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Music of Africa and the Diaspora
Doctor Armstrong
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Artist: 3 Canal
Album: Heroes of Wha?
Song: Welcome

“Welcome” is the second track from *Heroes of Wha?* and a cursory listening proves the song to live up to its title as it literally welcomes those listening to Carnival. An important aspect of the song that must be considered immediately is the time frame in which it was created and released. Although 3 Canal is considered a Rapso group, their relative youth and recent appearance on Trinidad and Tobago's sound stage means that they are more open to experimenting with their style and as such, “Welcome” sounds more like *soca* and less like Rapso.

The first point of interest is the content, because Rapso has a tendency to be quite serious, and politically influenced and *soca* is known for its fast paced dancing and “wining” (Dudly 88). The second point of interest is the musical style, or what happens artistically and technically during the song. As a more *soca* oriented composition, the purpose of it is to get people up on their feet to dance and it is the musical traits of “Welcome” that we now turn our attention towards.

The song begins with several instruments playing on beat 1: guitar, bass guitar, bass drums, and snare drums. Beat 2 introduces the first vocal layer. This layer is pitched in an upper register and the melodic contour starts high and dips low, before rising and then falling again, the pitches fluctuating up and down for variety as the line descends. This vocal line has an open timbre, containing multiple voices, whereas the low pitched humming that enters directly afterward – on the offbeat – is more closed, and is only a single voice. Moreover, this humming does not continue uninterrupted as the higher vocal line does, but rather acts as filler in the spaces. There are also some miscellaneous sound effects from the voices that add to the richness of the intro.

As soon as the rhythmic patterns are clearly established – with an addition of a triangle to the percussive texture – the voices not “ahing” begin to sing the words of the text, “run in, come in,” lyrically inviting the listener to join the celebration. The background vocals then fade out as the song approaches the first verse. At this point a repeating two note, “low high, low high,” motive on successive notes in the second guitar becomes more audible as the soloist begins to sing, “Welcome to the festival, welcome to the ritual.” The chorus answers, “Welcome!” at the end of each line using the call and response format popular with the *soca* style (Dudly 89). Sometimes these two lines overlap, and the texture grows richer as the multiple layers sound simultaneously. When the song reaches the chorus, the soloist is joined by a chordal harmonic accompaniment.

One of the main ideas that is emphasized in “Welcome” is that Carnival is more than “Baccanal,” more than the pure sensuality and its propensity to be noisy to the point of being disruptive that Carnival is famous for. Several times it is stated that Carnival is a “spiritual thing” and if this idea is coupled with the fact that Trinidad is “the birthplace of Pan” (that is steel pan, the national instrument (Dudly 53)) then it is clear that the spirituality of Carnival is deeply intertwined with the cultural heritage that is so important to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

But besides the serious tone that creeps into the lyrics, the song is about everybody embracing the spirit of Carnival, whether or not they are from Trinidad, or can even dance in the first place. Phrases such as “free up your mind” and “welcome to the real wining school” emphasize the party aspect, and draw 0 more focus to the parts of the song that talk about pretty girls and how they dance.

After the short introduction detailed above, “Welcome” tends to follow a verse, chorus, verse, format, with the percussive and rhythmic layer staying fairly consistent throughout the changes in melody and texture in the voices.

This is not always the case, as the guitar relegated to higher pitches breaks away and plays – albeit quietly – a more interesting melodic line in the first half of the second verse and the instruments stop completely for just a moment after the third verse, in which both the timbre and texture changes because a new, different voice sings, and at the moment of instrumental silence only two vocal lines and a percussive sound effect are heard.

Directly after the following chorus, the wordless vocal line from the intro returns, setting up “Welcome” to enter the bridge (after another repetition of the chorus) which contains a vocal line that is half sung, half spoken. The wordless vocal line makes another reappearance after the words “run in, come in,” are heard again, almost playing the events of the intro in reverse, and signaling to the listener that the song is winding down and coming to the end. The percussive layer also changes, with parts cutting in and out, and finally fades away behind the voices that end with, “Welcome. Yeah.”

3 Canal "Welcome." *Heroes of Wha?* Craze Productions, 1999. CD.

Dudly, Shannon. *Carnival Music in Trinidad*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004. Print.