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Navid
Lancaster:

The New Musician

SHARDA PATASAR

“If you want your film to win awards, then it has to pass through my hands.”

It is a confident statement from a guy who has the track record to back it up. While it may seem arrogant, these are the words of the new musician, a musician who utilises social media to his advantage and who acknowledges that music is after all, a business, and produced for a paying audience.

“The reality is that we do have to eat as well,” he states.

Still caught in the era of the stage performer, the music industry in Trinidad and Tobago has now formed a bottleneck - many people vying for one ground - the stage. But Navid Lancast-

er many years before, recognised that music simply didn't mean just stage performances.

“See, I quickly realised that you can put music in anything. So I started attending conferences that had nothing to do with music. And that's how I got into Anime Caribe. I had just gone to market myself.” It's as simple as that.

The business of music is an infant field here in Trinidad and Navid Lancaster can very well be one of its pioneers. Lancaster's early love of music manifested itself at age five when he remembered listening to the songs of Styx, particularly 'Babe' and George Benson's version of 'The Greatest Love of All, both songs that he learnt by heart. His ear caught the sounds of instruments as well that captivated him. The violin remains one such.

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"I remember just really loving the sound of the violin, but being poor, that wasn't happening so I became an avid listener of music. Later, as I grew older, into my teens, I discovered rock music, especially heavy metal."

For those who question the value of music, Lancaster's experience is evidence of its importance in the play of human emotions.

"I had a bit of anger and frustration and that found an outlet in heavy metal. For a long time, it was the only

music I would listen to. I would go to the mosh pits and return home with a headache, but relieved. It was a great way to release my tensions and frustration."

Later on, he would discover the music of the Carpenters which was directly opposed to the heavy metal he had grown into. But he admits 'rock was always a base ... and martial arts, both of which were ways of venting and releasing pent up frustration.

Post-A-Levels was a turning point.

"I had written my A-Levels, but wasn't

sure what direction I wanted to take. I had done the sciences. Most of my childhood friends were becoming doctors and such but I realised that wasn't my calling. I was serving the Bahá'í Faith and right after A-Levels, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Trinidad and Tobago sent me to Guyana to collect information on what was going on with a teaching/expansion campaign in that country. I spent four months in Guyana. It was a space away from Trinidad and I was so free there, not being in the Trinidad society."

It was in Guyana he met the musician J B Eckl, who was also a member of the Bahá'í Faith. Eckl set him (Lancaster) on his path when he said, "The greatest thing you can do is follow your calling."

"It was then that I

decided I was going to be a musician and at the ripe old age of 19, I picked up the guitar. It was my sister's guitar and I just tried to figure it out on my own."

Largely a self-taught guitarist, nevertheless, the dedication to the instrument led him to other musicians.

"I was unemployed, so I used to practice 18, 19 hours. I started giving lessons from time to time and it was during that time I met Sheldon Manoo. We formed a band called Broken Mirrorz. That band lasted for 12 years."

He began working at the National Bahá'í Centre as an Assistant Secretary in the mid 90s and there learnt to type and work with computers. While there, TV6 broadcasted an interview with Kenny Phillips, music producer, arranger, musician and now owner of WACK radio. Following

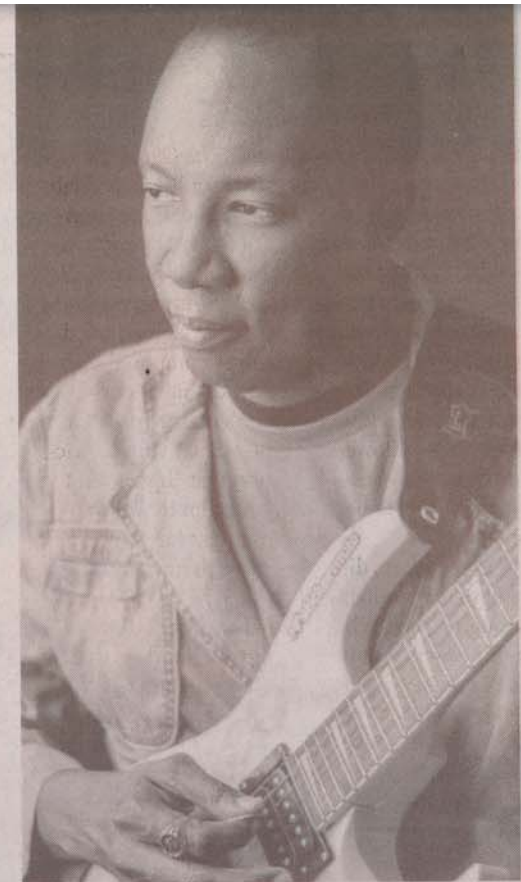
his instinct, Lancaster called the television station and spoke to Paolo Kernahan, who had interviewed Phillips and was given a phone number. He contacted Phillips, telling him of his desire to become a music producer.

