s. It also traces the development of institutional accommodations for women in the later twentieth century, including a National Calypso Queen competition in 1972, the renaming of the Calypso King competition as "Calypso Monarch" in 1977, and performance venues such as "Ladies Night Out" in the early 2000s.

Chapter 3 introduces Calypso Rose, born Linda McCartha Sandy in Tobago in 1940, who began singing calypso in 1957 with the Young Brigade. She was the first Caribbean woman to win a calypso competition (in the Virgin Islands in 1963). In Trinidad she won the Road March competition in 1977 (a sort of people's choice for the most popular song on carnival day), and the Calypso Monarch title in 1978 (not to mention the several Road March titles that officials later admitted were stolen from her). Munro does a fine job of relating Calypso Rose's career trajectory and her lyrics to her personal life and her understanding of what it means for a woman to sing calypso. The chapter concludes with a focus on two other female calypsonians who rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s—Denyse Plummer and Sandra Devine—and the rapidly changing conditions in which they pursued their careers.

Chapter 4 turns to the genre of soca music, and foregrounds the role of female masqueraders as the dominant consumers of soca music on the road today. Munro observes that this has translated into increased opportunities and

popularity for women singers, and discusses the aesthetics of how “soca divas” display their bodies in performances at carnival and fetes—communicating a sensuality that inspires and empowers, rather than objectifying women, through energetic choreographies to get the crowd moving with them, and of course “winning” (gyrating the waist). The moral concerns about sexy dancing that permeate the discourse on Trinidad carnival historically become much less prudish and more nuanced in the voices of performers such as Denise Belfon, Destra Garcia, and Fay-Ann Lyons, as well as others whom Munro represents here.

Chapter 5 is about steel pan music. Munro notes that women’s participation in this instrumental genre “closely parallels” their roles in calypso and soca, but admits that it is different. One of the many differences, for example, is the history of violent rivalry between steelbands, which gave the steelband an intensely masculine aura that is still an important part of its symbolism (though Munro fails to analyze it). While this chapter misses some opportunities to theorize gender in a different context, and has less continuity with the others, it nonetheless makes a good review of steelband history and of women’s participation. It concludes with interesting discussions of two pan women, Michelle Huggins-Watts and Natasha Joseph.

I would actually recommend beginning this book with its “Conclusions,” where Munro provides some of her most insightful framing. She begins with a simple and sincere description of the innate Trinidadian gift for language and performance and nicely sums up the thrust of the book: “Women popular musicians participate in a vernacular feminist project that resists domination while at the same time inspiring audiences to question the relations that cause domination in their own lives” (p. 180). That is, women singers have to be bold in order to participate in performance genres that are historically male-dominated, but in doing so they bring about real changes in gender relations and attitudes.

Shannon Dudley

School of Music, University of Washington

dudley@uw.edu