

BIOGRAPHY

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THE STORY OF BING SERRÃO AND THE RAMBLERS

GUYANA, LONG BEFORE THE RAMBLERS

From 1950 / 53 - 1962, The Ramblers

THE ORIGINALS ... THE SEED

I begin with a summary of The Ramblers from the time we were very young teenagers 'fooling around' with attempting to make some sort of music, until up to 1962 when several members of the band had left Guyana, some emigrating to the U.K., others to Canada. Eventually, only Bing, Maurice and Vincent Xavier survived the exodus from the political unrest in Guyana.

As The Ramblers band was winding down, Bing and Maurice became involved with The Troubadours steel band. Later on they were members of the original Telstars group. Vincent Xavier also joined The Telstars as their Conga drum player and Albert Rodrigues played bongos.

The Ramblers last gig was at the G.F.C. Old Years (New Year's Eve) Night dance, December 31st., 1962 and in 1964 Bing and Maurice left Guyana to reside in Toronto, Canada. One week after they arrived in Toronto The Ramblers were re-established and played at a charity fundraiser organized by Harold Stevenson and Claude Vasconcellos. We are still playing out, but with a slight name change and are now known as Bing Serrão and The Ramblers.

This is the story of The Ramblers from my (Bing's) own point of view, beginning from when I was a young teenager, before The Ramblers were formed. Bernie and Maurice will have their own stories to tell, which I am sure will be just as interesting and exciting and probably more detailed and accurate. They both seem to be able to recall more detail of events than I do. Although, I am the one who will spend frustrating hours trying to figure out why I cannot find a pair of pliers or why there is a buzz coming from my guitar amplifier, their recollections of our experiences expanded the dynamics and the thrills of The Ramblers musical journey.

Bing, Maurice and Bernie are three Serrão brothers, the last of nine siblings, our ages spanning about five years. This age difference perhaps explains the extensive repertoire of music which we play and is perhaps the main reason why the band has survived for so many years. Even more remarkable, is the fact that we are brothers of simple, wonderful, not very well off parents. Our parents were Augustus (Gush) and Julia Serrão, who taught us to be respectful and decent, and that though there may be differences among us, there will be no serious 'fights' among family members.

I include here my own early teen recollection of the "seedling memories" going back to before the band known as The Ramblers was formed and became so well known in Georgetown, Guyana. I describe my own personal experiences which led to my involvement with music and events which began with the formation of a group of young teenagers, just for the fun of it, 'fooling around' with their own brand of musical 'entertainment'.

THE RAMBLERS IN GUYANA

I cannot imagine why or how the history of The Ramblers seemed to have become apparently extinct, even though we left Guyana during the mid 1960's. This is the group which revolutionized music performances in Guyana with their youthful energy and creativity. They changed the style of music and band composition. This is the beginning of the amplified guitar type of musicians in Guyana's history. One might say that this group represents the birth of a new generation of musicians in Guyana.

The equipment inventory of musicians influenced by this group was changed and included more amplified guitars and conga drums, bongos, scratchers (gueiros), electric basses, etc.. Pianos were replaced with keyboards. It also brought younger, budding vocalists to the forefront of this new way of performing. Truth be told, The Ramblers, The Telstars, The Combo 7, The Rhythmaires, The Casanovas, The young ones, and the Troubadours steel band seemed to be just one large group of friends, young friends, who played music because they loved to play music. There was a special sort of respect among members of these groups for each others' talent, and a true competitive, yet friendly approach to creating and producing this new kind of great music.

To properly research the story of The Ramblers in Guyana, one would have to access the entertainment section of the archives of British Guiana's / Guyana's Daily Chronicle, The Guyana Graphic, Evening Post, and The Daily Argosy starting from approximately 1950 / 1953 and onwards to 1962 when Bernie left for Toronto, Canada. These coverages, and especially those of the weekend issues, will provide the many articles on the performances of The Ramblers at fund raiser concerts, when we were sometimes referred to as The Serrão Brothers, and later as 'The Ramblers' when we played for weddings, private parties or Club parties at the G.C.C., G.F.C., Portuguese Club, E.I.C.C., Bookers Sports Club, Carib Hotel, and hotels and night clubs in Georgetown, and most of the Sugar Estates in Guyana.

