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TRIBUTE TO LOUIS REGIS



Gordon Rohlehr

I met Louis Regis in 1976 when he entered the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus to read Spanish and English Literatures. I soon realised that Louis and Zeno Constance, of the same era, shared my interest in researching calypso. Those two were part of what I grew to term "the Southern Mafia", a cluster of creative young men that included Dennis "Sprangalang" Hall and Leonid Francis, who used kaiso to transform the teaching of Social Studies. Each year, Louis would compile and distribute transcripts of "silent songs", calypsos he was sure few people had heard.

Louis, Leonid and Zeno were all creative teachers. Louis was a quiet team player who often worked behind the scenes as director, stage manager, or key organiser of a stage production. He was mainly responsible for the Kaiso Night each year on at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. As a schoolteacher in Pleasantville, he directed some of Zeno's plays. In 1998, he was also involved in the production of "A Nation's Pride" at the Centre of Excellence, Macoya, where all the living Calypso Monarchs sang their winning calypsos. Sparrow sang fourteen songs, Duke eight, Chalkdust eight or ten, Stalin six or more. That show was dedicated to illustrating the wide and varied heritage of Kaiso, at a time when the form seemed to be under political attack.

As a researcher on calypso, Louis was thorough and original. He knew several of the calypsonians whose songs and testimonies provided him with the raw materials for his research. He also had access to Sprangalang's extensive archives. He wrote informative biographies of Maestro (Cecil Hume) and Black Stalin (Leroy Calliste) and went beyond these monographs to write his Master's thesis on the first 25 years of post-Independence political calypsos. The book that he published, *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago, 1962-1987* (1999) is a foundational text in this area.

With *Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Trinidad and Tobago Calypso 1970-1998* (2017), a book based on his doctoral dissertation, he established new dimensions in the ethnomusicology and social anthropology of contemporary Trinidad and Tobago, that even the academic world has not truly appreciated or acclaimed. He understood the complexity of this society, and the many dimensions of the singers, the songs and the nuanced contexts out of which they grew.

After retirement, he was involved in digitising the data he had collected during his decades of research on calypso and related fields; absorbed like all researchers, in making sense, or at least putting in order, all that he had read or absorbed over the years, even as memory and meanings ebbed.

If this sounds more like a recommendation for a post retirement job than a eulogy, it is because I want whoever it is that has so suddenly terminated Louis's contract with life in the kingdom of this world, to understand the quality and excellence of this man, brother and son they have taken from us, who was my dear friend and whom I considered to be one of my special sons.

I want Ferne, Kosi and Kaya to know that I share your sorrow and your hope that Louis, who worked so hard, so silently and so long, who loved you so dearly, will rest in peace and arise beyond the veil, to some real vintage kaiso.