

liming, feting and fliming



70 + 18 = 12604.02 = 25.20 by Kris Paterson

As we find ourselves snowbound at midwinter, many a filmmaker would give his right arm to film down South. Below is a first hand account of a shoot, last winter, in Trinidad.

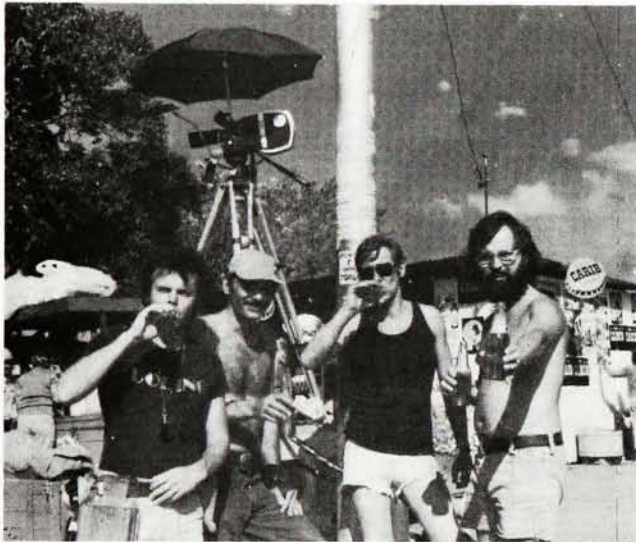


photo: Paul Michnick

While I wax eloquent about the diverse joys of filming for a month in the Caribbean, during what, I gather, was a singularly unpleasant February in Toronto, a word of caution for those filmmakers who may be considering the warm possibilities of remaking **Mutiny On The Bounty** or **The Endless Summer** because Trinidad has "plenty bureaucracy, mon."

Glossary

"Fliming"	Trinidad dialect for filming
"Liming"	Laying back and having a good time
"Boedecia"	Check your history books
"Bang stick"	A nasty device consisting of an aluminum pole and a live shotgun shell which explodes on severe impact, used to send sharks and other predators to fish heaven.
"Mas"	Ancient Trinidadian word for carnival
"Feting"	From the French for party

This is a "Limey" (British) legacy honed to horrendous heights and, when coupled with the slower lifestyle of the Islands, can drive the speed-crazed North American mind quite mad. Despite our valid work permits, visas and letters of agreement, it took us three days to clear the equipment through customs. All forms are in quintuplicate, totally without meaning for us, and it seemed, for most of the officials who were usually unfamiliar with them and couldn't decide how to fill them in. All this paperwork was processed through Port Of Spain (the capital) twenty miles away, then more signatures were added back at the airport; the paper went back and forth several times to various officials at enormous taxi expense only to find it was siesta-time, or that the official had gone off duty somewhere to watch cricket, another "Limey" legacy. Naturally, he had forgotten to mention the matter to his colleagues. The phone system rarely works, and the fast Trinidadian dialect is impossible to understand anyway while ninety-five degree weather is frying the brain cells. Tempers were getting very uptight and as a result, "Fresco" (who had the best credit rating of the crew) almost blew his top when asked to post a \$25,000.00 (Trinidad and Tobago) bond (about \$11,000.00 Canadian) to free the gear. Nevertheless, apart from a quick bid by one customs official to make us pay rent on our own equipment, we were free and in business.*

Trinidad and Tobago are remarkable, beautiful and probably unique islands. The film was centered around Carnival, but was also to show the "aura" of the island's culture. Trinidad is without a doubt the friendliest and least racially disturbed country that I've worked in. It is made up of 40 percent black, 40 percent East Indian, some Chinese, Portuguese and French, a few descendants of the original Carib and Arawak Indians, and about 1 1/2 percent white, all delightfully mixed up, to the benefit of all. Never have I seen so many beautiful people. Unlike the usual CBC or commercial crew who move around the world from Holiday Inn to Hilton with no

* N.B. This is not Mexico. An out-and-out bribe will not be accepted: one uses lawyers for bribery, or faces summary jail.

surprises, we had the benefit of getting in with the people, living first with the East Indian community in the village of Tuna Puna and then, with the black community in Las Cuevas, a fishing village. These live-in situations made the filming flow, and resulted in some lasting friendships.

Getting around in and out of Port Of Spain is an incredible scene, and worthy of a short film in itself. Any car that has an "H" in its licence plate is considered a cab, and most of the cars have one, so for 50 cents one can go anywhere. It is *the* accepted form of travel. The method used is to point vigorously at your feet. A car will stop, and you pile in with five or six other people, a couple of chickens or ducks and go. There is a constant flow of cars taking on and emptying out, usually right in the middle of the road. Anarchy reigns, and it's a delightful change from law-abiding Toronto. The cars are mostly British models from the "fifties", many times welded, patched, painted and covered with "go-faster" stripes, running lights, TV aerials, interiors of pink plastic with zebra stripes, hub caps like the chariot wheels Boedicia would have used against the Romans, and slogans like "Team Competition Car" which look a little bizarre on an ancient chopped and raked 1953 Austin A 30. The driving style is as ferocious as the decor. The roads are narrow with potholes and a single passing or suicide lane in the middle. Here the technique is simply to drive head-on at anything that moves, blasting one's horn repeatedly. It seems to work most of the time, and the losers have created a booming trade for the local body shops and for the mad-talents of their brigade of steel sheet and brazing rod repairmen.

