

Interview with Tom Bailey, president of WIADCA

By Colin A. Moore



CM: First of all, I would like to congratulate you on your recent election as **president of WIADCA.**

TB: Thank you very much Colin.

CM: Inquiring minds would like to know--what was the reason for the change in **officers** and the change in the **board of directors**?

TB: Well I guess, as was indicated by the then outgoing president, she was about to move on to other things in life and she decided to give it up quite abruptly, ... we lost our executive director and also our first vice president that created a deep hole in the administration.

CM: Who is the executive director and first vice president?

TB: Ken Fostin was the first vice president and Noel Bryden was the executive director.

CM: And I understand just about that time, I think it was about March of 2012 when this happened, when Yolanda vacated the position?

TB: No she actually vacated in December.

CM: And I notice that it created quite a bit of confusion, because as a matter-of-fact one of the problems was that, as a result of the confusion, the association failed to file an application for funds from the state of New York.

TB: Yes there was a bit of inactivity in the organization for that period of time. Everything happened so suddenly and at that time of the year most of us were away from the country--that was carnival time in Trinidad and the bulk of us were in Trinidad.

CM: So as a result, you guys failed to put in the necessary documentation?

TB: There were quite a few things that were supposed to be done, that were not done and that created the problem.

CM: And I remember there was a lot of speculation in the Caribbean community about what happened. Well of course when people don't know

what happened, very often they put their own spin to it. There was a lot of spin about what the motivations of the outgoing president were and so forth. There came a time when your organization issued a press release and more or less clarified the situation? Is that correct?

TB: To the best of my knowledge, yes. A press [release] was issued and ... every thing was moving as smoothly as it could have been at the time.

CM: As a matter –of- fact, the press release used the adjective *new* six times It spoke of the *new* team, the *new* president, the *new* WIADCA team, a *new* and positive direction and a *new* era of cooperation and friendship. So my question to you is, what is the new vision and new policy and program of action for the association now that there has been this transition, this change?

TB: ...we had to prepare for 2012, which at one point in time we felt may not have materialized. The group got together and placed emphasis on 2012. The importance of 2012 being realized with the number of Caribbean people in the New York metropolitan area, Labor Day has become one of the main features of our operation and we were determined to make it happen. There are quite a number of things we are devoted to,... new membership is one of our goals,... quite a number of plans have been put into effect, to make 2013 and beyond the organization that we want it to be.

CM: So you have some sort of long- term plans as well as short-term plans?

TB: [In the] short term ...[we want] to get 2012 off the road and [in]2013 we are...looking at various areas that need to be improved, so that we can survive up to 50 years. This is our 45th year and we are hoping that by year 50 we would have achieved quite a number of things to make our organization the type that we expect it to be.

CM: I have in my hand here one of the programs for 2012 and I notice that one new activity is the mas, mas and more mas, which is on for Thursday August 30th; this is when the mas bands will be parading. I think this is the first time the organization is having a parade of the bands? Is that correct?

TB: It's not the first time; it is a new slant that is given. Normally we would have had on that first night the old mas competition and both bands and individual masqueraders. But this year, what we decided to do was to go out to all the mas bands, pick the kings and queens of those bands, have them do their competition on that night so that you don't have to wait until they hit the road on Monday to determine who is the king and queen.... This is in

addition to the other masqueraders, old mas, bands, individuals and stuff. So that is the reason why we call it mas, mas and more mas....

CM: It will give the mas bands an opportunity to strut their stuff before the big thing on Monday. So I notice that of course dimanche gras would be on Sunday night, which is my favorite and I notice Stallin would be there; of course he has not been at the carnival for a long time. I don't see Sparrow's name but of course Sparrow I know is a perennial; every year he is there, whether his name is mentioned or not.

TB: Calypso Rose is going to be there filling in for Sparrow.

CM: So it's going to be a very interesting show at the back of the museum on that Sunday night.

