

# Survivor – Introduction/Biodata

## ‘Introduction by Rawle Gibbons

This publication celebrates Eintou’s 70<sup>th</sup> year and represents most of her work over this time as a playwright. We should note that these plays in themselves by no means tell the full tale of Eintou as a theatre artist. She has contributed quality time and effort developing plays with community groups for the Best Village Competition, performing on stage, creating street theatre events since the revolutionary Black Power period of the 1970’s, as well as directing a good deal of her own work. The spectrum of her commitment, nonetheless, is reflected in the themes, stories and dramatic techniques documented in this volume of her plays.

Eintou’s major purpose in the practice of her art is the self-empowerment of historically disadvantaged peoples of the region. Key to this process, in her view, is the transmission of ancestral memory and knowledge from the scattered histories that quilt the Caribbean. In all her writing, creative, professional or community-based activity, she makes this mission clear. Moreover, as a former librarian, she deeply appreciates the value of an intellectual and artistic heritage and the need for its documentation. These issues she addresses directly in pieces like: ‘Sesa Woruban’, ‘I, Hyarima’, ‘Spirit of Chaguaramas’ and the pageant ‘Kambule’. In these works, young people gain knowledge of themselves through the advice of elders, ancestral revelation or the activism of peers. This concern situates the work primarily for an audience of young people, an audience sorely in need of attention. It is this audience to whom Eintou is primarily committed.

This focus on youth and children is also reflected in the didactic aspects of works presented here. Several of the plays are constructed to teach specific lessons. ‘Tyrell Learns a Lesson’ warns children against disobedience and the dangers of abduction. ‘Baby Doll Meets Midnight Robber’ warns against drug use, wanton sex and lack of self-respect. ‘Cut Yuh Style to Suit Yuh Cloth’ explicitly encourages young people to walk the credit union way. In dramatizing these lessons, Eintou makes good use of her creative story-telling skills, inherited from her ancestors and honed to a fine art with her children and grandchildren. Some of the plays are actual folktales; others are her own stories; but all of them are presented through narrative figures - Pierrot, Speech Masters, Story-tellers, Griots, Chorus – drawn from our cultural traditions.

Out of the folktale tradition come the stories ‘Ti-Jean and Mariquite’ and ‘How Anansi Bring the Drum’. In fashioning her stage version, Eintou develops the female characters Mariquite and Tantie into identifiable archetypes of Caribbean womanhood. In telling us ‘How Anansi Bring the Drum’, the Griots consciously re-connect the traditional folklore character, Anansi, with his roots in the West African cosmos. Her very use of the term ‘Griot’ places her stories squarely within the African tradition. Story-telling is universal and as ancient as human society.

The griots of West Africa are those whose family calling is to record and relate the history of the people, their heroes, royalty and distinguished clans. These histories are presented in the griot’s dramatic performances with chanting, drums, actions to accompany the monologues.

It is this function of story-teller as keeper of ancestral memory that these plays are meant to invoke.

This function continues today in the Caribbean and remains a necessary role of our artists. Elder and Master Artist Leroy Clarke challenged: ‘Who will re-chart the ruins?’ Traditional Carnival characters like the Pierrot, Baby Doll and Midnight Robber who have become set characters in Eintou’s work are preserved here because they have disappeared largely from the streets at Carnival time. The art of story-telling itself that was so natural a part of Caribbean child-rearing has been replaced by cartoons and children’s’ shows on television. Writing these stories as drama gives them new life and exposes new audiences to their values and lessons. These new audiences include today’s generation of young parents who, themselves unexposed to traditional story-telling, can find in these plays stories they can use in entertaining their children and in building their own story-telling skills. For, apart from ancestral recall, stories in themselves are sources of imagination, entertainment, magic and art. Such has always been the work of our word-smiths – calypsonians, Midnight Robber, King Pierrot, Pierrot Grenade. Drama offers another platform for these indigenous performances, as the plays present themselves with their own personality and purpose.

