

## KEN'S CHOICE #14 – July 30<sup>th</sup> 2006

Alfred PRAGNELL  
and  
GUYFOLKFEST

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Way way back in the “good ol’ days”, in the heydays of Caribbean cultural hysteria, in the optimistic days of Caribbean unity, in the hectic 10 days that was the first ever CARIFESTA in Guyana, in the temporary canvas covered hastily built National Cultural Centre in the outskirts of Georgetown, a crowded auditorium of Guyanese and Caribbean citizens experienced their first ever white Bajan spoken word performer – it was the absolutely one and only ALFRED PRAGNELL – reading, not performing, just reading, the dialect poetry of Bajan authors and poets; and we were all enthralled and thoroughly entertained.

Since that time, Alfred Pragnell continued to amuse and educate us about the very particular richness of Bajan speak and thought. At Storytelling Festivals where the artists were supposed to perform their stories and/or poem, this icon of Bajanness (and Caribbeaness) just sat quietly on a stool and read to us.

His readings were as compelling as any other performers of Caribbean dialect work – Paul Keens-Douglas (T’dad/Grenada) Winston Farrell (Barbados), Ameena Blackwood-Meeks (Jamaica), Thelma Phillips (Grenada), George “Fish” Alphonse (St.Lucia), Edgar Ortiz (Costa Rica), Marc Matthews and Ras Michael (Guyana).



Alfred leaned heavily on the writings of two Barbadians – short storyteller Timothy Callendar and the most prolific and consistent dialect humorist and social commentator Jeanette Layne-Clarke.

Alfred Pragnell died last year, but his work lives on in his first and only CD SKYLARKIN'! and now the Caribbean is a better place because of the work/play of Alfred Pragnell and Jeanette Layne-Clarke.

**Four Caribbean Storytellers - Alfred, Cecily Spencer-Cross (Barbados) Ameena Blackwood-Meeks (Jamaica) and Ken (Guyana/Caribbean). At the annual Holders Hill fair in Barbados.**

Is it too much to ask/expect that the Caribbean (not just Barbados) should honor this man in a memorable way – a park, a theatre, a street, a library? .... And that the CXC and CBU and the CARICOM SECRETARIAT and the thirteen Ministries of Culture and Cultural Foundations of the West Indies should do SOMETHING that makes us remember and continue to enjoy the man – ALFRED PRAGNELL.. and for that matter, many other men and women like him?

On Fathers’ Day last June, my children gave me a thoughtful present – Alfred’s CD. My wife and I keep it precious in the car and continue to listen and enjoy a man who should be another of our Caribbean cultural icons.

**SKYLARKIN'! is available online <http://www.csmusic.com>**

Meanwhile, sneaking up on us over the past five years, is a cultural festival that has now matured into a major event in the North American Caribbean diaspora. It is a series of events over several months that climaxes with a Guyanese mini version of Carifesta (Caribbean Festival of the Arts).

**The GUYANA FOLK FESTIVAL** is now an important fixture in the cultural landscape.



Perhaps one glorious day we'll see a CARIFESTA of the diaspora. Now THAT would be something else wouldn't it? Because as it is now, many top class Caribbean artists in all disciplines have no chance of active participation in CARIFESTA – as I understand it, participants have to be invited to the ball by their Governments or by the CARIFESTA committee.

It could be unfair for me to mention a very few names because many many others made Guyfolkfest possible. However, six names come to mind – Dr. Vibert Cambridge of Ohio U. who conceived the idea of a folk festival more than a decade ago in Guyana and transferred his vision to NY; Malcolm Hall of Citibank, Claire Goring and Claire Patterson as hands on day by day implementers, Ron Lammy of [www.ecaroh.com](http://www.ecaroh.com) and Juliet Emanuel who helps to organize and run the symposium event.

There was a Guyana film festival in June, two plays in July, and now comes the big one starting with an awards ceremony Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August, followed by a night of Kwe Kwe (queh queh) a traditional Afro-Guyanese wedding night ritual ceremony Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September, Saturday symposium on the first CARIFESTA in Guyana 35 years ago, and climaxing with an all day Sunday fair/exhibition/entertainment.

The Awards evening is unique in its basic principle – that there are hundreds of people who have contributed to the cultural/social/arts matrix of Guyana and Guyanese, and they should all be recognized and acknowledged. Each year the number of awardees match the years of Political Independence of Guyana, so that this year there will be 40 recipients. The Fair on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September will be at the Meyer Levin Performing Arts School (a Junior High school) in Brooklyn. There will be an arts/crafts exhibition in the basketball gymnasium, an endless performance program in the theatre and general merriment and socializing in the outdoor area.

Nothing like this has ever happened before Brooklyn's GUYANA FOLK FESTIVAL, conceived and competently produced by **The Guyana Cultural Association NY Inc**, For full details and information about this festival, including the full list of 40 awardees of the Wordsworth McAndrew Award for 2006 go to [www.guyfolkfest.org](http://www.guyfolkfest.org)

*KEN'S CHOICE is an irregular series of tidbits of cultural/arts information emailed to my friends and associates wherever they may be. I'm sensitive to the spam syndrome so if there is any reluctance of receiving these, just send me a quick NO CHOICE email, and thine will be done quick quick quick.*

**Ken Corsbie .. is .. "Caribbean Voices"**

95 High Hill Drive, Sound Beach, NY 11789. (631) 744 3127. [kcorsbie@optonline.net](mailto:kcorsbie@optonline.net) [www.kencorsbie.com](http://www.kencorsbie.com)