

A horn man came to Carnival...

Etienne Charles rehearses the road band in the living room of his mother's home in Glencoe. The close quarters would seem spacious when the band needed to fit into the trailer on Carnival Monday.



Tuning the thought



LOCAL LIVES #22

Story and photos by **MARK LYNDERSAY**

It starts a bit like a nursery rhyme.

Etienne arrived on a Saturday.

He rehearsed on a Sunday.

He took to the road with a full band on a Monday.

As to whether that was the end of a beginning... well that's a story that's still to be told.

Etienne Charles began his journey to climbing aboard a 40-foot Carnival trailer in February of 2016 while researching his Guggenheim Fellowship work, Carnival: Sound of a People.

It was his first full Carnival season back home in 15 years, and it irked him to see not a single

brass band performing as he walked the streets on Carnival Tuesday.

"I grew up to the sounds of Charlie's Roots, Traffik, Atlantik, Rukshun, Sound Rev and many of the other brass bands that used to come out on the road (on Monday and Tuesday," he said.

"It was a scream to see real musicians going through their paces on the road."

"We have a generation of adults now in Trinidad who have never seen a live brass band on the road. If children only hear music coming out of speakers and not instruments, they're being short changed culturally. So I wanted to bring that back. Men and women used to make a healthy



David Rudder rehearses his 2017 Carnival song. This is Trinidad with the band on Carnival Sunday evening.

chunk of their year's salary playing in fetes with bands and on the road. I'm hoping we can revive the live tradition as it adds such a huge element to what Carnival is about."

"My first calls were to David and Leston who I've idolised since I was small. Once they were in, I put the band together. It's basically the same band that did a show at Kaiso Blues (Café) last year when I was home in January 2016. Keith (Prescott) and Lima work regularly with my calypso group in the US and so they're solid in my corner."

"We're all on the same mission, to bring quality live music back to the people, and hopefully introduce the next generation to what inspired us to play music."

Brass hits the road

There seemed to be no shortage of hiccups as the musicians gathered around the 40-foot truck

that would be their home for the day.

"I was stunned when I saw the truck," Tony Rollins admitted, gazing at the activity on the trailer bed from across the street.

Rollins, from New York, was recruited by Etienne Charles to man the sound board for the day and worked alongside Robin Foster to prep the band's working environment.

Foster's first job was to make space for the band. The truck, outfitted in standard DJ mode was stuffed with huge black speakers and offered little room for the 15 musicians who would be working there.

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Charles' aunt, Marcelline Mendez-Charles folds t-shirts at the Tragarete Road distribution point for costumes. The band sold out three times, at 500, 700 and finally 1,000 players before it closed for good.



Etienne Charles greets friends on his arrival at the band's meeting point on Carnival Monday. To his left is dancer Adele Bynoe and his sister, Abby, is on his right in the gold mask.



Part of the 13-strong band settle into position on the trailer, from left, Clint DeCoteau, KJ Marcelle, Neil Payne and Dean Williams.



As the band gathers at its meeting point on Long Circular Road, friends chat while the trailer is prepared. It would leave just over an hour late on Carnival Monday.



Trombonist Shaka Charles chats on the pavement (right) while the road crew loads amplifiers and other gear into the trailer.



Sound engineers Robin Foster (left) and Tony Rollins (right, at soundboard) review connections and background tech as the trailer nears readiness.

Brass hits the road

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His first move was to direct the disconnection of a layer of speakers from the rear half of the truck, which left just enough room to squeeze the band in, standing room only, save for drummer KJ Marcelle.

As the masquerader numbers sharply increased a decision was made to bring in a second music truck, one that would repeat the live music via a WiFi connection. That idea worked for a while, then began to get drop outs on the road and the truck was relegated to DJ control.

It was clear, though that the 1,000 assembled were not there to be led by the authoritative whomp of

recorded soca but to be entertained by musicians who had already proven their value on the concert stage and were now being tested on a rolling platform.

“You have to feel the people, I was watching them, to see when to slow down, when to pick up pace, when to go vintage, when to go ‘80s, ‘90s etc. (You) also have to pace the musicians. It was my first time doing such a long set. The first set was more than two hours, and we didn’t stop the rhythm once. We started with an F jam to soundcheck, and once we had vocals in the mix we hit Rainorama, the masqueraders sang lyric for lyric note for note.”

“That was a magical moment for me.”

THE BAND

- Etienne Charles**—Trumpet
- Shaka Charles** — Trombone
- Tony Woodroffe Jr.**—Saxophone
- David Rudder**—Vocals
- Lima Calbio**—Vocals
- Keith ‘Keet Styla’ Prescott**—Vocals
- Leston Paul**—Keyboards
- Dean Williams**—Guitar
- Neil Payne**—Guitar
- Clint DeCoteau**—Bass guitar
- KJ Marcelle**—Drums
- Kayode Charles**—Congas
- Ernesto Garcia**—Congas
- Chris Wilcox**—Percussion
- Pasquale Landeau**—Percussion
- Gilbert Ravello**—Percussion



Lima Calbio (right) and David Rudder look at the crowd surrounding the trailer as the band leaves St James along the Western Main Road.