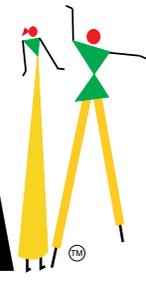


GUYANA AND FOLK

And Culture



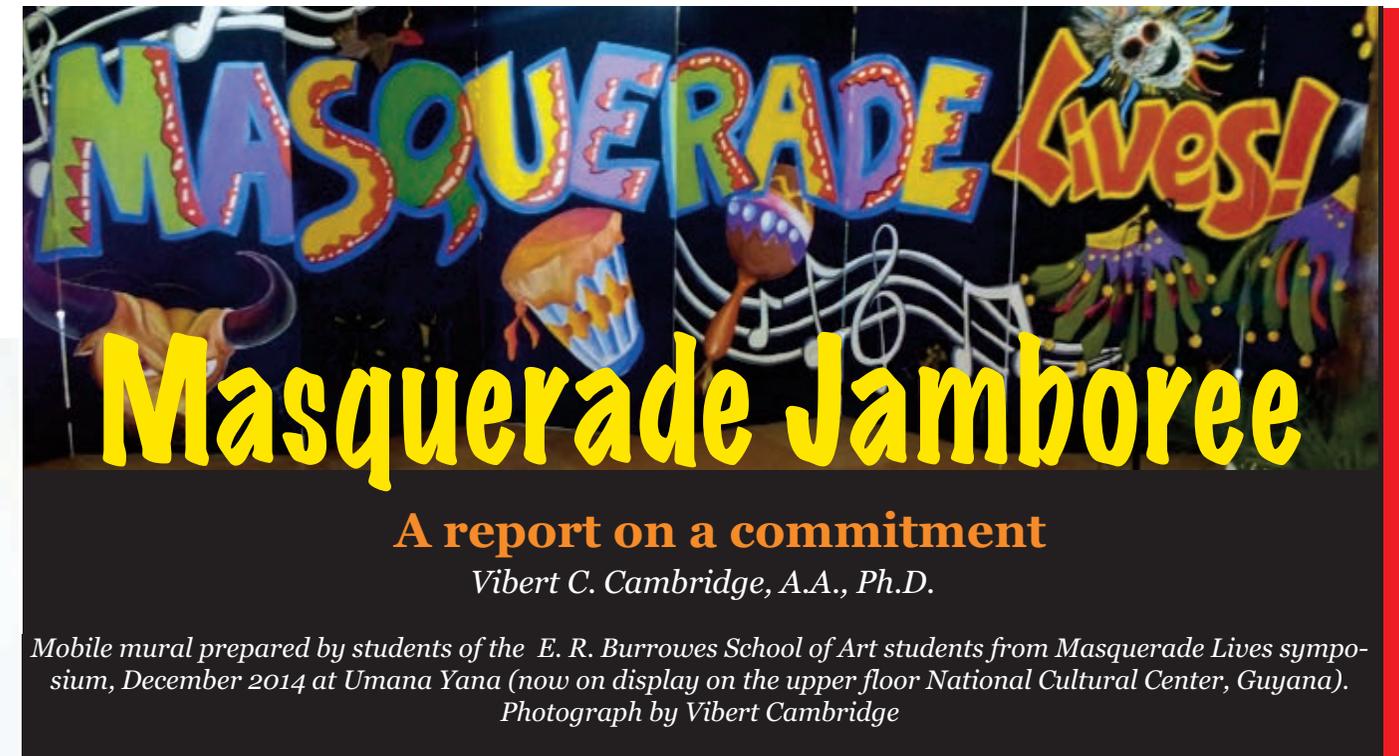
CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH GCA IN GUYANA

MASQUERADE JAMBOREE

Masquerade Lives!
DECEMBER
19 - 21, 2016

8 BIG BANDS FOR
FLOUNCE OFF!

PLAISANCE COMMUNITY
GROUND



Masquerade Jamboree

A report on a commitment
Vibert C. Cambridge, A.A., Ph.D.

