

Trinidad Tent Theatre

Ellen O'Malley Camps (Helen Camps) launched the Trinidad Tent Theatre project in 1982. It began with a group of twenty-five trainee performers-technicians, and a rented, leaky, very patched tent. The project reached a natural conclusion in 1987 with the disintegration of a second tent and Camp's recognition of the fact that the trainees had become expert in different theatrical fields. Former members are now the professional actors, directors, and producers of Trinidad and Tobago - a few with their own theatre companies and theatre spaces.

Trinidad Tent Theatre was first and foremost experimental. It attempted to create a style and theatrical form suited to the resources and the realities of the Caribbean.

Trinidad Tent Theatre was committed to the development of a theatre professional capable of sustaining her/himself financially through his/her craft. To this end the performing company was rigorously trained in a variety of theatre disciplines and each member appeared in at least two full-scale productions as part of this training. The training was free of charge and no money was earned during the apprenticeship period.

Training covered voice, movement, text and sub-text work, theatre techniques (based on the traditional movements, chants, rituals and characterisations of Carnival), promotion and publicity, lighting, sound, stage management, community relations and personal development.

Tutors included those belonging to the Trinidad Tent Theatre as well as various Caribbean specialists invited from time to time for specific workshops.

The goal of this all-round foundation training was obviously aimed at producing professionals grounded in all aspects of theatre – total theatre practitioners. Those opting for a particular discipline could subsequently become members of the Trinidad Tent Theatre Company, or part of the technical and administrative sectors of the theatre assisting in the training of new pupils. Some used the training to freelance, benefiting the country as a whole while earning a salary.

Trinidad Tent Theatre Objectives

- To develop a Carnival Theatre training (based on the development of qualities such as will, power, inclusion, beauty, harmony, organization creativity and interdependence) and a Theatre of Carnival (to preserve the traditional Carnival characters and rituals mostly lost from the commercial extravaganzas of the modern carnival).
- To increase the accessibility of theatre to the Trinidad and Tobago audience. The Trinidad Tent Theatre Company, (in addition to working with the Ministry of Community Development in reaching out to urban communities in the country) gave a free show every Sunday evening during a regular season. The shows such as ***Mas In Yuh Mas, J'ouvert, Go To Hell, New Waves (1, 2 And 3), Cinderama, Sno-Kone And The Seven Dwens, Variations And Rampanalgas Sunrise*** were aimed at children and young adults and introduced them to the possibilities and excitement of theatre and of aspects of their culture.
- To use theatre techniques and Carnival traditions in schools and institutions to help build a sense of cultural identity.
- To enrich the cultural lives of people in the wider community by sharing the living experience of theatre with them.

- To help Government in an experiment attempting to iron out some of the problems caused by the then “shift school system”. Trinidad Tent Theatre members worked two hours daily in a Junior Comprehensive school.
- To continue to develop and extend the Theatre School functions of the Trinidad Tent Theatre. Formal classes alternated with practical sessions creating and producing indigenous Carnival and Pop musicals along with more formal theatrical pieces written by established authors. Thus, while the training objective was served, the Trinidad Tent Theatre, produced theatre that related strongly to the Caribbean and to those issues that affected its people.
- To extend the emotional range of the performer. Plays such as *Equus*, *Bent*, *Statements After An Arrest According To The Immorality Act*, *Freedom Of The City*, *The Maids*, *Lovers*, *Actor's Nightmare* And *Sr. Ignatius Tells It All*, were studied and performed.
- To train young people in all aspects of theatre and so facilitate the development of professionals capable of sustaining themselves financially.
- The Trinidad and Tobago Tent Theatre ethos continues - in varying degrees - as part of the professional work of former trainees

Trinidad Tent Theatre And Carnival

The main objective of the experimental Trinidad Tent Theatre was the development of a theatre form and style rooted in the traditions surrounding the country's annual Carnival.

The Trinidad Tent Theatre identified with the spirit of the Carnival festival, which allows for the creation of works of art for its duration and their destruction at its end. The Trinidad Tent Theatre along with many other Carnival artists recognized the ephemeral nature of their art and accepted that the best way for the images to live eternally was in the minds of the people.

The Trinidad Tent Theatre also recognized calypsonians and traditional ole' mas players as the original Carnival Theatre actors and narrators. Trinidad Tent Theatre honoured the fact that they have kept alive the spirit of political satire, which is exemplar of a society espousing freedom of speech.

