

## Jolly Joseph to Patty pan.

A docu-fiction on the evolution of post colonial commuting in Jamaica.

Mini van, mini van through Jamaica.

One drive a dozen conducta.

This period of transition from the Jamaica omnibus service to the informal privatisation of commuting in urban Jamaica in the late seventies to early eighties, was the death knell for fairly decent, orderly commuting practices.

General Trees summed it up quite well in his song from which the opening lines are drawn.

The virtual anarchy, decline in self respect, public abuse of children and the elderly, racketeering, pick pocketing, road rage hustling, public sexual assault and perversion, traffic order violations and state agent bribery and corruption, found their birth place in such an era. Public commuting would of necessity be the fertile land mass for the growth and development of this so called "sub culture". Some inept descriptors call it society, s "under belly", but if raggedy commuting of your public human resources is an under belly, please show me your society.

Secular music once termed "rags" songs once fitted the description of sub culture when measured up against a state ordered acceptance of what was good music, where is reggae today?

Since my quest is to highlight the evolution of public commuting in Jamaica from Jolly Joseph [J.O.S.to](#) Patty pan and beyond, I pick a few actors for the then new dispensation, the Patty pan era for a ride from downtown parade Kingston to uptown Constant Spring on a Monday morning.

Jolly bus had pulled up it's final brakes on business in urban Jamaica, citing insolvency, another word for bankruptcy, this had been phasing and pending for some time.

"Mawnin boss" his name was Kevin o/c Sprakit. He turned up to meet with Mr Levy who was bus owner and first driver, you would not dare give him an alias just yet.

Sprakit's good morning was ignored, that is the driver in waiting.

"Bwaay, fuss mawnin an'yuh late eeh" he chided Sprakit who was penitent. His rag in back pocket and a big sweat towel on his shoulder stated a long sweaty day of round trips to come. Miss Becky, who was spouse Levy, and conductress, chimed in to counter the reprimand of Sprakit: "Das why nuff a unoo nuh mek it ina life, unoo no know time".

The legitimacy of the vehicle to carry passengers was evident by the red plate affixed (PPV), route undefined, and between drivers, conductress and a few converging passengers it was determined that the destination was Constant Spring. (granted, that could change even while on route, or journey might even not be completed, depends)

Sprakit positioned himself to assert, after all, he was. both sideman 1 and driver in waiting.

"Clear di bus door" he said with almost imperial authority.

"Di bus a travel Crass Road?" That was a touter known as Heckla, Sprakit eyed him briefly, then decided not to remark. Hekla for all intents and purposes, was either a prospective passenger, or potential sideman 2, if he proved useful.

Hekla it was who started quoting the unofficial new fare structure. Five cent go a Craas "Five cent go a Craas Road seven cent Half Wey Tree an ten cent go a Spring"

Hekla continues, "membra seh a stage fare bizniz". just like in Jolly times.

Any incorporation of Hekla, had to be by the rest of the crew, seems he was getting there. "By nex week di ticket book dem wi print" remarked Miss Becky.

Patty pan was a smaller version to the big country bus, more favoured for shorter distances for smaller commuter groups. It was in the category of "may reach" which was tolerable round town. The larger Mail bus that left at 5am to deep rural, had to be more formidable.

The passengers converge to board the smoking rattling contraption that replaced Jollibus. One traveller remarks: "Unoo naw form di line?" another retorted "which line?" Anuh Jolly Joseph dis, a private man bus" Levy proceeded round to the driver's door to honk his horn, and to maintain an unnecessary rev. The passengers were semi organised, but still eager to get in, tripping over each other, while Miss Becky, the conductress and equally untrained business partner and crew handled her bib (a cloth apron in which one collects money).

The single entry/exit door on a Patty pan had to be monitored, ten bodies would squash their way in. Hekla and Sprakit intervened: "Unoo naw pop dung di man bus an'tep pon di ole people an'pikiney dem, line up" The camaraderie between Levy, Sprakit, and Hekla was building on account of that "buss loading effort", Miss Becky was busy with her bib.

Hekla was a more avid campaigner on this first day, than even Sprakit, he it was that hinted that he was not only prospective sideman, but protectorate of Levy's budding P'pan enterprise; the pay structure, if any would be established if he lasted round trip, double trip, or into day two, depends.