TB: It is also important that we mention the Friday night show with the famous Machel Mantano and together with him you have Mr. Vegas. And this was intentionally done because this year Jamaica and Trinidad are celebrating their 50th independence anniversary. On Friday night we will be having the best of Trinidad versus the best of Jamaica. The spotlight is going to be on those two guys along with the other artists who are going to be participating.

CM: Barbados got a strong contingent-- Cross Fire.

TB: Cross Fire is there with Edwin Yearwood and even Dominica is represented with Wuck and we are looking forward to a real solid night of entertainment.

CM: And speaking in terms of the Jamaican contingent, there is one little absence I notice--reggae night. You remember reggae night used to be a big thing.

TB: Reggae night used to be a feature night many, many moons ago, but there were some problems with that night and it phased out. But we still input the Jamaican possee into the program. We can't leave out the Jamaicans. We can't leave out the reggae.

CM: Looks like it's going be a very interesting program that you will be having in 2012 despite the organization's problems that you've had in the year.

CM: Now everything of course culminates on Monday?

TB: Monday [is] the parade.

CM: We start out with breakfast, in which politicians and all these wannabe's. When is it going to be starting? I notice last year of course the mayor stated that the parade had to end at six o'clock. I notice you guys had to advance the starting time to noon.

TB: Well this year we are scheduled to start at eleven from the same venue, which is Schenectady and Eastern Parkway. We had moved from Utica but in spite of that move, you'll still have an influx of the band line up all the way down to Utica Avenue, because once they come up Buffalo after they pass the inspection of the trucks and stuff and they approach Eastern Parkway there will be the line of people just waiting to kick off after the eleven o'clock[start] at Schenectady.

CM: The bands know they have to be there to start at eleven o'clock?

TB: Yes, they will extend all the way down pass Buffalo to East New York Avenue....

CM: One or two things that I forgot to mention in terms of the parade this year. I notice last year for example we had a little incident at the museum when one of our elected officials--Councilman Jumanee Williams, was arrested by some overzealous police officers; of course that incident is regrettable. What specific steps are you taking to ensure that we don't have a repeat of the same kind of situation by overzealous NYPD officers?

TB: That was a very unfortunate situation. In our post mortem and the meeting we held with NYPD, we came up with a plan which hopefully would eliminate any such incidents. In the particular area where this stuff happened WIADCA is going to be represented there by members of the organization who would be able to identify dignitaries. It is unfortunate that he was not identified because he was wearing his.....[MISSING]

CM: That's right he had his ID on.

TB: Right, so if there is going to be anybody who is in that area, if there is a question to be asked, WIADCA members will be there...

CM: To vouch for them.

TB: Right,... we are hoping to eliminate any such problemsit was very traumatic, because myself and my family were there and we saw when he was thrown to the ground

CM: It created a whole kind of atmosphere, people were really scared, especially the women. And they knew that he was an elected official, well respected in our community. And they're feeling, well if he can be brutalized by the police, then what about us, people who are not elected officials and who may not have that proper ID. A lot of the young men were scared of going out and coming back and being confronted by overzealous police officers.

TB:...After the bands have ... passed the reviewing stand and you are heading towards Grand Army Plaza--The Brooklyn Public Library, it is no return. You are on the river of no return; nobody is supposed to be coming back once you cross there. And like I said, unfortunately he came past and was on his way back when this incident occurred;...but this year we are hoping that with the steps we are taking, this situation should not occur.

CM: As a matter -of -fact there was another white official from Park Slope--the public advocate. He was marching just before Jumanee and when he came in, he came in the same way and they did not question him. But then because of the fact that Jumanee was black, a big strapped guy with his braids, these officers you know they have this racial profiling, so they must have figured that he was a raster or something like that and they confronted him. But this other individual, the public advocate who was in the same group and who is the same height as Jumamee, he was not confronted and so we immediately knew that there was a case of racial profiling right there, that they picked on Jumanee because he was black and because he looked threatening. So as I said, it just created a very bad atmosphere.

TB: We are hoping that such an incident does not recur because that really spoils the parade.

