

Feature Address at the  
35th Annual Top 20 Stars of Gold and Calypso of the Year Awards  
Bridgid Mary Annisette George, MP, Speaker of the House of  
Representatives  
Thursday December 18, 2024 07:30 hrs.  
Central Bank Auditorium, Eric Williams Financial Complex,  
Independence Square North

---

## **Salutation List**

- Mrs. Joyra Castillo - Chargé D'affaires, Embassy of The Republic Of Panama
- Mr. Juan José Martínez - Chargé D' Affaires, Embassy Of Mexico
- Brother Kwasi Mutema - Servant Leader, National Joint Action Committee.
- Brother Embau Moheni – Servant Chairman, National Action Cultural Committee.
- Awardees & Composers
- Sponsors
- Members of the Media
- Members of the Audience

**Good evening,**

I am immensely thankful for the opportunity, to have been asked to serve as your feature speaker at this prestigious event. I must confess though that, I had to do some mental weighing when the invitation came because like most women in the society at this time of the year I am engrossed in all things Christmas and Family related, especially on afternoons into the evenings, when the duties of the office release me. In local parlance, this is my time to put away and do house fixing, as if the entire 11 months prior did not exist to reorganise and redecorate?... But that is the Trinbagonian in me!!

However, when I reflected on what the premise of this gathering is, it was imperative that, I accept this invitation.

My acceptance was imperative because, I often say that we cannot just speak of our “Trinbagonianiness” (*I expect in this audience that I will be permitted some creativity with language*), we must participate and appreciate its callings and today’s calling, is about the artform, its founding and continued embrace. It is about us, our 1.4 million strong, our people of the red, white and black; our stories; and how our stories are forever going to be told. Our Trinbagonianiness, led UNESCO to designate our Capital City—a City of Music, recognising the rich musical heritage and variety of

sounds that we have produced, from drumming, the national instrument the Steelpan, Rapso and spoken word performances and tonight's Pièce de Résistance, Calypso.

Additionally, I realised that this invitation was a humbling privilege and honour to have been asked to present a feature address at this 35th Annual Top 20 Stars of Gold and Calypso of the Year Awards.

For me it is humbling in that this invitation reminds me that Calypso and indeed Culture is everyone's business in this nation and that in addition to a collective responsibility, there is a personal responsibility placed on each citizen, me being no exception to be involved in the preservation and development of our indigenous arts and cultural forms.

Furthermore, it is a distinctive honour for me to present this feature address in the National Action Cultural Committee's (NACC) fiftieth year not only because of the illustrious line of speakers who have preceded me on such occasions but also because the event honours calypso excellence as curated and prescribed by the NACC.

While I may be walking on a tight rope in singling out one person, I wish to recognise as the embodiment of the NACC the President of the National Action Cultural Committee (NACC) and former Member of Parliament, Mr. Embau Moheni and to sincerely thank him for this humbling invitation to participate in a stellar event which is a testament to the work, commitment and persistence of the NACC under the stewardship of the National Joint Action Committee in establishing standards for the ongoing improvement of the calypso artform.

If the question were posed to me by Lord Funny about the work of NACC *“50 years have gone... How yuh feel?”* I can without hesitation, stand up proud and retort, **THEY WORKED HARD AND PRODUCED....YES!!! THEY DID THEIR BEST!** For this accomplishment, as an audience we should give NACC a hearty round of applause!

To anchor myself and speak to the tenants of the NACC, I use the analogy of the root system of a tree and locate NJAC as a **trunk** supporting various branches -from which, many other positives were spawned, such as;

- Social consciousness and the courage to hear and listen;
- youth activism and development,

- the will to speak truth to power; and the
- power of truth.

But to understand the significance in the national landscape of the NACC we must begin, like any Calypsonian with the tory....**So, we begin with 1969!**

1969 saw us, as a nation, holding our first national awards and nationally, we were still not attentive to the societal needs... we were still not attentive the transformations and gruelling social change required of an independent nation; which were quite frankly beckoning for attention.

That year would also mark the founding of NJAC, with a vision which was possibly that of a greater force at work,... the resolution to form this organisation embodying words of how a stone across water can create ripples, speaks to the strategic significance of the power of one, to influence the much larger whole. That ripple effect, was The Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago, which was a period of political unrest and social upheaval that began in the late 1960s and culminated in a series of protests and demonstrations in 1970.

Perhaps, had we as a society paid acute attention to the Mighty Duke's poetic stanzas that signalled **“to rid ourselves of the old slave mentality....and never feel ourselves inferior....and to have dignity”**.....Just maybe, things would have been different, had we not been swept away only by the alluring melody and sultry tones of the Mighty Duke's voice, a different story may have unfolded and we would have averted the eruptions... in the words of former **Senator Jennifer Jones-Kernahan** “the dashed hopes of what independence would mean: a better quality of life and better opportunities for employment.” were constant and fervent, but who was actively listening?

The lessons to be gleaned from the differences between hearing and listening were honestly not new issues in our history. From the Canboulay Riots, there was hearing but did we listen?