Mobile mural prepared by students of the E. R. Burrowes School of Art students from Masquerade Lives symposium, December 2014 at Umana Yana (now on display on the upper floor National Cultural Center, Guyana). Photograph by Vibert Cambridge

The Jubilee Year Christmas is shaping up to be a special season. On Sunday, December 18, the **Festival of Carols and Lessons** will be presented at D'Urban Park. According to Dr. Seeta Shah Roat, this multi-media production will "involve the National Drama Company, National School of Music, National School of Dance, National Drama Company, five youth groups from different churches, Woodside Choir, Primary Schools Choirs, Secondary Schools Choirs, National Steel Orchestra, Police Band, Acapela singers, large screen projections, and masquerade bands."

The Festival of Carols and Readings has the status of a national event. It is a production that will showcase Guyana's "best voices singing traditional carols some with new twists."

Between December 19th and 21st there will also be several other events that will also contribute to the Jubilee Year Christmas season. These events are organized under the theme **Masquerade Jamboree** and are connected to the masquerade revitalization initiative launched by the Guyana Cultural Association of New York, Inc. (GCA) and the Department of Culture four years ago. The events will include:

- An eight-band masque-parade,
- Opening of the masquerade season,
- National Flounce Off,
- A spoken word event celebrating masquerade language,
- a mini-film and video festival on the Learning Channel, and
- the launch of Masquerade: My First Book—an early-childhood activity book.

Also anticipated is the **Concert for Puttagee**—a benefit for Rudolph "Putagee" Vivieros—a legendary exponent of the folk art. "Puttagee" is probably the last of Guyana's great masquerade flute men. The concert will pay tribute to "Putagee" and showcase new masquerade-inspired compositions and innovative arrangements by Derry Etkins.

Masquerade Jamboree represents another important moment in the revitalization of masquerade—a distinctive Guyanese folk art. This article is to provide background to the revitalization initiative and seek your ongoing support.

Background

Since 2002, the Guyana Cultural Association of New York, Inc., has been organizing an annual symposium. The symposium is one of the signature events of the annual Folk Festival season held in Brooklyn, New York. The symposium provides a space for reflection and action. Over the years these symposia have focused on many topics related to the Guyanese experience: music, literature, dance, diversity, biography, and identity.

In 2008, the annual symposium was held in Georgetown, Guyana. The theme for that symposium was **Creole Mehcheh Mehcheh" Celebrating Mac: Folk, Identity, and National Cohesiveness**. The symposium focused attention on Wordsworth McAndrew and his contributions to the fashioning of Guyanese identity in the post-independence era. For "Mac," Guyana's folk heritage was a rich, reservoir of wisdom, knowledge, and creativity that was fashioned from the long Guyanese experience.

For McAndrew, this communally owned reservoir offered resources for developing the interethnic trust so needed to build a just and caring society. McAndrew's work emphasized collection, documentation, and sharing (broadcasting and publishing). This aspect of his work directed the symposium's attention to issues of preservation, and ongoing documentation of Guyana folk heritage.

Masquerade Lives!

GCA's 10th annual symposium was held in Guyana in December 2012. The focus was on a distinctive Guyanese folk art form—Masquerade. This decision was influenced by Margaret Lawrence's 2011 short film Tradition which focused a young man's desire to dance masquerade despite family and societal objections.

The 5-day event was held in December (Guyana's Masquerade season) and was intended to raise awareness about the precarious state of an essential Guyanese folk art. The Call for Participation issued in June 2012, noted that masquerade has been in decline and for many; the few masquerade bands that take to the streets during the Christmas masquerade season are considered and treated as nuisances.

The mission of the 10th annual symposium was to collaborate with Guyana's Ministry of Culture and other Guyanese institutions to create a space for public education, the examination of the deep heritage associated with Guyana's masquerade traditions, especially its origins, history, international connections, and aesthetic dimensions--(costume, dance, music, craft, and performance). The symposium also aspired to an action plan—a strategy for the revitalization of the tradition.

