

# Lights, Camera, Action - A tribute to Hollywood - Harts International



## Energising Fun The Harts engine room



MARK LYNDERSAY

GERARD, Luis and Thais Hart are in a unique position in Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. Together, the three have presented a band for dozens of Trinidad Carnivals, working with their parents Edmund and Lil on most of the family's 47 bands.

Harts International still builds costumes the way they always have, in a single camp, now located at Alcazar Street in St Clair, with production facilities circling the large two-storey building, a presentation space in the main lobby area and offices and storage upstairs. There is one outsourced, off-site seamstress.

"We've never considered outsourcing, because this is the part that we enjoy, this is what we grew up with," said Thais Robertson.

"The type of materials we work with now are very different. In the old days, when we made a breastplate, it was hammered metal. We've done them using moulded plastic, and now we've worked with Pascal Ramkissoon on using an even lighter foam for the moulds."

Those moulds are painted and shaded to bring back the feel of metal, but touching them is vaguely unsettling, like picking up balsa wood and bracing for the weight of pine. The foam, less than four millimetres thick, was flat in earlier presentations, but the newest version is preshaped with re-



DONNA CASTELLO, the lone seamstress on duty, stitches waistcoats.

markable accuracy.

"We started using beads 15 years ago, and it's very much was masqueraders want and as the costumes have become smaller over the years, we began using appliques to bring more detail and sparkle to the costumes. I'm told that these pre-made appliques are made by hand in huge factories in Asia. I look at that fine detail and I can't imagine it."

The first band to be described as a "fun band" more focused on the pleasures of its masqueraders than on winning titles, the

DEANNA TESHIERA-KHAN prepares a head piece in the engine room of the Harts mas camp in St Clair.

PHOTOS: MARK LYNDERSAY



SAMANTHA WILKIE and PAULINE CLARKE string beads.

Harts have pruned back their presentation to customer tastes. It's been more than a decade, for instance, since the band has presented a king or queen of Carnival.

"The last time we did a king, it cost almost \$60,000. Today that would cost more than \$100,000 to build. Who is going to pay for that? The only way to make sense of it would be to spread the cost to the masqueraders and that wouldn't be fair," Robertson said.

Production continues at the Harts mas

camp for most of the year and production for the following year's presentation will generally begin in July. The band works on projects for other Carnivals, but would prefer to do more work for show business internationally.

"Most of our people have been working with us for more than ten years. We give people a section, and they have a sense of pride in producing it. They work on it more efficiently and will bring their own friends in to help. There are rivalries that spring up as people boast about how good their section is looking."



COMPTON RIDLEY tests the fit of a headpiece for the section 300.



GERALD and THAIS HART review materials in their office at the Harts mas camp.