



National carnival arts strategy 2005-2007

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Cover image:
On Route Carnival painting. Photo: Pax Nindi

Foreword

The National Carnival Strategy, which has been written by Pax Nindi Senior Carnival Officer in consultation with the carnival sector and regional colleagues, is an important milestone for Arts Council England. Not only does it place carnival as a major artform in England today, it sets out a vision and an agenda to see carnival arts flourish in the 21st century. By bringing together the cultural experiences of carnival artists, their hopes and aspirations for the future, Arts Council England has set out in this strategy how we are going to support the cultural, artistic and professional developments of carnival arts in the near future.

We hope the strategy will challenge and inspire, and create conditions for partnerships and collaborations within the carnival arts community and with the Arts Council itself.

The strategy is also a major contribution to the race equality and diversity objectives of the Arts Council¹. Grants for the arts² – our open application funding programme - has seen a greater number of applicants by Black and minority ethnic artists, and our portfolio of Black-led arts companies on regular funding has also increased significantly. There has never been a better time for carnival to flourish, and this strategy is the platform on which to build that future success.

Tony Panayiotou

Director, Diversity, Arts Council England



Notting Hill Carnival. Photo: Pax Nindi

1 These are set out in *Respond: A practical resource for developing a race equality action plan* (Arts Council England 2005); available to download from our website: www.artscouncil.org.uk/documents/publications/responddoc_phpnlDz7c.doc

2 Grants for the arts for individuals, organisations and national touring replaced over 100 grant schemes from our various offices. It is customer focused and has a single application pack, which achieved the Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark.

Contents

Foreword	
Contents	
Introduction	05
Definitions of 'carnival'	05
Arts Council England's definition of 'carnival arts'	07
A brief history of carnival	08
The growth of carnival arts	09
Carnival arts in the UK	09
Arts Council England and carnival arts	11
The development of our strategy	13
Methodology: consultation and mapping	13
Key findings and identified needs	13
Artform-specific issues	15
Carnival arts and our <i>Ambitions for the arts</i>	17
Enabling organisations to thrive not just survive	17
Supporting the artist	19
Offering opportunities for young people	20
Championing cultural diversity	21
National Carnival action plan 2005-07	23
Appendix one: <i>On Route</i> conference report 2004	29
Appendix two: Arts Council England's regularly funded carnival and combined arts organisations 2005-07	44
Appendix three: Arts Council England's regional officers with responsibility for carnival arts	46
Appendix four: Individuals and organisations consulted	48

Introduction

This strategy sets out some practical ways for carnival arts to develop between 2005 and 2007 to meet Arts Council England's ambitions³.

We aim to offer all artists – no matter where they are based – access to the same level of services and support from us. Both Arts Council staff and people working in the carnival arts sector need to develop their skills and share their knowledge of the artform to work together effectively.

This strategy also aims to provide the carnival arts sector with the same awareness of and access to our funding programmes as other artforms.

Joyce Wilson
Head of Combined Arts, London

Definitions of 'carnival'

There are many different theories about the origins of carnival. This makes it difficult to agree on one definition for 'carnival arts'.

The following definitions are taken from various glossaries:

Carnival

'A non-religious holiday associated with the Christian religious week of Lent where everyone parties and celebrates before Ash Wednesday when all Catholics must abstain from such behaviour for an extended period of time. In Brazil it starts on the Saturday before Ash Wednesday and ends midnight Tuesday night. In many parts of the world this is called Mardi Gras.' **World Samba**⁴

Carnival

'From the Latin *carnivale*, loosely translated as "farewell to flesh"; the season of merriment in New Orleans, which begins annually on 6 January, the Twelfth Night (the feast of the Epiphany), and ends at midnight on Fat Tuesday; the Carnival season leads up to the penitential season of Lent in which fasting replaces feasting.' **Arthur Hardy**⁵

Karneval

'Carnival or Mardi Gras goes by many names in German, depending on the region and dialect: *Karneval* (Rhineland), *Fasching* (Bavaria), *Fastnacht* (Baden), *Fosnat* (Franconia) or *Fasnet* (Swabia)... Karneval is a "movable feast" (ein beweglicher Festtag) that depends on the date of Easter. The official start of the Fasching season is either 7 January (the day after Epiphany) or the 11th day of the 11th month (11 November), depending on the region ... it is a time for revelry, humour and satire. Although its origins go back to ancient pagan times, it is the Romans and the Italians to whom the Germans owe many aspects of their celebration. Fastnacht is related to the Germanic word "fasten" (to fast, abstain from eating). Karneval is related to the Latin "carnem levare" (to remove meat).'