The 2012 symposium featured an international conference, the unveiling of public art projects, premiering of music inspired by the masquerade heritage, a film and video festival, and an innovation—The Flounce Off. The international conference was held at the Umana Yana. The Masquerade mural was unveiled at in the compound of the National Museum, Water Street. The inaugural Flounce Off took place at the Community Center Ground, Victoria Village, East Coast Demerara. Among the "findings" of the 2012 symposium were the following:

- There were no active masquerade bands in Berbice.
- Pervasive concerns about the quality of design and manufacture of costumes.



Masquerade Mural, National Library. Unveiled, December 2012.

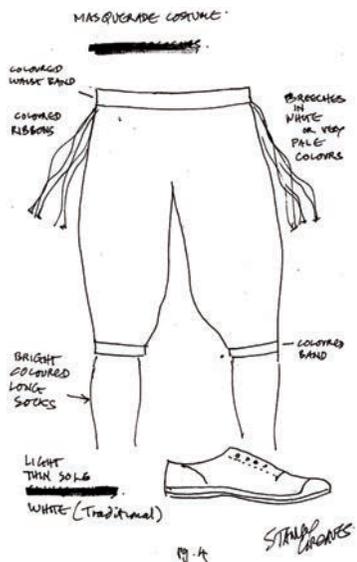
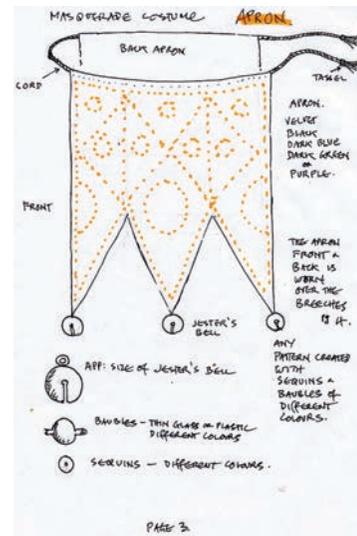
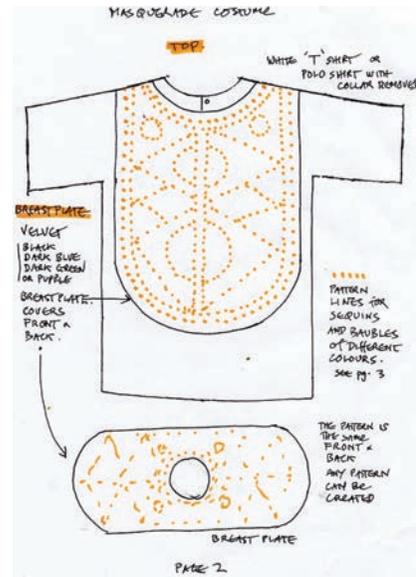


From Masquerade Flounce Off, Victoria, East Coast Demerara, December 2012. Rudolph "Puttagee" Vivieros on Penny Whistle. Photograph by Vibert Cambridge



Masquerade Lives! Bam Bam Sally at Flounce Off, Victoria, December 2012. Photograph by Vibert Cambridge

- Concerns about the state of masquerade music. Among the problems were the shortage of goat skins for drums and the rapidly declining number of flute men. In 2008, only two were identified—Puttagee and Three Foot.
- Innovation. Boysie Sage’s protégée, Julio Thijs’ commitment to taking stilt dancing and stilt technology to “another level.”
- Cultural exchange. Contemporary masquerade practice suggested influential interethnic interactions and exchange dynamics were in progress. This dynamic was evident in music, costumes, dance movements, and performance venues. The symposium also generated a 2012-2016 action plan. The following were identified as elements in that plan:
 - “Mapping” of the geography of masquerade bands in Guyana;
 - Focusing attention and mobilizing help to areas perceived to be in crucial need;
 - Identifying Guyana’s masquerade’s global, regional, and national connections; and
 - Encouraging the study and celebration of masquerade’s musical, literary, design aesthetics, and its history.
 - Conduct biennial reviews starting in 2014.



Four templates for masquerade costumes by Stanley Greaves



Stanley Greaves at Masquerade costume design workshop, December 2014. Photo by Vibert Cambridge

The rapporteur’s report, prepared by Dr, Michael Scott, now Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Guyana is a valuable record of the symposium.

Masquerade Lives! Practicum

Now following the biennial schedule, a second masquerade focused symposium was held in Georgetown in 2014—again near the December masquerade season. This symposium featured an international teleconference and two week-long practical workshops.

The two workshops were in response to the concerns about costume design and music. The costume design workshop was held at the E. R. Burrowes School of Art and the music workshop was held at the National School of Music. Among the participants in the international teleconference were the Director of Culture and senior officials from the National Archives, National Museum, National Cultural Center, E.R. Burrowes School of Art, National School of Drama and the Theater Arts, National School of Dance, and The Learning Channel. New York-based participants joined via Skype.

The 2014 symposium reviewed actions taken since 2012 and made plans for the 2016 symposium. It was agreed that the December 2016 symposium would be titled Masquerade Jamboree. Among the declared objectives:

- To contribute to enjoyment of the Guyanese Christmas heritage during the Golden Anniversary;
- To showcase the state of the masquerade folk art;
- To showcase contemporary creativity inspired by

Guyana’s masquerade heritage

- To demonstrate masquerade’s global, regional, and local connections;
- To support the development of heritage tourism as Guyanese product.

A quick chronology ...

By the 2014 symposium, there was evidence of work done by the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport and other stakeholders to support the preservation and revitalization of masquerade as envisioned in 2012. For example,

- Director, National School of Dance, Linda Griffith had produced, with UNESCO’s support *Movements of the Masquerade Dance*--a DVD documenting the steps of Guyana’s masquerade.
- Linda Griffith and Andrea Mentore (National School of Music) through the organizing of regular Flounce Offs had “mapped” the distribution of masquerade troupes in Guyana. [No active bands in Berbice. Essequibo may have more active bands than any other region in Guyana—probably a function of the Bad Cow festivals sponsored by the Alphonsos. Demerara’s “hot spots” are the East Coast (Victoria, Belfield, Golden Grove), Linden, and West Demerara]
- Masquerade movements were evident in the repertoire of dances presented at “high” national moments, such as the Flag Raising Ceremony.
- There are national and regional masquerade competitions during Mashramani.



From Masquerade costume workshop,
December 2014.
Photo by Vibert Cambridge.



From Masquerade costume workshop,
December 2014.
Photo by Vibert Cambridge.



From Masquerade costume workshop,
December 2014.
Photo by Vibert Cambridge.



High school student participant, Masquerade
music workshop,
December 2014.

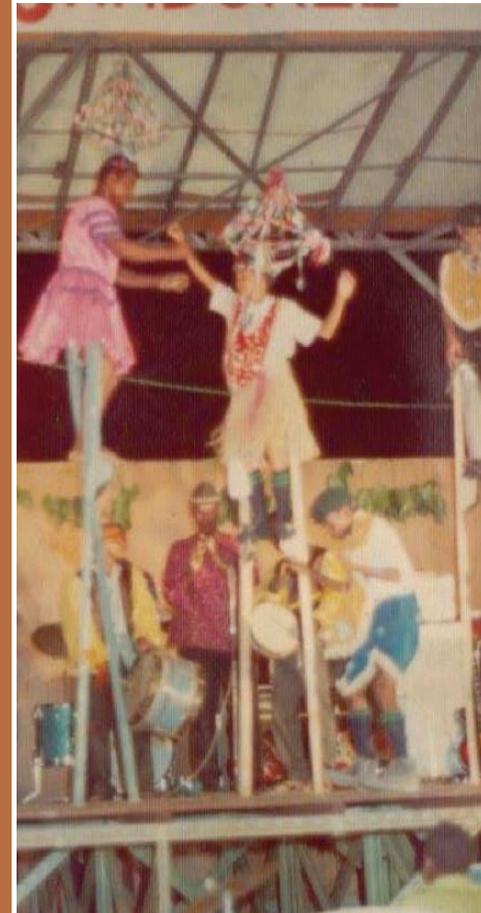


From Masquerade music workshop, December
2014. Rudolph "Puttagee" Vivieros on flute and to
his right, Teacher Raghu on dhantal.
Photograph by Vibert Cambridge.

- Masquerade elements were evident in Guyanese new music. Derry Elkins' composition *Masquerade Sweet Suite*, premiered during the 2012 *Masquerade Lives* symposium, launched an initiative—exploring masquerade music as a “groove” to inspire contemporary Guyanese musical creativity. By 2014, there was evidence of this in the work of Ray Seales, Keith Waithe, Charmaine Blackman, and Bonny Alves, among others.
- Cultural Exchange. There was evidence of the presence of the masquerade bands in villages such as Enmore—a village of predominantly Indian heritage. In addition, there was evidence of dance innovations by young flat foot flouncers; increasing interethnic musical exchange and musical innovation, and growing private sector support, as seen in events held at venues such as the Sidewalk Café and Jerries' Late Night.
- In New York, GCA's summer heritage workshops

were featuring masquerade in its dance curriculum since 2012. This competence was showcased in the *Folk Feet in the Street* program sponsored by the Brooklyn Arts Council.

- Dr. Paloma Mohamed circulates for review her pioneering article, *Toasts, Boasts, and Memory: A Preliminary Look at the Lyric Traditions of Guyanese Masquerade*.
- Guyanese Masquerade ensemble attends Guyana Folk Festival in New York, September 2015
- In May 2016, Julio Thijs, presented the Golden Jaguar which led the Guyana National Service contingent during the Jubilee Day Mashramani costumed bands and float parade. Thijs was demonstrating his commitment to take masquerade stilt dance and stilt technology to “another level.”



Left to Right Boysie Sage, Julio
Thijs, Richard Gomes at Boys'
Scouts Jamboree, 1969.
Photo courtesy of Julio Thijs.



Boysie Sage International All
Stars, Calgary, Canada.
Featuring the Boysie Sage Mk7
stilts which are now in use in several
countries around the world
including Guyana, Canada,
USA and Australia.



Julio Thijs,
Golden Jubilee
Celebrations,
May 2016



Guyana Masquerade Ensemble at Guyana Folk Festival, Brooklyn, New York, September 2015

COME OUT & ENJOY THE Masquerade Jamboree 2016

As mentioned at the start of this article, the Masquerade Jamboree season will include:

- An eight-band masquerade-parade,
- Opening of the masquerade season,
- National Flounce Off,
- A spoken word event celebrating masquerade language,
- a mini-film and video festival on the Learning Channel, and
- the launch of Masquerade: My First Book—an early-childhood activity book.

What follows are the currently available details.

This information is subject to change:

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Participating Bands

1. Torch (Region # 10: Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice)
2. Showtime (Region # 10: Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice)
3. Ann's Grove Warriors (Region # 4: Demerara-Mahaica)
4. Victoria Renegades (Region # 4: Demerara-Mahaica)
5. Fyah in de Land (Region # 4: Demerara-Mahaica)
6. Golden Arrowhead (Region # 3: Essequibo Islands—West Demerara)
7. Fire Red (Region #2: Pomeroon-Supenaam)
8. Village Ram (Region #2: Pomeroon-Supenaam)



*Julio Thijs and the Brooklyn Jumbies, Guyana Folk Festival, Brooklyn, New York, September 2015.
Photo by Vibert Cambridge.*

OPENING OF JAMBOREE - December at the Umana Yana at 14:00hrs,

FLOUNCE OFF – 16:00hrs – Plaisance Community Ground
(a street parade in Plaisance beginning from Puttagee's home to the ground where bands will compete with each other. Prizes for the top three bands).

CHANT- Wednesday 20th Dec.17:00hrs at the Umana Yana -
A focus on masquerade language – a spoken word event,

READINGS – Thursday 21st 17:00hrs
- A child-centered event (nursery to 6) surrounding the launching of
Masquerade: My First Book—an early childhood activity book
developed by Dr. Juliet Emanuel.
Subject to modification.

The masquerade revitalization partnership is demonstrating an example of diaspora engagement. There are lessons learned, and those still to be learned, may have applicability to other sectors of Guyanese cultural life. In meantime, have a wonderful Christmas and please support and encourage a masquerade band during this Jubilee Christmas season.

This was an update date on a commitment.