

Tribal Explosion - The Kalicharans



Holding the line in San Fernando

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK LYNDERSAY

"WE'RE INTO pretty mas," Wendy Kalicharan says with emphasis, clearing up any confusion I might have had about the profusion of feathers in their small mas-camp.

The Kalicharans, Wendy and her husband Ivan, have brought a band with a King and Queen to the streets of San Fernando on Carnival day for 29 years and this year's presentation, Tribal Explosion, may be based on Native American costumes, but it's a very loose interpretation.

The Kalicharan's have taken home the San Fernando Queen of Carnival competition seven times and won the national queen competition once in 1997.

Her son Aaron won the king competition in San Fernando at 17, prompting an immediate ruling amendment that ensured that all future kings would be 18 years and over. In 1998, mother and son won the King and Queen competition in San Fernando.

But for all their success, the band depends on the kindness of friends.

The Kalicharans have no sponsors, and make ends meet through the efforts of friends like Alan Plummer has been with the band for 28 years and has helped to build costumes for most of them. Others will fly in early for Carnival to work at the mas-camp.

"If we had to pay for rental space and labour, we couldn't afford to produce this kind of mas at these prices." The Kalicharans live, operate a business and host their camp at Harris Street in San Fernando.

"There's no money in mas in San Fernando, the wealthiest masqueraders will play mas in Port of Spain," said Kalicharan.

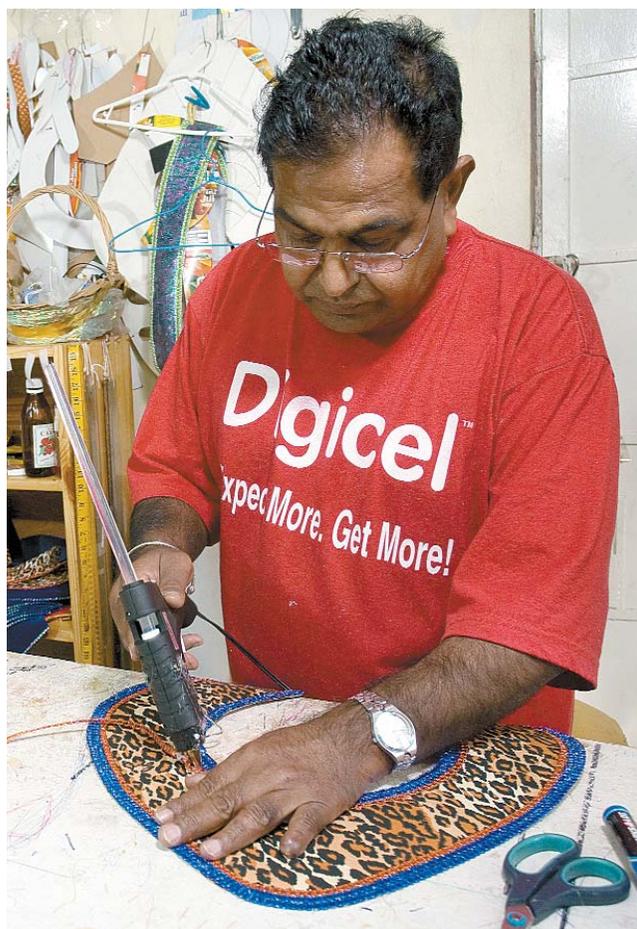
Most costumes cost no more than \$900, but there's an all-inclusive section for \$1600 that caters Johnny Walker Black.

Membership in the band has grown and ebbed over the years since they first took to the streets with 70 masqueraders. From a high of just over 1,000 players, the Kalicharans will present a band with 450 masqueraders this year.

"Initially, masqueraders wanted plenty of clothes, but over the last ten years, they have been asking for the bikinis and beads," said Kalicharan. "We've always offered half the band with clothes and rest with a lot less. But things are a little different in South."

"You'll find some younger, slim people who want plenty clothes because they come from rural areas and are still coy. But then there are others who will re-configure the costume to make it even skimpier."

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Anticlockwise from top

- ALAN PLUMMER perennial supporter of the Kalicharan's band at work at the mas-camp on Harris Street in San Fernando.
- CHENOA PHILLIP, the Kalicharan's niece (right), works on a school project using scrap cloth from costumes.
- IVAN KALICHARAN.
- WENDY KALICHARAN.