The Trinidad Tent Theatre recognized that over the years Trinidad's Carnival celebration out grew its roots with the massive participation of larger and larger sections of the population. The direction simply changed and with it the loss or gradual disappearance from the streets of the Traditional Carnival Characters

Deploring this loss Trinidad Tent Theatre's artistic director (Camps) and came up with the idea for a theatrical Carnival production called ***Mas In Yuh Mas***. Writer Felix Edinborough and dialect poet Paul Keens Douglas worked on the script. Wayne Berkley (Carnival band leader/designer) designed the costumes. Molly Ahye (folklorist/choreographer) ensured that the movements and dances were traditionally correct. Roger Israel (composer/lyrist/arranger) arranged the old time calypsos used in the show. The production married the unique rhythms of speech and movement of the Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade, Jab Jabs, Jab Molasses, Burroquite, Jammette, Baby Doll, Minstrels, Moko Jumbie, Firemen, Sailors, Bat, Dragon and Dame Lorraine with the refrains of old time calypsos and the dying art of calypso extempo (on the spot composing).

The following year a new Carnival Theatre production called ***King Jab Jab*** took the ground covered in the ***Mas in Yuh Mas*** show and advanced it further through the realization of the elements of political satire underlying the spirit of Carnival.

An invitation to the 1982 Traditional Folk Festival in Europe demanded a production that was thematically universal and so the ever-present threat of nuclear war was chosen as the theme for this show. Ms. Camps chose ***J'ouvert*** as the title as this word implied for her the hope implicit in all new beginnings. The patois word J'ouvert (New Dawn - Beginning) traditionally describes the "dawn signal" with a fired cannon shot for the Carnival celebrations on the Monday and Tuesday preceding Lent in Trinidad and Tobago.

In the show ***J'ouvert***, the power struggles, fights, competition, threats, deceits, evasions of the great world powers paralleled the same elements inherent in traditional Carnival - warring mas camps, steelband clashes, calypsonians competing for a monarch crown. ***J'ouvert*** used the politically satirical form of the traditional Carnival characters of Trinidad and Tobago to theatricalize the threat of nuclear war. Visually, Carnival can be divided into "old mas" and "pretty mas". In its costuming, ***J'ouvert*** focused on the "pretty mas" aspect of Carnival.

The following year, Trinidad Tent Theatre produced ***Go To Hell***, which, in its costuming and style, focused on the "old mas" aspect of Carnival (echoing the costuming and style of the early and late eighteen hundreds Jammette bands).

In 1985, Trinidad Tent Theatre involved itself in Carnival street theatre when it worked alongside Carnival bandleader Peter Minshall co-writing, producing, directing and performing ***APOCALYPSO*** the music/calypso which lead Minshall's Carnival portrayal - ***Princes Of Darkness Lords Of Light - The Golden Calabash*** - onto the big stage in the Port of Spain Savannah

Trinidad Tent Theatre took Carnival Theatre to the people. Recognizing that the majority of the country's youth had neither seen nor heard their traditional Carnival folk characters Tent Theatre performed in the streets, in shopping malls, in schools and community centres using the traditional Carnival method of begging (rather than charging a set fee) for remuneration.

Trinidad Tent Theatre culminated its 1986 touring year with performances for ***Caribbean Focus*** hosted by the Commonwealth Institute in London. Trinidad Tent Theatre considered it imperative that its concept of a Carnival Theatre and a theatre of Carnival be part of that Focus not only in order to establish a concept of Carnival Theatre among other Caribbean countries but also internationally. Towards this end the Trinidad Tent Theatre presented a "Mini Carnival" package for its Caribbean Focus Tour:

- ***J'ouvert*** - Its Carnival Theatre musical and
- ***Come Leh We Go*** - A Carnival Theatre workshop devised to introduce participants to the history, traditions, rhythms, costumes, language and dances of the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival.

Téyat Toutafé (St. Lucia)

Téyat Toutafé (rough translation "altogether theatre", "theatre for everyone", "together theatre", "total theatre" - a combination of all four) is a creative collaboration between Ellen O'Malley Camps (Artistic Director), Adrian Augier (Technical Director/Designer), Gene Lawrence (Musical Director), Lawrence Bain (Producer/Manager) and a highly capable cadre of some twenty performers of wide and varied talent.

Téyat Toutafé's HISTORY

Like all creative projects *Téyat Toutafé* was born of and builds on sources already there. The *Hewanorra Story Folk Theatre Project* (which brought together the combined vision, creativity, expertise and energy of Augier and Jen-S Design, Lawrence and O'Malley Camps) was conceived to facilitate the development of an indigenous entertainment industry. The Folk Research Centre under its then director June Frederick, embraced the concept as a vehicle for deepening the national consciousness with regard to the value of folk based traditions and other "folk" manifestations.