German Carnival Glossary⁶

3 *Ambition for the Arts* (Arts Council England 2003) lists our priorities. You can download this from our website: www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/ambition.php

4 *The World Samba glossary*: www.carnivalnet.org.uk

5 *Arthur Hardy's Mardi Gras Guide*, © Arthur Hardy. www.onroutecarnival.com

6 From www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/index.php



Venice Carnival mask. Photo: Pax Nindi

Carnival Roots

The roots of the Carnival as we know it today were planted [in the 1790s] when the French arrived in Trinidad ... [They] brought with them the pre-Lenten season festivities in the form of Carnival or "farewell to the flesh" ... Trinidad's Carnival consisted of dinners, balls, hunting parties and outdoor picnics ... It was a time for mimicry as many of the elite class adopted the look and persona of servants ... the slaves, who were prohibited by law to partake, became eager onlookers who also mocked their masters in secrecy.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the aristocratic and exclusive character of Carnival dissipated and the festival transformed into an affair for everyone. The emancipated slaves took the celebration to the streets and participated in what was known as the Canboulay or Cannes Brulees – a parody of dramatic events in plantation life, where ex-slaves adopted the personas of plantation masters by wearing the white masks, while other participants enacted the oppression by wearing padlocked chains... It was a time where processions of the people revelled through the streets with lit torches, singing songs and in disguise. Carnival provided an opportunity for both whites and blacks to find merriment and a sort of vicarious liberation by imitating each other⁷.

Arts Council England's definition of 'carnival arts'

In this strategy – and in line with current practice and our experience in supporting the artform – we define 'carnival arts' as:

- a carnival event that involves a procession or series of events with all or some of the elements of costume, dance, music and 'floats' or mobile constructions. There are often opportunities for ticketed performances and prizes for all or any of the elements that make up the event
- a mas band or carnival club – usually led by a bandleader – that may feature the main 'King', 'Queen', 'Prince' and 'Princess' costumes followed by one or more sections of supporting participants. Each section may have between 25 and 80 participants in costumes relating to the chosen theme of the band. In Samba these sections could be as large as 2,000 participants

In Caribbean and English style carnivals music for the procession is normally staged on a float equipped with pre-recorded music, a steel band or other type of live band. The band may also 'march' with the dancers or masqueraders. This is often the case with Latin American style carnivals (samba) and English style carnivals (marching bands). Some Soca DJs are taking advantage of new technology by playing music from a laptop using MP3s or other music compression formats.

Community participation is an important part of most carnivals and carnival bands – from conception to final presentation. Many bands involve the community in artistic decisions – for example in making costumes.

⁷ www.visittnt.com/codn2k5/content.asp?s=2&p=4

A brief history of carnival⁸

Almost all cultures have something like a carnival event in their calendar. But Caribbean, African, Latin American and Asian carnival artforms heavily influence many contemporary carnivals in the UK today.

In late Medieval European society a feast called the 'Feast of Fools' was celebrated in the four days leading up to Lent. In Italy during the sixteenth century carnival developed as a series of masquerade balls encouraging the wearing of masks and costumes. In France *Mardi Gras* developed from traditional celebrations held on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. (The phrase *Mardi Gras* means Fat Tuesday in French, from the custom of using all the fat in the home before Lent.) Carnival festivities in the UK originally developed from pagan rituals. Some were later adopted as landmark events in the Christian calendar, and others – like the May Day celebrations – kept their pagan roots.

In colonial times as their masters celebrated pre-Lent festivities, West Africa slaves shipped to the Caribbean were allowed to carry out their own traditions of storytelling, drumming and dance. Carnival began in Trinidad as masked balls hosted by the colonists. These balls developed a strong African influence through *Cannes Brulees* (French for burnt canes), a celebration linked to the burning of sugar cane as slaves walked to neighbouring plantations to help with the work.

With the abolition of slavery in the early 19th century, it was inevitable that celebratory events would develop to mark the newfound freedom of the slaves. These events led to the birth of the African-Caribbean carnivals we know today. Carnival in Brazil – even under Portuguese colonial rule – was already an established annual event after the abolition of slavery. Portuguese settlers in Brazil allowed the African community to join in the celebrations. Carnival arts continued to grow during the 20th century in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Events inspired by the Trinidad carnival began to develop in the Western world in the 1960s, particularly in cities with an immigrant Caribbean population. Caribana in Toronto, Labour Day in New York, Notting Hill Carnival in London and carnivals in Leicester, Nottingham, Reading and Manchester were all inspired by the Trinidad carnival.



Notting Hill Carnival Roadshow. Photo: Omar Elhouni

⁸ This chapter refers to the following two publications: *Globalization and the Trinidad Carnival: Diaspora, Hybridity, and Identity in Global Culture*, Keith Nurse (Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies, 1999) Chapter 13.4: pages 661-690 and *Carnival In England: An investigation into the history of carnival and current policy towards carnival arts, in the context of producing a carnival in the south east*, Daniel Bernstein (2001.)

The growth of carnival arts

Carnival arts in the UK

The use of carnival arts in the opening ceremonies of high profile cultural and sporting events – such as the millennium celebrations at the Dome, the Queen's Golden Jubilee, the World Cup and the Olympics – is now a common occurrence and exposes the artform to a worldwide television audience.

