



CALYPSO BY PATRICIA MESCHINO

Fiery Queen

At 68, Calypso Rose Is Still Winning New Fans

More than 55 years after she began performing in the calypso tents of Trinidad, pioneering singer Calypso Rose has released a new album aimed at taking her music to a more diversified international audience.

"Calypso Rose" revamps several traditional calypso and faster-paced soca classics culled from Rose's extensive catalog, with strains of R&B and Caribbean-flavored jazz. The album was released in October in France on the Maturity Music label, co-founded by Jean Michel Gibert in Trinidad and Paris-based Thierry Panel, former senior A&R director of EMI France. Distribution is by leading European label World Village/Harmonia Mundi.

The album will be released in other European countries in March, while the U.S. release is scheduled for May; all 12 tracks are currently available

for download purchase on Trinidadtunes.com, and for a limited time the jaunty ska single "Israel by Bus" can be downloaded for free.

"This is a whole new chapter opening up for me in my senior years," says Rose, 68, in an interview in her Queens, N.Y., home. Her living room is cluttered with trophies, plaques and numerous citations, each attesting to her preeminence in the calypso genre, and by extension, her ambassadorial role for calypso's birthplace, the southern Caribbean Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. "The arrangements on this album are open to a wider scope of listeners," she says, "and when we launched in France, I performed in front of thousands of people who have never seen me before."

On Jan. 11, Rose made her debut at the sixth annual GlobalFest, a showcase of world music artists held in New York as part of the Assn. of Performing Arts Presenters conference. During a 50-minute set Rose

dazzled the talent bookers, tour agents and other tastemakers with her bold, occasionally bawdy stage persona, delivering among other selections her best-known hit, "Fire in Meh Wire" (which has been recorded in eight languages by various artists), and providing an overdue authenticity to Nat "King" Cole's nod to calypso, "Calypso Blues."

"Calypso Rose is a jewel that hasn't been discovered in America," explains Shanta Thake, director of Manhattan's Joe's Pub, a co-producer of GlobalFest, "We felt this was a great opportunity to bring her to the forefront."

Born McArtha Sandy Lewis in Tobago, Rose was adopted by an aunt and uncle in Trinidad. She started performing there as a teenager in the 1950s when it was considered shameful for women to sing calypso. Performing provided Rose with the necessary confidence to overcome her severe stuttering; despite heated opposition from her family and vocifer-

ous protests from Trinidad's religious groups, she persevered and secured her several-decade-long reign as Calypso's queen.

She made history in 1977 as the first female to win Carnival's Road March title (which honors the most popular song) with "Tempo," and since 1978 she remains the only female to have captured Carnival's three top musical honors—Road March, National Calypso Queen and Calypso Monarch—in one year.

Rose returns to Trinidad in February to perform at several carnival shows and shoot a video for "Israel by Bus." She then heads to Tobago to film the documentary "Rose, the Calypso Diva," produced by Maturity Music, Dynamo Production (France), Maxcenars (Congo) and the Trinidad and Tobago Film Co.

"Through all of the criticisms I got, I have opened doors for Caribbean female artists," Rose reflects. "I have passed through hell, but thank God I am still here to give them fire." ■■■