"Well, okay. You want to be a producer? You will have to leave your job," Phillips informed the young man.

And so he did. What followed after, according to Lancaster, was hell.

"I was accustomed to working on a PC. Kenny put me on a Mac, gave me a programme I knew nothing about and put me in the studio. Two paying clients and the clock was ticking. I got cuss from everybody, from Rikki Jai to Iwer George. I was basically the lackey, making tea, learning, just being thrown in the deep end. I remember I was living in Port-of-Spain at the time and the studio was in Palmiste so I spent nights sleeping on the studio floor. Real old school."

The training paid off, however. After three months he ended up at Spectakula Promotions where he worked as a music producer for six years, and then at



Navid Lancaster

the National Academy (NAPA) for the Performing Arts where for four years he was a sound engineer officer/media archivist. While at NAPA, his formal studies took him from a BTEC HND in Media and Communication to a First Class Honours in the B.A. Media and Communications (University of Greenwich) and then to an M.A. in New Media and Society (University of Leicester).

"I realised that I needed to leave in order to fully concentrate on

the Masters programme and get it done. And it was one night while doing sound for a live show I saw this camera guy. I went up to him and introduced myself."

The young camera man, Steven Taylor would follow up months after with a call to Lancaster to work on the soundtrack for his film *Buck - The Man Spirit* which won the People's Choice Award for Best Short Film, TFFF (2012).

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Music is everywhere

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"It was entirely by chance that I ended up in film," Lancaster said. Highly doubtful, Lancaster's career thus far had shown evidence of his drive to follow his musical calling. It was one that had allowed him to identify areas which needed to be tapped into.

"People say it's difficult to make a living through music. While in this economy it is, it isn't impossible."

What follows after *Buck*, would be a series of films that won numerous awards for which Lancaster served in the capacities of music producer, music editor and composer. Among them *Jab In The Dark* (2013) - Winner of People's Choice Award. Best Short. TFFF - Navid Lancaster (Film Composer). *Pan: Our Music Odyssey* (2014) - Multiple Award Winning Feature Film / PBS Broadcasted - Navid Lancaster (Technical Assistance). *Pan: Our African Odyssey* (2015) - Winner of Best T&T Feature Length Documentary. TFFF - Navid Lancaster (Music Editor / Sound Mixer). *Tomb* (2016) - First ever feature length Science Fiction film shot entirely in T&T - Navid Lancaster (Music composer of the launch sequence in the film)

and *'The Old Higue' Trailer* (2016) - Collaboration of three countries. (GAN - Guyana Animation Network / SAN - Suriname Animation Network and music composed by Navid Lancaster).

It's no surprise that he can say with conviction that "If you want your film to win an award, it has to pass through my hands first."

Lancaster's drive to tap into markets that others are not focusing on has led him from genre to genre, from recording pan, to music for mobile apps and video games. His latest is *Banana Boat* - currently seeking crowd-funding - an animation film for children where he will work as music producer and sound designer.

If he were to advise young producers, Lancaster says, "Listen to a lot of music from different cultures. It's the only way to expand your brain. Once you start doing that, your brain will climb out of that box of 4/4 rhythms, bacchanal music, dead on Ash Wednesday kind of music. Go to musicians who actually play their instruments and question them about the instrument. Get some grounding in the actual reality of it. Even if you work with samples,

instead of downloading sample packs, you can record the actual instruments so you can do your own samples. At least you then have some connection with what you are creating. You are trying to create something out of nothing.

"And truth be told, all

of us borrow from the past anyway. Nothing works in a vacuum."

Navid Lancaster's work is evidence of his openness to various genres and constant interaction with the latest happenings in the music industry. He exemplifies the new, technology-age musician, one

who moves between stage and technology, between the real world and the virtual world. Even in the Internet, social media age, to be a producer, "if you can't relate to people, your music is not going to be heard. It takes a lot of practice and a lot of failure. But it is still the

end user, the listener, who puts value to your work."

Navid Lancaster's work can be viewed and heard on his website www.lancastltd.com. Search for it and enjoy the layers of music from this very versatile music producer/sound designer.

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