"Fresco" and I had the dubious distinction of growing up in the U.K. and learned to drive on the wrong side of the road, so the rent-a-car became our responsibility. Needless to say, we plunged into the fray. Our forty dollar-a-day (US) sadly abused Hillman station wagon with bent wheels was used to confront the oncoming hordes. A cold "Carib" beer between our legs, we drove the winding roads, thinking about a cold Toronto with its safe and boringly drivable highways. (As an afterthought, seatbelts in Trinidad are used to hold extra luggage on.)

The two weeks before Carnival are known as "jump-up time." Almost everyone is making "mas," "feting," "liming," or making costumes (mine was a black "T" shirt with "honky" written on the back), or practising for the steelband competitions. During this period the whole island of Trinidad becomes one big pan band (pan is used to describe the steeldrums of various sizes and shapes) and music becomes a twenty-four hour thing. Big steelbands are something else, upwards of 200 musicians all playing at once – the effect through earphones for the first time is shattering. They can, and do, play anything from "Ghost Riders In The Sky" to Bartok or Stravinsky, but this year the big hit was the Gay Desperadoes' arrangement of "21st Century" which, though based on a calypso beat, goes through so many jazz progressions that it reaches something sublime. We were recording both in stereo and mono. The stereo recording was complete of pieces en-

Kris Paterson and his partner Bob Fresco run their own film company, Pretty Pictures, and were contracted by G.B.R. Media productions of Toronto to film in Trinidad and Tobago during the Carnival period last year.

compassing the whole band, while I moved with "Fresco," picking up individual sync takes right inside the band (this was done to facilitate cutting in sync to the master during editing).

Filming Carnival? What can I say? Imagine being a tiny minority of "WASPS" surrounded by 20,000 costumed Trinidadians in a parade of color that defies description. They're all stoned out happy (yes, it flourishes in Trinidad, in fact, better than Jamaican). You just have to flow with what's happening, drink a case of cold beer and sweat it out in the 100 degrees of heat, exchange gulps of rum, gin, whiskey or whatever, hug and dance with total strangers, be absolutely outrageous, laugh a lot, and try to keep your mind on not running out of tape or film. "Fresco" was into using his 85-300mm zoom lens, which is the ultimate lens for the professional voyeur, and when the spirits moved him – and they moved him a lot – would put on his bush hat labelled D.O.P. and jump into the parade with one of the two Eclair ACL's and boogie with the costumed madness. He was using a variety of two hundred and four hundred foot magazines and a complete set of prime lenses including an Angenieux 9.5 to 57mm zoom and a Canon macro 12-120 zoom with attachments ranging from six-sided prisms to spectra star and center sharp edge soft lenses to create a myriad of special in-camera effects that gives the film an acid-look of the sixties, which is exactly where Carnival '78 is at. As old hippies we felt totally at home – wonderful in fact. Check out the finished film for its psychedelic visions. You won't be disappointed.

After a day's rest we headed north to a fishing village far off the tourist route and quickly got into a life of combined film and "lime." As the carnival costumes are inspired by the island's wild life and flora, we needed shots of fish, birds, and jungle, to make the film a total experience. Jock Brandis had built us the MARK I Underwater housing for the ACL from the aluminum remains of two pressure cookers, some heavy glass and lots of welding, and we dived off the reefs, encountering another world. Filming went well for a day and a half until we ran into a pack of large and hungry barracuda. Since gun laws are very strict in Trinidad, I wasn't carrying a "bang stick" so discretion seemed very much better than valour; however, the boat was by this time fifty yards away and a few anxious minutes were shared huddled together trying to read the fishes' collective mind.

Our last trip was further north at an isolated cove and jungle where our friends, the fishermen, shortly had us living *au naturel*, picking coconuts and breadfruit, spearing a few fish, surfing, and wandering on the beach. Filming was so perfect with the natural light there that it is hard to believe, unless you see for yourself. The film gives some idea.

It's tough being a film crew, eh?

Postscript:

Leaving Trinidad was worse than arriving: more forms; a plane strike; getting bumped off two flights, courtesy of Trinidadian bureaucracy, during which our baggage and equipment left without us; arriving finally in New York at 3 a.m. and sleeping on the floor in cut-offs and "T" shirts until 7:30 a.m. We arrived in cold Toronto at 9 a.m.

Welcome back to reality, or is it....? □