..The rattling contraption posing as a commuter bus throttles on, the ventilation is poor, and the morning heat is augmented by both the sun at seven, and the growing body mass in a small enclosed [space.lt](#) was still not time for "take off", both Sprakit and Hekla urged passengers: "go dung eena di passage, wol heap a space roun' a di back". By this time, a sweating Miss Becky held her own at the onslaught from her position blocking about a third of the entry/exit space.

A "well spoken" young lady asks: "Where's my ticket?" she wanted accountability to continue as in Jollibus days. Miss Becky and her eye the writing which says that one should demand a ticket upon paying and entering. "Mi seh by nex' week di ticket dem wi print, yuh neva hear?" Levy intervenes; "a di ticket a carry yuh, or di bus?" A few passengers chuckle, the young lady is pressured and embarrassed and gives up. (ominous) "Mek she step back, an nuh waste people time" ridicules obsequious Hekla

The now crammed P'pan is now the semblance of a mni gas chamber, but the intensity will be less when it's in motion.

The pretty young lady who gave up the ticket challenge, takes out her fan. "Heaven help us under this new system" she laments "Jollibus really won, t be back out?"

As P'pan ambles off, the two "outermost" passengers are Hekla and Sprakit, the door slightly pulled in to observe the law on body protrusion, but for how long?

The sign that Hekla was gaining acceptance basically as one who employed himself, lay in the fact that he did not pay at this time.

Sprakit, who would be second boss, when it was that he took the wheel, seemed to be almost taking notes on the "runnings", cause between himself and the rest of that bus crew, the lesson of a degraded and demeaning urban transport mode of operations would begin with them, and span generations.

Did I make it sound like this bus was the only point of focus in the burgeoning P'pan era? Remember that as a secret writer, my focus is on this particular bus and those players for this morning. It's a whole aggregation of new players, the bus I'm on is :Sufferer's Time, it is written on both sides and on the front. In another line, the name of the other throttling P'pan is CAUTION.

SUFFERER'S TIME pulls out with numerous stops expected for entry and exit before another "pause" in Cross Roads, I'm on board.

Sufferer's Time; the vehicle, was aptly named for the new era of urban commute, cause it was held, debated and bandied about, that the average who was not at the commanding heights of the economy in a stratified three class society of upper, middle and lower, did not have a ghost

of a chance for entrepreneurial self development, a slice of the pie so to speak, if chances if chances like this escaped him

Public commuting was going private, and with government having failed at keeping it viable, it was small man's time. There was a helter skelter franchise procurement that was equally ad hoc and tenuous. For all its failings, there was a sense of organization, discipline, training and process characterising the Jollibus era. One received a ticket upon entering at the front door, as distinct from the rear door for exit, and there was also an emergency exit. One would ring the bell for a stop which could only be at a designated marked bus stop. The route number and destination were always clearly displayed. Standing on the steps was unheard of, and the doors had to be closed while the bus was in motion. Chivalry was not quite dead, so the practice of giving up a seat to the elderly, or male giving up to females was still in vogue. Children were well protected, and any abuse would meet strong collective reprimand by a gentler society.

As Sufferer's Time P'pan rambled out of base, it was as if the entire passenger cohort counted each gear shift as Levy strenuously rammed them in coming up Orange Street: "Yuh a wan inspecta sah?" a curious passenger seeing me scribbling in my notebook queried. "No" I replied, "a student" I could not disclose my ghost writer status to put anyone on alert about my quest. Levy gave a little sweet foot (a rev of the engine between gear changes) as he geared down to make his first stop, which was not for exiting passengers, but rather for pick up in an already well loaded bus. Both Hekla and Sprakit stepped from their key position on the bus step, near where Miss Becky sat, this was to clear the way for the boarding passengers, who pay, then squeeze their way into the crowd, finding a section of rail to hold onto, or the back of a seat. Sprakit reboards, with Hekla following as if in pursuit.

Now Miss Becky had fallen down badly in the ticket accounting department, but was not going to be faulted for not dutifully ringing off the bus with that barely audible buzzer that was an irritant. Levy belched the noisy "rattle tattle" off again, wincing with each gear change as if the full weight of bus and passengers lay on his shoulders. Between himself and the bus, the statement is: "mi ole but mi nuh cole". "Step it boss" Sprakit urges for good measure, after all, it was the dawn of an era when driver distraction would become the norm as against in Jolly times.