CM: Absolutely! As you are aware, the association has had some problems with the steel bands. It has taken the pan men almost a year to receive their performance fees and prize money, and I must congratulate you for having cut a check in the amount of **\$52,000** owed to them by WIADCA. However, there are still some ill feelings between the National Association of Steel Bands and WIADCA. For example, Anthony Ike Hinds, president of NAS, has accused WIADCA of bluster and posturing, and being interested not in the music but mainly to control it. Desmond Chase, president of Hawks, has stated that the steel bands are merely a cash cow that is being milked by WIADCA. What concrete steps are you taking to mend the tattered relationship between the pan men and the association?

TB: Well prior to the issuing of these statements by those individuals,... WIADCA has met with the steel bands that are participating in the panorama this year. Again, this takes me back to 2012.... There was a short period of time that we had to work with, to get 2012 off the road. It is a matter of doing this starting [in] May for September. The organization has met with those steel bands that are part of the organization's panorama this year. Many, many discussions have been held with them and we intend to continue talking with this organization –the USSA I think is the organization that represents the bulk of the steel bands in Brooklyn. My group of people,... has pledged to get together with these guys and work towards improving the relationship between WIADCA and the pan men. Without pan and without mas there is no Labor Day.

CM: That's right. You know the former prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams, believed very strongly that pan was the whole backbone of the carnival and he was the one who promoted panorama, so obviously there is a very strong emotional attachment to the pan band.

TB: We are quite concerned about where we are and we are definitely making some serious efforts to change that.

CM: State Senator Kevin Parker has indicated that because of the failure of WIADCA to file the necessary application in March of this year, the association will not be receiving financial help from the state of New York; as a result hundreds of thousands of dollars would have been lost to the association. My question is --why the association did not file the necessary documentation in time and what steps are being taken to obtain alternative sources of funding for the association?

TB: The reason why there was a lapse ...is because... of the resignation of the key members of the board; everything was in a sort of turmoil.... The positions that were vacated, those were the people who were basically responsible for doing the necessary filing and keeping up -to -date.... However, [in] 2013, in spite of doing the preparation for 2012 we are focusing on doing our filing. I mean it's almost September and we have to catch up,... but we are looking quite closely towards reaching the deadline of filing for 2013. And in addition to that part of our ongoing program, we have to be more serious about fundraising activities other than depending on the city, state or the federal government.[We have] ...focused our attention to a fundraising committee of some people in our community who are good at it, and we will be utilizing these people to come up with some program to

raise funds to supplement whatever other funds we do get from the city or state.

CM: Do you have any commitments from Governor Cuomo, for example, or Mayor Bloomberg or Borough President Marty Makowitz to provide emergency funding to compensate for the lost of funding from the state?

TB: You mean emergency funding for this year or next year?

CM: For this year.

TB: No we have not; we met with a group of the elected officials
[MISSING]

CM: But they couldn't do anything to compensate?

TB: Right; nothing could have been done. We met with one of the deputy mayors [and] presented our case and we are still waiting.

CM: You mentioned fundraising, so you'll have an active program of fundraising?

TB: Yes.

CM: One question that has always bothered me is why we do not have TV coverage by the leading TV networks, similar to the type of TV coverage given to **the Puerto Rican Day Parade, the Columbus Day Parade and the St Patrick's Day Parade**. If we were to receive that TV coverage which is in the hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars, would it not be a great financial boon to the income of the association, and would it not solve its financial problems? What are your views with regards to TV coverage? I remember at one time we had limited coverage. I think it was Channel 11.

TB: For three years we attempted to have live television coverage of the parade. But again we have no one but ourselves to blame. In order for this parade to be effective [with] television coverage, there has to be a flow, and one of the main problems that we experience is that the bands are supposed to get there, in positions at a particular time and they move in succession one after the other,... There is [a] need for a flow to be covered by the television cameras. And if you are sitting in your home looking at..... the Puerto Rican Day Parade for example, you see the constant.....

CM: Flow, that's right.

TB: ...But in order to get the television coverage you have to ... get there on time, have the bands moving in succession one after the other. Nobody

wants to get up to Grand Army Plaza before six o'clock,...Six o'clock is too early for them.

