

Song n Mas

a response to Arena Calypso Nights

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i

This poem starts
with a man and song,

one whose legacy lingers

lyrical magic/ in the arrangement
of calypso,

Sun and the tilt of
burnt molasses,
poured like

a resurrection
of spirit n shadow,

a Calypsonian,

with midnight eyes of
Fulani or Yoruba blood,

Seated throne-like
filled with ancestral stories

Tek luggage n left his island
with a crown hovering
in the wind

all black n kingly/peacock/plump
chest – sailor Mas style

Planted two foot like cassava
pon ship deck

and set sail across an ocean

not like his forefathers
before
him/ Mas bodies/ in dutty
stink holding pits

He arrived
O Lord o / Island king/ Shango
God like/elevated/lyric full/ as if him
was sea captain
steering ship heaven-wards,

In de so/so grey skyline
shine of calypso.

The story is...
him fling song/pelt de white man good
from ship deck,

lick dem with
London is the place for me...

Oh Massa Kitch
tapped notes
mixed mystic
moonlight of kaiso n calypso
like buss-up-shot

Well-dressed to call up any spirit
ova de dead,
with verse n chorus

his words
tek its
own flight/

ii
This poem is an ocean
of Mas players

in the slow breath of chest
and belly rising

performance
in tongues...

black sweat of skin,
in the
dum/ca/ca/dum/ca/ca
and the ponging sweetness
of steel pan riddim's

We are mourning loss,
with plenty prayers

living blackness in diasporic
humming/ call/in

remembrance of de dead
ship n ocean/ Wake/full-ness

make we body rise up/voodoo/obeah/orisha
beating/beating/beating

drum...
and sugar plantations/ liquid to earth

dis
rum...

could be blood of Christ released
in fete n flags /mourning Mas

father God knows
dis

is not a Wake/fe cow
bawling

we ain't ask no permission/to do dis

Listen/to the J'ouvert silence
before the rebel drum pan plays

de
dum/ca/ca/dum/ca/ca/dum/ca/ca

God of orishas magicking chorus
and tuned hammers and pan playing...

dis
dum/ca/ca/dum/ca/ca
is ocean
water/beneath ship bottom,

dis
pan ponging is
ah Sailor Mas n Mid-night robber

ah blue jab jab/black oil down
Molasses/ coffin dragging devil
in story n riddim

dis
dum/ca/ca/
and stick ponging
is the richness

When we find
we own space/fe tell/we own
change n de shape of
dis yah
Ponging

dis yah
Pan

dis yah
heart-beating
can't stop

Note

Pan Player credit: Melvin Zakus
Sound mixed by Christella Latras