

De BOSS and Tribal Connection - The Traditionalists



Fitting history for today

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK LYNDERSAY

IN HIS PORCH in Belmont, Churchill George is preparing for the 14th "voyage" of his band, De BOSS, the Belmont Original Stylish Sailors. For his section in "Come Fly" he is carefully gluing a model airplane to an ornate gold and black hat. George is only the second captain of the band which was formed after veteran sailor mas bandleader Jason Griffith retired. The band launched its first voyage with 99 masqueraders and is planning to hit the streets this year with 130 masqueraders in four sections, almost all of whom are returning players.

The band offered a king of the band for the first time last year, and he will be returning this year to try to improve on his ninth placing in 2007. New members tend to be over 35, but as George brags, "we have a lot of disciplined people."

"We have the seniors," laughs George. "We try to incorporate the juniors, but they want to wear something skimpier and we don't cater for that."

That isn't strictly true, because Ancil McClean, a tailor who lives just a few streets north of George in Belmont has cut down the traditional sailor mas costume a bit this year for the women playing "Birds" in his section to a sailor top with short pants with flared leggings that echo the traditional bell bottoms.

It's caused a bit of concern in the camp, but two women in McClean's section have chosen to play the seri-

ous sailor mas costume or "head mas" as it's called.

Sixteen masqueraders will parade in these costumes, which feature an enormous, surrealistic head built from wire and papier-mâché.

Costumes begin at TT\$600 and go up to \$900 in a standard configuration, but for an individual who wants a "really classy" costume, that price might rise to \$1500.

For the serious sailor masquerader, decoration crucial. In some sections of the band, a mas producer is assigned to an individual to oversee the customisation of their costumes.

In McClean's section, five of the 25 masqueraders will be asking for additional work. "Those who fly in from overseas will bring their own decorations," said McClean, "but I've got one guy, Keith, who will add to the costume no matter how pretty I make it."

THE ALI BROTHERS are patiently waiting for their fitting at Astil Alleyne's Union Hall mascamp. In a small backroom of his San Fernando home, his wife and a friend are working on the final decorations for two more of the massive feathered headpieces that are the signature of Tribal Connections, which has been playing Native American mas since 2000.



Clockwise from top

- PATRICIA SEALEY adds finishing touches to costume at Astil Alleyne's home-based mascamp in Union Hall, San Fernando.
- ANCIL MCLEAN'S decorates a costumes at his mascamp for De BOSS at Baptiste Street, Belmont.

- CHURCHILL GEORGE, bandleader, prepares headpieces for his section in the porch of his Belmont Terrace home.
- SALIM ALI is fitted for his costume as his brother HAFEEZ (right) looks on while ASTIL ALLEYNE (centre) handles the fitting.



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"The history and folklore is exciting, and it's challenging to put together," said Alleyne. "It's not just gluing on some beads, there's a lot of detail and it's put together one at a time."

The band will present 120 masqueraders performing Gathering at the Little Big Horn in Port of Spain, their stomping ground for the last seven years.

"Nobody is gravitating to playing traditional mas," said Alleyne. "Perhaps it's because we're based in San Fernando, but this type of mas was born here. There are other bands who play this kind of mas, and I don't think that anybody's going to miss us."