When Bernie left Guyana, May 15th. 1962, Bing and Maurice played with The Troubadours steel band. Later on Maurice played with what was then the beginning of The Telstars. Then in 1963, on Friday, September 13th, when Clive Nobrega, just 15 years old, died as the result of a motor cycle accident. Bing was

asked to fill in for Clive at a gig on the next day at The Bamboo Gardens. Bing practised with the band all afternoon learning some of The Shadows numbers and getting accustomed to playing a solid guitar. I played that Saturday night for the first time as the lead guitarist for The Telstars.

Bing and Maurice left Guyana for Toronto on August 9th. 1964. Winston Duggin took over the lead guitar position and Bernard Rodrigues (Byron Flea) took over as bassist. Winston now resides and performs in Miami, Florida. In 2009 we were a part of The Telstars reunion appearance in Toronto. Bernard Rodrigues also had left to reside in Alberta, Canada but could not attend the reunion. I believe that I have the only original Telstars jacket, which we showed off at the reunion.

One could not relate the birth of The Ramblers unless we go back to my (Bing Serrão's) own very young life. Here, I try to describe how I and my brothers Bernie and Maurice and friends were influenced by certain events and by others who, only by the path which fate has laid out for us, helped, encouraged and influenced us in our endeavours. All of this resulted in our early teens involvement with music which finally led to the formation of The Ramblers. Our musical experiences during our years in Guyana were many, playing as The Ramblers until we emigrated to Toronto, Canada.

None of us could have predicted after The Ramblers stopped performing in Guyana in 1962 that Maurice and I would become a part of The Telstars band, or that The Ramblers band would experience a re-birth in 1964 in Toronto and regroup as Bing Serrão and The Ramblers. Now, in the year 2014, we are still performing and playing at dances and private parties, and at night spots and Caribbean restaurants in and around Toronto.

RADIO APPEARANCE .. not yet The Ramblers

Still in short pants on ZFY Radio Station

It is difficult for me to recall what circumstances led us to perform at ZFY Radio on the 'The Ovaltineees' show.

Below is the theme song lyrics (as I remember them) for 'We are the Ovaltineees'

We are the Ovaltinees, little boys and girls
Make your requests, we'll not refuse you
We are here just to amuse you
Would you like a song or music
Will you share our joy
At games and sports we're more than keen
More merrier children could be seen

Because we all drink Ovaltine
We're happy boys and girls

Know what ? A couple of times we came away with some Ovaltine biscuits or Ovaltine rusks as prizes for our effort ! .

The group would become a natural successor to The Serenaders, playing un-amplified and now on ZFY radio. We were not quite ready for private parties, but to be on the radio must have sounded exciting to us. We had been playing for many concerts and other functions for a while and now we were venturing into a new phase of the excitement. I recall playing on the same radio station, providing the musical accompaniment for a rendition of 'That lucky old sun' by Billy Ryan, a Guyanese singer who had returned from the U.K. to reside in Georgetown, Guyana. He also worked at Gun Fernandes store and the Blue Room restaurant in the back of the store, on Robb street.

PLAYING AT CONCERTS AND OTHER FUND RAISERS

One of my earliest recollections of public performances

So far, I believe that members of the group were Bing, Bernie, Romeo Rego and Ambrose De Souza.

In Guyana, as it is in the tropics, we did not get into wearing long pants (trousers) until usually about the age of sixteen. We had already been playing out at many functions in short pants, but a few performances at the C.Y.O. stand out especially in my mind.