CM: That's right; you have to get this continuous flow. And the other thing that the Puerto Rican Day has; they have the big bands like Titupwa.

TB: But you know we have our top DJ; our DJ trucks are the best; our top DJ'S are the best coming down on the Parkway... Television has to cover something, no big gaps, and that basically is one of the problems. But we have not given up on it. Last year we approached NY1 and one or two of the other channels but it did not materialize. Well this year we had no time for that ...[in] 2013/14 we will be looking at that also.

CM: One of the issues that have always plagued the organization is the question of **financial transparency**. Desmond Chase stated that in 2001 the treasurer of WIADCA at a Holiday Inn in Trinidad on Ash Wednesday, openly admitted that for the 30 years she was treasurer she had never seen or filed a financial statement. As you know under section 501(c) 3 regulations, WIADCA as a non-for-profit is required to file with the attorney general every year audited statements of income and expenditure. Now, when is your association going to file these statements for 2012?

TB: At the end of the year.

CM: Has there been a problem in the past?

TB: Not that I'm aware of, ...

CM: Because I know people are always asking questions about what has happened to the money and so forth and one of the things I find is that when you don't publish these things, then the public gets a distorted view; they think that the association is making a lot of money and that a lot of money is being converted to private use and what not. But apparently, when the statements are published then it becomes clear to the public. Because I know, for example, the same situation faced the carnival associations in Trinidad. For years people said they got millions of dollars from the government and what happened to the money? And as a matter- of- fact almost every year for the last 20 years, the national association in Trinidad and Tobago has never made any money; they have constantly lost money every year, simple because their expenditures have been so very high. But I'm saying, if people do not know this, they think, there is always a perception that there is a a lot of money coming in and the organization is somehow just short circuiting or converting the money to their own private

use. So I'm saying that very often in order to just lay aside those fears one has to publish. And I know that you work at Merril Lynch and you know what I'm speaking about-- financial disclosure and transparency is very important in dealing with the public.

TB: But again the records of the organization is under public scrutiny and anything that needs to be seen or found is available there by the click of a mouse. But I am not aware that there has been ... any discrepancies. As long as I am here I would do my best to ensure that reporting is accomplished, as it should be....

CM: One of the criticisms made of the association in the past is that the board of directors is not truly reflective of the cultural diversity of the Caribbean community. There have been the allegations that while some countries have been over-represented on the board, other countries have been under-represented. Is there a serious attempt to ensure that the future boards are truly representative of the cultural diversity of the Caribbean community?

TB: Well this is something that has been said many, many times over the years and I can tell you for sure as of today, we have made a serious effort to include, especially other Caribbean people as to be part of the overall membership of the organization, not necessarily the board but eventually they can become members of the board. But we have been encouraging non-Trinidadians because many people feel the WIADCA is a Trini thing.... Efforts are being made to be very inclusive of our Caribbean brothers and sisters. Our first vice president is a born American and we have other Grenadians and Barbadians in the organization.

CM: Do you have any Guyanese?

TB:...I can't swear for that, but we try to very inclusive. And again this is something that people have to want to be into. ...Volunteering in these organizations ... takes a lot, time, energy, effort, a lot of sacrifice....

CM: But people only see the glitter; they don't realize the amount of work that has to be put into a voluntary organization.

TB: Yes, but you know, we are trying.

CM: I notice last year the theme was "one Caribbean family." I know there were some attempts to coach people from Dominica for some reason. I remember there was an affair given on Utica Avenue and there was a delegation of mas people from Dominica. I don't know if it was an attempt

to encourage other Caribbean people to participate. And I know that the Haitians are very, very enthusiastic with their compass and things like that and I know they would like to become part of the family.

TB: You look at the composition of the mas bands on the parkway; each Caribbean country is represented; you have the bajans, the Jamaicans. Everybody is there, not only Trinidadians. It's changing.

