

## The Notting Hill Carnival

This great festival began initially from the energies of black immigrants from the Caribbean, in particular, Trinidad, where the Carnival tradition is very strong, and from people living locally, who dreamed of creating a festival to bring together the people of Notting Hill, most of who were facing racism, lack of working opportunities and poor housing conditions resulting in a general low self-esteem.



There had been racial tensions in the 1950s and black people were subjected to constant pressures. Dances were organized in halls in North London, where black people could come together freely. At the same time steel band music was being played, each Sunday at the Colherene Pub in Earls Court, by Trinidadians who had immigrated to the UK. From this, evolved the idea of inviting the steel band to take part in a street festival in Notting Hill, to encourage people, mainly children, both black and white, to come to the streets and be social and artistic. The first time was in 1964 and was an enormous success. Once the black people of Notting Hill heard the first tunes of the steel band, they immediately came out to the streets expressing themselves in appreciation of the music and togetherness and remembering the Carnival back home. It was a great opportunity to dance and perform in the streets of London free of all pressures.



In Trinidad, during the days of slavery, black people (slaves) were forbidden to play music and wear costumes, apart from when the traditional imported European Carnival took place, six weeks before Easter. On those occasions their participation was limited to providing entertainment for their masters. It was also known that slaves were forbidden to be in the streets after dark unless they were accompanying their masters. When the laws were repealed and freedom from slavery was announced in 1833, the slaves took to the streets in song and dance, indulging in their culture and using their artistic skills to mimic their masters and the system that had them

enslaved for so long. Consequently, slaves would dress like their masters, powder their faces to look like them or make masks to resemble them, distorting images and features.

These celebrations of freedom provided the only opportunity for black people to express their feelings about their slave masters and they quickly developed the art of costume making, creating fantastic ensembles which satirised their situation as Africans, transported to the Caribbean to become slaves. In Trinidad the tradition continued, going from strength to strength, as people from all over the island began to take part and associate themselves with Carnival, the skills of costume making, steel drumming and calypso became what is today, a huge festival of arts and culture, of which Trinidadians everywhere are justifiably proud, drawing on all aspects of their cultural heritage from Africa and Europe. The Notting Hill Carnival welcomes tourists and other visitors and has as its motto "EVERY SPECTATOR IS A PARTICIPANT".

Today, over 2 million people attend the Notting Hill carnival. It happens in August and lasts for two days. Many tourists go to London just to see the carnival.