On one of my first appearances at a concert at The C.Y.O. I was so nervous that my hands shook and my legs would not stand still. I was then only playing the mandolin, so it must have been in my really young days, and I had quite a time playing properly while trying to keep my nervous legs steady on the floor of the stage. Appearing on that same show was Dennis De Souza who later emigrated to Trinidad.

We were still teenagers, perhaps fourteen or fifteen, and we were performing at the Guild Club for a variety concert, another fund raiser for charity. The Guild club was always packed with attendees. For whatever the reason, we played on the floor of the hall, young guys still in short pants. I can recall that we played the Tennessee Waltz and the Peanut vendor and maybe another tune. The audience was so impressed with our performance that while applauding, they had to stand up to get a good look at us. For me, this was impressive enough to leave a mark in my memory.

Suffice to say that playing at little concerts for fund raising, and the

encouragement of the adults around us, were the vehicles which determined that The Ramblers were to spend most of their lives, actually the rest of their active lives, entertaining others. And it is good to remember that in life we are all buoyed by others, whether near or far, who will help to determine the path which this life holds for us. And though some may try to, clearly no one can boast of finishing the journey on their own steam. The energy that drives us to perform is created by those around us and the audience appreciation of our talent.

So we may say that there are many fortunate influences which led to the success of The Ramblers and I would say that it began with wonderful parents, great friends and well-wishers. Then there were the many others who cared enough to organize fund raisers for the less fortunate of society, which afforded us greater exposure to the public, ultimately resulting with a group of very young men becoming known as The Ramblers.

I would think that it was our radio performance, sponsored by Lee's Photo Studio which was the first really big boost for the band. The Ramblers played on Radio Demerara for about six years as The Ramblers for Lee's Photo Studio on the program Rhythm by The Ramblers on Saturday nights at 8:30, and also in the last two years as Stanvic and the Stardusters (6:30 on Tuesdays) for Joe Chin and Company, advertising Dewar's whisky.

Personalities at Radio Demerara about that time included, Ulric Gouveia, Rafiq Khan, Ayube Hamid Khan, Greg Poole (Canada), Lillian Fraser, Bertie Chancellor, Ed Fung (a good harmonica player), Olga Lopes-Seale, Tommy Rhodes, Adrian Robinson (Jamaica), George Quintal (engineer), Wilfred Holder, and Pat Cameron.

THE RAMBLERS FIRST PAID GIG

The Ramblers first paid gig for \$20.00 Guyana currency was at Church and Wellington Streets for Zebulum Pereira's 21st. birthday party. That same year Mr. William De Ryck booked us to play at a Black Tie Old Year's Dance at his home at Lamaha and Vlissengen Road. This is when Vincent Xavier and George Baldinick joined The Ramblers. Mr. De Ryck asked how much we would charge and Bernie told him \$30.00 Guyana Currency. The band members were Bing, Bernie, Romeo Rego, Vincent Xavier, Ambrose De Souza, George Baldinick, and Charlie Barkoy.

THE RAMBLERS - RADIO BROADCASTS

**Lee's Photo Studio Presents
'Rhythm by The Ramblers'.**

In 1955 Lee's Photo Studio sponsored a fifteen minute weekly evening programme over Radio Demerara, 8.30 p.m. Saturday evenings. The mandolin amplifier was the William Hussein built 10 watts amplifier.

The theme song for this segment was the baião 'ANNA'. (one of two of the most popular Ramblers renditions, the other was 'Maldito Celos').

After the second year the Saturday night show 'Rhythm by The Ramblers' was increased to half an hour.

Members of The Ramblers on Lee's Photo Studio programme were as follows: Bing Serrão (amplified mandolin), Bernie Serrão (Lead / rhythm guitar), Maurice Serrão ('banjo'), Albert Rodrigues (rhythm guitar), Royston Charan (single conga drum), George Baldwinick (maracas), Malcolm DeSouza (bongos) Charlie Barkoy (3/4 upright-Bass). This is where I also got the chance to play a few tunes on the Alto Sax, such as 'Brazil', and a few others on the electric steel guitar before 'giving up' on both instruments..