Some 30 people trained and rehearsed under O'Malley Camps' direction (dance with Stephen Hankey, voice with Lyndell Bailey) for the musical *Hewanorra Story* (book by Adrian Augier and music by Gene Lawrence). The group was also privileged to observe/assist the authors' developmental process through "workshopping" techniques.

After the premiere performance on Pigeon Island/St. Lucia the production moved to a factory shell and this became "home" long enough to see the genesis of **The Factory Creative Arts Centre**. At its centre was Adrian Augier for whom the Factory represented "the culmination of a dream...to create a permanent home for the development of the arts and to nurture home grown artistic talent..."

That rented "home" survived as long as it did due to the work, support, dedication and sacrifice of Augier and the involved artists/performers. Tragically, they had to move out when the building was sold.

The dream however, never died for Augier. With the support of Lawrence Bain he produced a season in October of 2000 (*Mary Could Dance* and *La Chunga* at Eagles Inn). Again Gene Lawrence came on board as composer/musical director and O'Malley Camps as teacher/director. That training period culminated with O'Malley Camps directing *Papa Diable* at the Parish Centre (produced by June Frederick of the FRC) and a concert of Walcott's *Ti Jean* with Andre Tanker for the St. Lisi Tourism Awards at the Cultural Centre (produceddesigned by Augier).

In March of 2001 O'Malley Camps designed a six-month training for some 30-40 participants (**Inner Theatre/Total Theatre**) with the help of sponsorship from the French Secretariat. This provided the launch pad for **Téyat Toutafé**, a company that is first and foremost experimental, attempting to create a style and theatrical form suited to the resources and realities of the Caribbean and providing a name and an identity for the group.

Téyat Toutafé's FOCUS is primarily on the development of the human potential through the multidimensional medium of Caribbean theatre known for its deliberate integration of music, movement and drama.

Téyat Toutafé RECOGNISES

- The need for a formal theatrical infrastructure to better support those committed to the craft.
- That living as we do in a period rife with the tensions that emerge from urbanization, globalization, industrialization, secularization and segmentation, it is the spiritual toughness that results from mental, psychological and emotional wellness that is most needed.
- That spiritual toughness is developed only in an environment of human enrichment.
- That it is in such an environment that we become fully human with the impetus towards altruism, the aesthetic sensibility and the need to find meaning in life.
- That every individual needs such an environment with its respect for higher needs - one where qualities such as hope, respect, self-esteem, autonomy, inclusiveness, empathy, love and will can blossom.
- That it is our primary caregivers who create (or fail to create) an environment of human enrichment and that it continues (or does not) in the school, in the work place etc.
- That such an environment can also be created, consciously, during the process of preparation for any performance.
- That doing theatre is one such process.

Téyat Toutafé's META Intention:

- Is to assist members and trainees in their quest to become the best performers/persons they can possibly be.
- To encourage a more conscious utilization of explored theatre techniques and folk traditions to better inform and develop “right relationship” and “best communication” practices off as well as on stage.

Téyat Toutafé's TRAINING is committed to the development of a theatre professional capable of sustaining her/himself financially through his/her craft. The training covers voice, movement, text and sub-text work, and theatre techniques based on the movements, chants, rituals and characterisations of Folk traditions and Carnival. All are involved in the promotion and publicity, the lighting, sound, stage management, the community relations and personal development that are part and parcel of every production.

Tutors include various Caribbean specialists invited from time to time for specific workshops.

Téyat Toutafé 's TRAINING intends to:

- Invite participants through their work in the theatre to become conscious human enrichment facilitators.
- Make conscious and to underline the inherent possibilities for revisioning, for individual and group transformation in process and production.
- Augment/develop qualities of presence, empathy, listening and attention
- Facilitate the expansion of context and content while exploring personal style

- Teach stress management skills such as centering, focusing and meditation, which can help to improve interpersonal relationships
- Teach initiative and assertion skills, which facilitate the creative confrontation of problems/issues and contribute to conflict resolution
- Develop more creative and expressive modes of being with a consequent growth in confidence.
- Further the acceptance and development of personal power with a parallel awareness of distortions and abuses of power.

Téyat Toutafé 's INTEGRATION Process

A primary value of this sort of training is an increased awareness of the interplay and interdependence between: Body, Feelings and Mind.

Téyat Toutafé's ENVISIONED Process

The process is not so much about acquiring new skills, but about removing anything, that impedes a natural, native presence, energy and creative fullness. It is intended as an attempt to remove all half-heartedness, mediocrity and mechanical patterns of mind and body. It is about assertion and competition, inclusion, discipline, integrity, “letting go” and “showing off”. We truly believe, that the disciplines and the techniques practised in the created environment of rehearsals and performances will empower all concerned.