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*DREADNESS: The Mystic Power, Philosophy and
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INTRODUCTION

DREADNESS – THE MYSTICAL POWER, PHILOSOPHY AND PERFORMANCE OF SHADOW



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Shadow's unique approach to creating and performing music has had an enduring impact on the Caribbean popular music scene. His powerful messages delivered in relatable storylines have provided listeners with sage guidance for navigating the vagaries of everyday life. Calypso and soca aficionados can readily recall the first time they heard Shadow's music or saw him perform, and they can easily recite a playlist of their favourite Shadow songs. Like all good art, Shadow's music transcends space and time and during his almost five decades of performing, he came to epitomise different things to the various generations who grew up under his signature styling - as a harbinger of doom and gloom, an advocate for social justice and equality for the downtrodden and marginalised, a sage uncle offering advice to the young, and as a comic genius who captured and channelled key aspects of Carib-being.

Shadow's music is deeply embedded in the psyche of the Caribbean cosmos and illuminates the capacity of popular cultural forms to provide ways to understand, celebrate and elevate what people do and create for themselves every day. His body of work appealed to both our profane (fun loving) and sacred sides, transforming our responses to our social worlds. Every aspect of Shadow's world - conceptual, material, performative and aesthetic - confronted the accepted conventions of the calypso form. For example, his adherence to wearing black vestments underscored his ideology of black love and self-acceptance as necessary and radical acts of Carib-being. Through his ethereal dark presence on and off stage, aided by the incorporation of West African

derived rhythms and story-telling, Shadow personified post-modern blackness while wholeheartedly embracing its 'dreadness' as a pathway to liberation.

Arguably, nothing exemplified the alterity that Shadow embodied more than his choice of name. His refusal to add the prefix 'Lord', 'King' or 'Mighty' to his name signified a refusal to be defined or re-defined by a monarchical system of classification in keeping with his continuous praxis of anti-colonialism. Notably, this approach did not end with the nomenclature but was also apparent in every aspect of his art-making as evidenced by the countless anecdotes about his creative autonomy in the recording studio, his dogged business acuity as a tent manager or the clarity of his aesthetic vision when crafting his on stage productions. In this way, Shadow's approach to art-making represented a homology of form and function that shifted the ways that audiences consumed his music. Inevitably, listeners were able to insert themselves into the stories he told because of how and why he told them. Being a witness to his music moved audiences away from the role of mere spectators to that of co-creators. Shadow spoke for us all, and told Caribbean stories in ways that were universally accessible, resonant and revolutionary. For these reasons, Shadow and his body of work are worthy of greater academic enquiry.

The articles in this special edition emanated from the conference that was held in March 2022 entitled 'Dreadness - The Mystical Power, Philosophy and Performance of Shadow'. They explore the various themes that are discernible in his corpus inclusive of the ancestral moorings of his music, his re-presentation of gender relations in the Caribbean, his aesthetics and his performance style. Rayshawn Pierre's "**Unconverging the Cannon—the Sound of Social Agency**" examines Shadow's critical vocabularies while assessing the social agency of sound. Pierre interprets Shadow's style, approach and impact in a multidimensional perspective of dreadness, blackness and jumbleism to unearth the vast unspoken and undeclared possibilities of the voice. In her subversive pun on the "canon" / "cannon", Pierre dares to claim a place in the arts for the calypso genre.

The submissions to this issue remind us that calypso remains a generative site for the reproduction and transformation of cultural and spiritual relations. Yvonne Webber and Deborah Matthews in **“Abyssinia Coming Down: Rituals in Jumbie Time Spaces”** examine how the voice of the calypsonian and poet blend with otherworldly energies to create a music of prophecy. By conducting a close comparison of Winston Bailey’s and Mikey Smith’s discourses, the writers demonstrate that myth and spirit can be wielded to contest and withstand seasons of extreme social stress. This innovation in form is a projection of a deep yearning for transcendence and radical change, which Bailey’s and Smith’s oeuvres inspire.

Similarly, Kela Francis in **“Yoruba concept of Cool and the Oxymoronic Philosophy of Dreadness”** proposes an original and appropriate lens for understanding and interpreting Shadow’s metaphysics. The author makes the case for a deeper appreciation of the influence of Yoruba in shaping the worldview and attitudes of Trinbagonians. Francis contends that Trinbagonians have an uncanny ability to laugh in the midst of tragedy. This penchant, she argues, extends into our art and communication style, and is an ancestral residue from an African past. Francis draws on Robert Farris Thompson’s postulations that the Yoruba aesthetic of coolness relates to striking a balance in all aspects of life. In this articulation, Shadow’s dreadness is an extension of the Yoruba concept of Cool, and is a viable philosophy of life/living.

Abeo Jackson’s, **“Man Cyah Take Horn: The intersections of Colonialism, Capitalism and Gender Stereotype”** advances the general theme of this issue and provides an interrogation of the shifts in male-female relations in the Caribbean. Shadow’s clever use of idiom and metaphor and his interpretation of popular history vis a vis gender relations are engaged to demonstrate the power of the genre to access the fears of men and masculinity and the ways in which women respond to this phenomenon.

O’Neil Joseph also provides a useful analysis of gender dynamics in calypso and its interface with contemporary Caribbean cultural realities. In **“Ah Have a Message to Give Yuh”: The Mighty Shadow Counsels Men on Affairs of the Heart”**, he examines Shadow’s use of the genre as a vehicle for navigating the ebb and flow of intimate male-

female relationships. In this piece, Joseph negotiates the specific themes of infidelity and intimate partner violence in the Trinbagonian landscape and avers that Shadow's calypsos reflect how shifting gender norms impact both men and women in their decisions, desires and choices.

"Bring Down The Rhythm!- Shadow & The Rise of Speed Soca" by Martin Raymond is an organic creative reflection on the process and methodology of Shadow. Raymond foregrounds the varying oral traditions and lived experiences that shape the consciousness of the calypsonian and offers a complex auto-ethnographic argument on the aesthetic value of music and production studies.

The breadth of this discussion is also enhanced by **Khion De Las's, "The Major Shadow of the Minor: Winston "Shadow" Bailey, Music Modes and Trinbagonian Attitudes toward Prevalent Social Issues."** De Las surmises that the Mighty Shadow's unique style of blending social commentary with 'feel good' party lyrics, is mirrored in the accompanying musicality of his songs. By identifying the techniques of alternating, cycling and mixing, De Las shows that Shadow's use of minor keys is reflective of myriad social injustices.

Adding to this issue's reinforcement of Shadow's philosophy of Dreadness, is a conversation that emerges from a range of cultural critics and creative workers who argue that in the grand corpus of Shadow's work lies a deep philosophical tradition that is grounded in guerilla strategy, counterinsurgency, refusal, symbolic action and mysticism. The round-table discussion fittingly entitled, **"We Real Dread! Everybody is Somebody"** occurs among Zeno Constance, Joanne Haynes, Aiyegoro Ome, Robin Foster and Omari Ashby and stands out among the archival interviews that focus on the integral role of Shadow's critical rhetoric.

Sean Samad in **"Our Uncrowned King"** explores the imagery of Shadow's album covers which he argues, aligns with the performer's identity over time as an Afro-Caribbean man – an artist grappling with issues pertaining to this space - blackness, dreadness and connections to traditional African spirituality. The critical essays, interviews and

commentaries in this issue are testament of the rich and captivating legacy of Winston Bailey whose life and work constrain us to critically re-evaluate our conception of genre, philosophy, discourse and stage.