The writer successfully marries her ideological, didactic and aesthetic objectives in two of her best-known plays published here – ‘Kambule’ and ‘Shades of I-She’. ‘Kambule’ is staged annually on Carnival Friday as a re-enactment of the 1881 Canboulay Riot in Port of Spain. The script is but the key to the unlocking of that historic moment when people defied the colonial authorities in defence of their Carnival. As the pageant rolls out its story, complete with costumed characters, music, spectacle, the performance annually transcends time and seeks to fill the void of memory and meaning in the present-day festival. ‘Shades of I-She’ brings to contemporary reality the woman’s experience briefly visited in the romantic fairy-tale ‘Ti-Jean and Mariquite’. In ‘Shades’, Eintou touches, in any one of her several poems, women who have suffered the brutality, tenderness, betrayal or timidity of men. This may well make it, as claimed, ‘Every Woman’s story’.

This publication comes at an opportune time for Caribbean educators. While curricula are being reformed and developed from primary to tertiary levels, teachers and examiners are constantly in search of material to support teaching the arts in the classroom. With the emphasis in CXC Theatre Arts on Caribbean cultural forms and their use in dance and drama, plays on the history of Carnival and its traditional characters, storytelling and First Peoples’ beliefs offer good scope for study and production. At the advanced CAPE level where the focus is on the development of acting skills, pieces such as ‘Shades of I-She’, ‘Ti-Jean’ and ‘Anansi’ provide scenes for intense action, dramatic monologues and improvisational sketches. Good use can be made of such exercises in the acting studio. The story-telling format also renders the material immediately accessible to primary and pre-school levels.

Hopefully, this collection also signals a change in publishing trends in the region. Without a supporting educational or professional sector, there has been little point in the past to a business investment in drama publication. As a result, there is often no drama category at literary festivals. Indeed, the federalist efforts of the Extra-Mural Department of the University of the West Indies, under the late Errol Hill, have remained unequalled in volume and still form the core texts of published plays in regional drama competitions. It is not that there are fewer individuals writing for the theatre now than then, though that may well be.

The key issue however, remains production and publishing opportunities that are ad hoc and still inadequately resourced for the reasons stated here.

Lexicon is to be congratulated for throwing its weight behind a vision of optimism and opportunity in what is today a changing landscape of the arts in the region.

RG, Jan 2, 2015.

*Rawle Gibbons is an educator and one of the regions foremost theatre practitioners, playwright, director, dramaturge, and lecturer. He has been in the forefront of fashioning an ideology of theatre, suitable for a post-colonial Caribbean. He has been instrumental in the establishment of programmes at the Jamaican School of Drama and the Centre for Festival and Creative Arts in Trinidad and Tobago.*

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## About the Playwright – Eintou Pearl Springer



One of the most prolific female playwrights of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region, Eintou's plays have been performed internationally to critical acclaim. They focus mainly on the heritage and culture of her birthplace, Trinidad and Tobago. All of her plays from 'Harmony in Diversity' to 'Kambule', 'Sesa Woruban' and 'Baby Doll meets Midnight Robber' contain authentic historical facts which ensure that her plays are not only educational, but they reveal aspects of the indigenous culture of Trinidad and Tobago which are still largely unexplored.

Eintou Springer is the recipient of a national award, the Humming Bird Silver Medal, for her contribution to the development and propagation of Arts and Culture.

An award-winning actress, she was awarded the 2004 Vanguard Award of the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NDATT), an organisation that she helped to form. She also conceptualised and managed the Best Village Junior programme for three years.

Ms. Springer is the author of several books of poetry, and was honoured by the Circle of Poets as of Poet Laureate of Port of Spain from 2002-2009.

Ms. Springer is the founding librarian of the National Heritage library of The National Library and Information Service (NALIS); as a librarian, she has over 40 years of specialisation in Caribbean bibliography. She has created the curriculum at both the associate and degree level at the College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAAT).