



THE DIASPORA CARES!

The Guyanese Diaspora in the 70s in the USA was very much an adhoc group comprising small stringbands and known singers along with a handful of thespians who produced plays at various schools and church halls.

I recall a gathering of Guyanese patriots at the Brooklyn Museum, which was reminiscent of the true Guyanese heritage experience. We were a small group of interested Guyanese who met to discuss the possibility of introducing to the Diaspora, the Guyana Folk Festival, which has its roots in Guyana having been organized by The Guyana Broadcasting Corporation.

Such was the birth of the Guyana Cultural Association with Carol Bagot, Claire Goring, Negla Brandis, Ela & Colin Moore, Faye Fraser, Patricia Trim, Malcolm Hall and several others discussing the initiative with Senator John Sampson.

The idea took hold and brought together many voices of Guyanese living in USA and inspired GCA to hold the first Guyana Folk Festival in the USA 25 years ago!

One of our original events was held at the Brooklyn Children's Museum. The Production was staged against a backdrop of a Stabroek "big" Market set, designed and constructed by the late Godfrey Chin. Thirty-six Guyanese stalwarts who made contributions to Guyanese cultural heritage were honored.

The following year Dave Martins, A.A. & recipient of a GCA Lifetime Achievement Award and his internationally acclaimed Tradewinds were the musical headliners. As memorable as the day was, it rained tremendously, however, it did not deter the attendees as it was a sold-out event.

Additionally, a fund-raising Awards Ceremony & Dance, featuring Dave and his Group, was held in Brooklyn with Wordsworth Mc Andrew, A.A. & GCA Lifetime Awardee presenting the Awards.

The Children's Summer Workshops engaged youth in plating maypole, ring games, folk songs and dances.

The Symposium provided a forum for Preserving & Promoting Guyanese Culture. Kwe Kwe, an African- Guyanese premarital ritual and celebration became a rallying point for those wanting to be more engaged in Guyanese Folk traditions.

The Guyana Cultural Association of NY then made a strategic decision to become registered as a Not-for-profit Organization and with the help of Corporate Consultant Ron Carlton, GCA became a registered 501(c)(3) organization, August 2007.

As a curator of Guyanese Culture in the USA, The Guyana Cultural Association of NY Inc. formalized their annual offerings as follows: -

- An Awards Ceremony- granting merit to Guyanese involved in promoting and supporting our cultural heritage.
- A Symposium to discuss and highlight the varied cultures of our people.
- A Performing Arts Series
- A Festival of Film A Literary Hang
- The Caribbean Heritage Summer Workshop Series
- A Kwe-kwe (queh-queh) Night to showcase our African premarital ritual that has produced many traditional songs and of course

Our premier event, Family Fun Day and Children's Village, highlighting various Guyanese arts, crafts and culinary delights through a cadre of vendors.

The early years provided GCA with an opportunity to engage Guyanese at home and drew the attention of the country's leadership, creating an

opportunity for a visit to Folk Festival by Guyanese Leaders. Groups from Guyana were invited to perform at the Festival and included the National School of Dance, Masqueraders and Indigenous Groups. They shared the stage with local groups from Queens, NY, exhibiting the traditional Friday Maticoor Night, a Hindu wedding ritual and the Guyanese artistic community in Canada, thanks to Kenton Wyatt and Andrea Douglas.

The Symposium and Literary Hang, one of GCA's premier events has been held at Borough of Manhattan Community College, Medgar Evers College, Columbia University and other locations as well as in Georgetown, thanks to Dr. Vibert Cambridge, Dr Juliet Emanuel, Dr Dawn Ford and others.

The Labor Day weekend provided the ideal opportunity as many Guyanese came to Brooklyn and enjoyed a weeklong celebration of Guyanese heritage events. The prestigious Awards Ceremony, co-chaired by Ronald Lammy, Tangerine Clarke, Claire Patterson-Monah and Verna Walcott-White and held on the Wednesday prior to Labor Day at the Borough Hall of Brooklyn, paid homage to the pioneers of our arts and cultural heritage. The Friday was a hit with the vibrant Kwe-Kwe Ceremony coordinated by Verna Walcott-White and Rose October-Edun.

As the years went by, the team recognized the need for passing the culture on, a transference of skills, leading to the formation of the Caribbean Heritage Summer Workshop Series hosted by core members of GCA and concluding with a Public Performance.

