

Myths & Magic — Tribe



JULIETTE CHUNG, STEFAN WILLIAMS and SAMEEL LUCAS work the production line. Packaging costumes accurately and neatly is a key part of the Tribe plan for their masqueraders. At far right, just out of camera range another group checks each box before it is packed.

Story and photos by MARK LYNDERSAY

TRIBE'S mas camp is more of a corporate headquarters, with a meeting room overflowing with supplies, offices and a large warehouse space where costumes are packaged for distribution.

But nothing is made here. The Tribe system is an elaborate network of 18 local producers who create the band in a system that costume production manager Michael Nobrega describes as "the spider's web."

Just one costume in all of Tribe's 2008 presentation, Myths and Magic, has been built abroad, an ornately stitched section called Black Magic, but the headpieces and back packs for the costume have been built locally.

When the web trembles and there's a problem, the costumes are likely to end up at Keith McClean's camp just down the street from Smokey and Bunt in St James. Nobrega describes him as a top producer, but he's also the band's problem-solver, tackling the costumes that are a challenge.

"It isn't quantity so much as it's difficulty. This is Cafenol central here." McClean has been involved with Carnival for 28 years, beginning his career with Wayne Berkeley.

"Some things are easier, the pre-made appliques and plastic moulds, for instance, but we have lost the experience of engineering a design. Many

of today's producers wouldn't know how to make a headpiece without feathers because they've never done one."

On a quiet street in Carenage, Tessa John and her son Douglas work with their own network of producers on Tribe costumes. Tessa John retired as a Carnival Queen in 1994 and began working as a mas producer. Her son Douglas grew up with the smell of glue and an explosion of colourful materials spread all over the house. Douglas now contributes design concepts to the Tribe team and has designed 13 of the 16 headpieces for the band this year and is producing five of the band's sections, a total of almost 1,500 costumes

A few streets further on in Carenage Akeisha Joseph is producing almost 500 costumes for the band in a small, unassuming house painted in bright yellow and purple.

This elaborately synchronised ballet of raw material and widely distributed assembly centres is linked by big plastic buckets that eventually bring the finished costumes together for assembly, audit and packaging in at Tribe central, in Woodbrook.

Here, the final spit and polish are applied, the costumes packed in handsome brown boxes topped with a silvered Tribe logo on the lid, stacked on neat shelving to await distribution day.



CHRISTMAS meets Carnival as crates of costumes are prepared for delivery in AKEISHA JOSEPH'S living room in Carenage.



KEITH MCCLEAN tests the fit of a moulded plastic cup for a Tribe head piece.



DOUGLAS JOHN prepares head pieces in the family kitchen while his mother, Tessa, prepares lunch at right.