CM: In terms of diversity, my question is, is WIADCA seeking to establish not only cultural diversity, but the question of chronological diversity; in other words, whether they are reaching out to young people, because the impression I get is that young people are generally underrepresented on the board. Is there a serious attempt to ensure that there is a chronological balance on the board, and that young people with a different frame of reference and a different skill set from the older generation would be represented on the board?

TB: Yeah, that is ... one of our serious attempts since we took over the organization and even prior to that, because we have invited quite a number of young people to be involved. But again this is voluntary work, and over the last two years, I can remember there were two kids; well they are not kids anymore, who won scholarships at the WIADCA's annual Labor Day festival. And when they graduated from college, came back and have started to volunteer their services to the organization. This is something which we felt great about and currently there are quite a number of people who are getting involved in our organization because... I am on my way out and quite a number of the officers in the organization are on their way out and this thing has to continue, and the only way it can continue is with the younger folks coming in. But again it is not so simple to get younger people to get involved in this type of activities but we are trying, ...

CM: And my final question is; why doesn't WIADCA establish a Caribbean cultural center or a museum of the visual and performing arts which will collect all of the costumes worn by the different mas bands and retain videos and documentaries of all of the pageants, concerts and festivities which can be displayed in future museum exhibitions?

TB: That is serious food for thought. I mean you look at Trinidad and Tobago where carnival is on a larger scale and there is so much ... after carnival is over compared to what is remained on the streets here in Brooklyn. Having a museum or a place for exhibition purposes is critical. To

have something of our own is also critical but that calls,... [for] dollars and cents, ... It is not something that we have considered recently to get into but it is something we can look at in the future...so that we can preserve the cultural aspect of the Caribbean.

CM: Because many people I know, Americans, they look and they see these fantastic costumes, and they make all kinds of comments-- oh that's fantastic and what not, and I'm saying to myself why don't we preserve this in some type of museum? Because I remember in Port-of Spain I went into a museum in Trinidad and I saw all the tremendous things that people like Saldana and George Bailey and all these guys created. And we have the museum here; we can ask some of these people to give us some technical advice on how to create the collection and the storing of these costumes and so forth and how we can put it on display.

TB: That's food for thought because I know some of the masqueraders donate their costumes to institutions like the libraries; you have them being displayed in the hallways of the library ... and [in] other institutions which is commendable.

CM: Right in the museum we can have a room where we can display these things and preserve them.

TB: And have them on exhibition.

CM: On exhibition, that's right, absolutely. And there is some great Trinidadian documentarian, I think the daughter of the former prime minister, after Eric. She is a great documentarian; she had some displays, I think, at some college downtown here, in Brooklyn. And I'm saying to myself, why don't we have some of these documentarians going down to the various mas camps and pan yards and what not, and just recording those visuals, those tremendous visual exhibitions that are occurring each year on the parkway.

TB: Like I said, that is food for thought. Hopefully by the time we hit 50, we should be in a position to say, hey there is [a] museum down here in Brooklyn where you can view the costumes of the last 10 years or the last 20 years. The kings and queens, have them chronologically displayed.

CM: And with regard to that thing, I'm wondering, we spoke about what's happened after the carnival. Why don't we have a meeting of all the stakeholders and what not and we do a post mortem of the last show and

come up with recommendations on how to make improvements for next year?

TB: We do that locally within the organization but like you said, if we can reach out to the stakeholders that could be more beneficial and more effective.

CM: You can bring in the sponsors, the elected officials, community activists and so forth, and let them make comments and put forward their suggestion and proposals.

TB: That would help to make the following years ... better.

CM: It has been a pleasure having you here at the offices of the Caribbean American Weekly and we look forward in the future to having you come back almost every year and hopefully you can show the incremental steps of improvements that are taking place in this great Caribbean cultural event. So thank you very much for sparing your time and giving us your cooperation and your commitment and we look forward to establishing a relationship with you and your association.

TB: On behalf of the organization I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to say something which needed to be said and we look forward to the continuous relationship with your organization and with Labor Day; see you on the Parkway.

CM: As the saying goes, if you see something say something.