GCA is proud of several outstanding productions, some of which are:-

- "IS WE TING "a high quality CD compilation of authentic Guyanese music, spearheaded by Ron Lammy, Ken Corsbie and other members of GCA.
- A series of dramatic plays written by Francis Quamina Farrier and directed by Maurice Braithwaite. These productions provided stage opportunities for Guyanese thespians in the diaspora.
- The GCA Folk Festival magazine helped to tell our story and maintained our contribution to the wider community wherever they resided.
- A big gain for Folk Festival was the collaboration with various High School Alumni Associations which helped to mobilize Guyanese throughout the diaspora.

As we celebrate 25 years it makes me proud of the many volunteers, who dedicated their skills and time from the infancy of the organization to make GCA the proud Not For Profit Cultural land mark it has become . We are very proud of our traditions: kwe-Kwe, masquerade, maticoor, mari-mari all held together by the many strands that make us one!

History belongs to the people as so elegantly stated by AJ Seymour .

May the soul of our founding Cultural Director
Claire Ann Goring M.S.

Rest well with the ancestors!

Much blessings to GCA

Rev. Malcom A Hall
Past President (2002-2011)



Reflections: Awards & Prizes

BY RONALD H LAMMY

CHAIR GCA AWARD

COMMITTEE 2005 - 2021

► The *Guyana Cultural Association of New York* was founded in 2000 to further the cause of illuminating and preserving Guyanese Heritage characteristics. The GCA organization initiated an identification and acclamation process for contributors of outstanding stature to Guyana's arts and culture. They were present from scores of prior decades. Its Award program has evolved into a continuous independent presenter of exceptional accomplishments in the homeland and in the Diaspora. There have been over four hundred Awardees from the inception including international participants, in its global audience.

Keen observers will grasp that there were significant changes in the ascendance from its formation to the Awards' highly regarded current status. Notable new adjustments were made to the Cultural Enabler and the Youth Awards designations as shown below.

- Guyana Cultural Association Lifetime Achievement Award
- Guyana Cultural Association Exemplary Award
- Guyana Cultural Association Award
- Guyana Cultural Association **Cultural Enabler /Business Partner Award**
- Claire Ann Goring M.S. Youth Awards

The Cultural Enabler/Business Partner category is an expansion of the 2006 co-chair's recommendation. The title was proposed to assert that individuals and entities are devotedly

instrumental in nurturing and promoting creativity.

In 2024 the Youth Awards of accolades to young Guyanese offspring was renamed Claire Ann Goring M.S. Youth Awards. It was done in tribute to our Culture Giant.

Previous careful acknowledgements of individuals by name, similarly, gave recognition to two Guyanese whose attributes were deeply impactful. The Godfrey Chin prize for Heritage Journalism rewards writers whose published works promote understanding and appreciation of the diverse strands of Guyanese traditions. The Derry Etkins Memorial Prizes give recognition to excellence in musical composition, performance, and preservation as well as service and commitment to sustainable music education programs.

The Awards recognition philosophy provides a foundation in also supporting the obscure, relegated citizens through a reference to facts. Among its guiding principles from the formative transition of presenting "All ah we" is that it exalts our values that fortify the organization's purpose.

In the early years of the launch a quantum leap was made in establishing a formal decisive Awards Committee with co-chairs and other volunteers of respected credentials. It implemented selection criteria proposed by a co-chair based on best practices conducted in the non-profit sector. **Transparency was a core element that was embedded in the selection process.** Award nominations were then, and now,

evaluated on consideration of seven criteria: Originality; Scope; Impact/Influence; Integration; Pioneering Spirit; Challenges and Achievements. All are actively measured twenty-one years later.

Among the definitive milestones to a sustainable endurance in depicting the honoring procedure is the Awards statuette. It is a unique, seminal, wooden sculpture that represents the GCA Logo. The idea was posited by the Awards Chair to demonstrate unbounded independence. The Cultural Director creatively collaborated with the **Woodwork Artist to craft** what has been proudly presented since 2016 and cherished by honorees.

The Awards is an annual event where Guyanese nationals receive the Lifetime Achievement Award; individuals are acknowledged with the Exemplary Award, and the Guyana Cultural Association Award. Individuals, organizations, and commercial entities are accorded the Guyana Cultural Association Cultural Enabler Award. Youth awardees are either born in Guyana, or have at least one parent who is Guyanese, or of Guyanese descent. **We seek to thoughtfully commend those** whose work demonstrates features of perseverance that led to transcendence from a history of hurt to comfortableness that enriched the Guyanese society.

The GCA Awards is the international standard bearer for recognizing and acclaiming Guyanese creativity in multiple forms. Its position today is held for two decades.