Carnival organisations and individuals in the UK⁹ are now collaborating with theatres, directors and writers to create carnival productions for indoor performances. *Carnival Messiah*, a carnival-based theatre production, sold out for two weeks at the Yorkshire Playhouse in 2001. Having premiered in Trinidad in 2002, the show will now run on Broadway. Since 1883 the Bridgwater Carnival has hosted successful carnival concerts prior to carnival day. These concerts run for 13 weeks, attracting audiences of more than 5,000 each year. They also help to recruit the 3,000 participants and volunteers of the main carnival.

Sponsors and local authorities are also seeking to involve carnival arts in high profile events and initiatives. For example Leeds City Council encouraged the Leeds Carnival to present their Queens' Carnival Costumes Gala in the Millennium Square. This is now an annual event in Leeds. Luton Borough Council was responsible for the creation of the Luton Carnival Trust and the Luton Carnival.

In 2002 and 2003 sponsor Western Union invested over half a million pounds to support a UK wide initiative, Carnival On De Road. Originally a New Audiences¹⁰ project funded by the Arts Council, Western Union – through On De Road – was able to offer support to 11 regional carnival events and a carnival touring company. Western Union recognised how carnival arts can help to reach diverse communities.

The *On Route* International Carnival Conference held in 2003 brought together Carnival practitioners from all over the world for two days of debate and discussion. The conference allowed artists to network with international organisations and secure work outside the UK. It was instrumental in changing the way Caribbean and English style carnivals in the UK relate to each other and opened up new opportunities for collaborations. For example the English style Kendal Torchlight Carnival in Cumbria now features regionally based Caribbean style carnival groups. A consortium was established by the Bridgwater Carnival (the oldest carnival in England), Nostalgia (London's oldest steel band), the Manchester School of Samba and London's major carnival club – Masquerade 2000, to produce a project called *10 x 40*. This project celebrated 40 years of the Notting Hill Carnival in 2004 and will celebrate 400 years of the Bridgwater carnival in 2005.

The growth of festivals and the trend towards including carnival processions within their programming is another important element of the promotion of carnival arts in the UK.

⁹ These organisations include Kinetika Art International (www.kinetika.co.uk), Mahogany Community Ventures (www.mahoganycarnival.com), Rampage Carnival Club (www.rampagecc.co.uk), South Connections Carnival Band and Yaa Asantewaa Carnival Group (www.yaaasant.demon.co.uk).

¹⁰ The aims of the New Audiences Programme are to encourage as many people as possible, from all backgrounds and walks of life, to participate in and benefit from the arts. www.artscouncil.org.uk/newaudiences



Yaa Asantewaa Carnival Club. Photo: Pax Nindi

Arts Council England and carnival arts

Arts Council England has a history of funding Caribbean and Latin American carnival disciplines such as Masquerade, Soca on the road, Steelpan, Calypso and Samba.

Annual established carnivals attract large numbers of participants and spectators from the local community and beyond. Attendance figures at carnivals around the UK have grown significantly each year.

Notting Hill Carnival is a national event capable of attracting an audience of two million over two days of the August bank holiday. Carnivals in Luton, Bridgwater, Kendal and High Wycombe attract between 30,000 and 200,000 people annually. Luton and Leeds are the largest carnivals after Notting Hill, attracting 150,000 and 200,000 people respectively each year¹¹.

In the UK there are over 300 samba groups and over 70 carnival events. There are more than 60 carnival groups in London alone and on the Isle of Wight – host of the second oldest English Carnival – there are over 17 carnival events¹².

Carnival has benefited nationally from our approach of encouraging risk taking and the wider application of carnival arts. For example:

- carnival artists are securing commissions from schools, international promoters and commercial companies as a result of using the internet and networking. For example, Mas O Rama and Metronome Steel Band were commissioned (through exposure on our Carnivalnet website¹³) to participate in the 1998 World Cup celebrations
- our International Artists Fellowships¹⁴ have supported artists to spend time in Miami, Trinidad and Brazil to improve their carnival skills. One artist returned from Trinidad to create old style mas costumes which toured nationally, attracting sponsorship from Western Union. Another artist based at Miami International Carnival concentrated on developing marketing skills. On his return he set up a link between a Miami based marketing company and the Notting Hill Carnival
- touring grants have allowed a number of carnival groups to tour their work nationally and internationally. Yaa Asantewaa toured *Yaaafrikan* nationally and to Denmark and Germany. Kinetika Arts International toured *Din Shuru* nationally and was commissioned to establish Kolkata's first Caribbean influenced carnival event in 2003

We are keen to ensure that carnival continues to flourish as an artform and that it reaches as wide an audience as possible. This strategy sets out our aims over the next two years (between 2005 and 2007) to support carnival.

11 www.luton.gov/carnival and www.leedscivictrust.org.uk/news0702spirit

12 www.islandbreaks.co.uk/events/carnivals

13 www.carnivalnet.org.uk

14 Arts Council England's International Artists Fellowship programme was set up in 2001 to support individual artists across the art forms to undertake research abroad without the constraints of immediate production demands. It enables artists to research and experiment while working alongside other international artists and within different cultural contexts.



Samba Encounter in Brighton. Photo: Pax Nindi