The matters outlined in the Moyne Commission, the 1930's Labour Riots...race, class and identity, equality and opportunity, would be recurring themes, which even plagued the Insurrection of 1990. These issues marked a period of militancy and frustration and the lack of compassion in governance. Admittedly, some of these pressure points may not have all dissipated, and the question is.... Does there still exist in our society that dichotomy between

**hearing and listening, and who better to answer that question, than the Calypsonian.**

In seeking to manifest its purpose to transform NJAC established The National Action Cultural Committee (NACC) in 1974. This organisation gave practical meaning to Makandal Daaga's profound assertion, that ***"It is in the Arts that the Spirit of our people would emerge and be created. To recognise or to reward the Artiste is in itself an act of National Salvation,"***

To me NACC is place the where those who write and compose because they have heard and those who truly are listening can thrive. The voice of the Calypsonian, serves as a potent vehicle for expressing cultural values, challenging societal norms, awakening new ways of thinking of one's existence and experiences; and inspiring collective action. By acknowledging and honouring artists, our nation not only celebrates its cultural heritage but also invests in its future. It provides the potential for fostering a vibrant, dynamic, sensitive and socially just society.

If one needs to seek an account of what has changed in the society or to obtain an assessment on whether we have progressed or digressed as a people, one only has to ask the Calypsonian, to

provide the scorecard. He or She will tell us if we are overtly or covertly hiding and that we should *Respect the Tribe*, or whether we are pretending and pandering and therefore there should be *No Excuse*- or simply whether we are ignoring the social ills - Ah doh want to do it an injustice by not extinguishing the Gunsmoke in the DanceHall.

But the calypsonian has also played another role. As the late **Professor Emeritus Gordon Rohlehr** in his works outlined: the Calypsonian, “is the master and keeper of all verbal codes within our popular culture... the Calyposian assumed the role of decoder and un-masker of the new slogans and codes and masks, that each regime of political chantwels has ambiguously employed to inspire society with notions of a desired ideal, and to conceal the distressing truth of our lived reality.”

It is in disputable that Calypso is our indefinable art, that threads and intricately weaves the rich tapestry of Trinidadian and Tobagonian culture. It is the vibrant and socially conscious music, which serves as a powerful medium for storytelling, social commentary, and cultural expression. Its witty lyrics, rhythmic melodies, and improvisational nature capture the essence of the nation's history, triumphs and challenges.



This is the artform that is ever timely and transcends generations. In the words of the Professor Rohlehr “*calypso re-invents itself...primarily in response to complex pressures within Trinidad’s [and may I add Tobago’s] parochial and infinitely complicated society.*” If we are truly listening and hearing, we can truly attest that:

- This is the artform that told women, that man, could keep their money and women go keep their honey and die with dignity,
- This is the artform that gave prominence and homage to pan, long before political will did.
- This is the artform that told us how we kicksings in Parliament,
- This is the artform that said nobody ever wins the War,
- This is the artform that told us who was the outside man and woman, and comically might I add that a Deputy is essential.
- This is the artform that spoke to fact that mother earth is dying, long before others did or were willing to act;
- This the artform that asked our children to watch out for that bag of white powder;
- This is the artform that told us that there is “No place like HO OME”

but most importantly;

- This is the art form that told us and reminded us as a people that we are **MIGHTY!**

This space celebrates our collective excellence, not just the griots, the culture and the tenors of song and calypso, but the sterling effort made by an organisation with socio political roots, a manifesto for empowerment, and a legacy of preservation.

This is an organisation that signals to the Calypso practitioner and the public at large that the Calypso Artform has an identity to be nurtured and cultivated in a particular way, thereby distinguishing its uniqueness. Indeed in a recent lecture entitled *“Calypso in Trinidad and Tobago, Culture, Identity and Development”* Dr. Hollis Liverpool (The Mighty Chalkdust) opined that *“it is not easy to make a calypso and underscored the significance of language in a calypso composition”*- and I guess the distinction ensures that you do not become a *“politician singing calypso but [are] calypsonians representing we!”*

You the griots this evening are the agents of resistance, affirmation, and nation building. You play the role of the wise men and women messengers, who simultaneously impart and listen;

defend and attack; affirm and condemn; report on and interpret the *lacooray*; scold and uplift; celebrate and deprecate. Your creativity is inextricably linked to the lived realities of the marginalised masses and the quest for transformation. You are a reflection of who we are. It is inextricably linked to who we are and our lived experiences- even more so we feel we *better than them*. (and that is anyone, in no particular context and speaks to our Trinibagonianness).

**The real question to our nation is after you have given so much is really are we actively listening?**

**But I urge you, to not give in to other mirages but to steer the course.**

**I implore you do not give up on your critical role to your society**

Having been selected to be among the Top 20 stars of Gold and Calypso of the Year of Awards alias **“The Grammy Awards of Calypso”** you have a sacred duty to preserve and safeguard the

artform and to guide and mentor those who are destined to succeed you.

Congratulations to each of you who have been or is being honoured, tonight

Congratulations and Best wishes to the NACC.

I thank you!