Stop number two is coming up just as Levy takes the prodding and is warming up, "burrp" the buzzer rings signalling passenger exiting. Between gearing down, sweet foot and sporadic braking, the annoyance for some and the fascination of others builds. "Mek him haffi a jerk up jerk up di ole bus so eh" (passenger1) "Dem yah vehicle no tan good, dem nuffi drive it soh" (passenger2) as the inertia pushes them forward and onto each other. "If dem hangle di Jollibus an' passenger so, yuh coulda report dem" (passenger3). In every act of indiscipline or poor social conduct, there are always some who are complicit; majority usually holds. "Nuh tek di bus den, tek taxi" (passenger4) "A pop some a dem a pop style, dem have kyar?" (passenger5) "Wey di man mus 'do, drive like a slow coach and cry excuse fi tap di bus?" (passenger6) "Yuh nuh si seh a Patty pan wi eena" (passenger7). Laughter erupts, the crew is not amused. Owing to the fact that passenger 7's comment was hilarious and not seemingly committed to either acceptance or dissent, it was a dead heat between the annoyed and the complicit.

I read the T shirt that a quite attractive young lady is wearing, she is seated beneath where I'm standing. I feel certain she can read, so I press a little as to whether she is aware of what is written on it: "I'm a skunk" she quotes. I press further: "Do you know the animal named the skunk?" "No" she says, "but mi hear seh dem stink". I rest my case, desist, and silently ponder the question of self esteem now and for the foreseeable future.

There would be three more regular stops en route to Cross Roads, and from Jollibus times, Cross Roads would be another major halt or bay for exiting, boarding and continuing passengers.

Levy applies a sustained loud rev to the now neutralized bus at stop as if to reassure one that the bus is power packed, and that P'pan is not too dusty or is anyone's whipping boy. He seems not to care too much about the fumes, but the uncomfortable passengers do. These are people now torn between acceptance of a new mode, or rejection of a diminishing standard. "Gwaan nuh driva" voices demand as Levy selects again and applies the rev, using an outstretched arm as an indicator that the bus was pulling out again.

The bus Caution that we had left at bay, sped past, leaving noise and smoke in its wake. I think I detected a missing section of the sliding window as it passed. This of course is ok for ventilation. Presumably the defect would warrant the use of a piece of celtex (a fibre glass like sheeting) that would be inserted in the space in rainy times. As handy as the crew would prove with this make shift device to keep out water, the bus would still meet the standard of "dry weather" bus. Caution would quite likely have done a "clean up" ahead of Sufferer's Time, the only difference is that it would be going to Papine. Only short distance passengers en route before or destined to Cross Roads would have been lost by Levy's bus, but so is the game, besides, the route to Constant Spring is a much travelled one, so the prospects were great. The commuting public well new of the lengthy delays at all central stops, this was true even of Jollibus times. The standing, continuing passeng

passengers would be eager to relieve their feet as some disembarked. Today could be a hectic yet smooth run for quite a few trips back and forth, the cents do add up providing there is no unforeseen setbacks like a puncture or any other breakdown. The days fortunes hinge on this, and the crew is hopeful. A jollibus break down was infrequent, and in such a circumstance, a quick replacement would occur with despatch.

They say there's many a slip between cup and lip, and no delay is envisioned, however Caution must have missed the police spot check just in the York Park area, near fire station. I myself could never recall a jollibus pull over by cops, but in this game changer, this was going to be a regular feature in privately run, public transportation for so many reasons. The burly policeman makes his way into the path of the bus and signals Levy to pull to the left and park, which he does unhesitatingly cause this is how the law works. He approaches the window by Levy's door, requesting all relevant documents to include his driver's licence. Levy is undaunted as he and the officer exchange pleasant greetings for morning. The fate of the commuters would be in the balance if there were irregularities, cause policing in this time is polite but strict. The big cop which who was a motor cycle cop because of the helmet that he wore, peered at the papers, takes a cursory look at the passenger cohort, then signals him on to everyone's relief.

Its a long morning from terminus to first bay, which is only two stops away. The morning traffic also builds, cause it's peak time. For reasons that are clear, P'pan stands out as a kind of new absurdity among the complement of other vehicles occupying road space.

P'pan signals the way forward for what could be for the long haul, middle passage like commute for urban folk.

Levy, Becky, Sprakit and Hekla will be trail blazers to the new demeaning trend, untrained but imperious as they man that microcosm of state travel which the working class will not be able to live without. Sufferer's time pulls into bay for that indefinite pause in Cross Roads which will be at the leisure and pleasure of the P'pan crew.

By Samuel Carty