THE VIBRAPHONE

The vibraphone sat in Al Seales' Gems Record Store for some time and probably was previously used in some of Al Seales recordings, when The Ramblers bought it not knowing who would play it . It was a 'Premier' vibraphone. This was probably in 1960 when Vic Gonsalves had recently joined the band and could play first pan, accordion and piano, so he was chosen to play the vibraphone. This was probably the first time a vibraphone was used in groups playing this new kind of music in Guyana.

NOW, ABOUT 'STANVIC AND THE STARDUSTERS'

The vibraphone provided The Ramblers with a more lounge type music, most likely because the vibraphone was well suited to the softer sounds of slower tunes as the band was becoming more versatile.

For four years we played for Lee's Photo Studio on Saturdays at 8.30 p.m. on the Lee's Photo 'Rhythm by the Ramblers' segment. The show was later renewed for two more years.

But now, the vibraphone provided us with the opportunity of creating a second group within The Ramblers and when another radio program was proposed, sponsored by Joe Chin & Co. at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday evenings advertising Dewar's whisky, 'Stanvic and The Stardusters' was born.

The theme song for this programme was Hoagey Carmichael's 'STARDUST'.

Now, for the next two years we were playing two shows every week; 'Rhythm by The Ramblers' and 'Stanvic and The Stardusters'. until 1961. The hosts for these broadcasts were Ayube Hamid Khan, Greg Poole and Ed Fung.

Who is Bing, and how did we come up with this 'other' group and program name.

Very few people know that my real name is **Stan**(islaus) Serrão. 'Bing' is a nickname given to me when I was about four years old by a wonderful lady named Henny who took me out for walks when a very young boy, often to listen to the militia band in the Botanical Gardens. Ever since then I have been known as 'Bing'.

Take into account the mood of the music and add the 'STARDUST' of the theme song to it, and with a little manipulation it was decided that the name of the program would be Stanvic and The Stardusters. **Bing** (STAN) and **VIC** (Albert, **Victor** Gonsalves .. (Alvic)) played guitar and vibes respectively, the lead instruments on this programme. Put bits of our names together and you get Stanvic and The Stardusters. Later, when Alvic Gonsalves left for the U.K., Maurice played the vibraphone.

BUILDING OUR FIRST, LARGER AMPLIFIER WITH A MICROPHONE .. JOHN THIJS ..

This was a major step, probably the first group of our kind to do this.

Over time our audiences grew, and It was time to get the band amplified. For many years The Ramblers played un-amplified, for instance, on a dray cart filled with carollers, during the Christmas season. It was no fun playing mandolin and guitars un-amplified in the open air on a dray cart. So, eventually we had William Hussein build (or purchased) a 10 watt amplifier for the mandolin, pictured in the Lee's Photo Studio's photograph. But as time went by and we started to play for more concerts and house parties we realized that we needed to amplify the whole band.

John Thijs (at the time employed at J.P.Santos & Co. Ltd.) was the brother-in-law of Albert Rodrigues who played guitar in The Ramblers, and I learned that John Thijs could build an amplifier for us. I was happy and fortunate that he agreed to build the amplifier for us.

I wanted to amplify two instruments and a voice. At least that is what I remember; and perhaps because of John's generosity, I don't remember that I paid any monies for the work of building the amplifier. Where or how I got the money to purchase the necessary parts is still somewhat of a mystery, but I believe it was from my \$5.00 a week starting salary (must have been after a few

salary raises though) at J.P.Santos & Co., Ltd., and I honestly do not recall how much it all cost, but it might have been when The Ramblers started putting aside some of the money we earned from playing at private functions.

On the small salary that I earned at that time it would have been little short of a miracle for me to finance this project without the money which we had put aside.

For having the patience to put up with me and the many hours dedicated to building the amplifier, for whatever little knowledge I acquired from him during the building of one of my major pet projects, all my thanks go to John Thijs who now resides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. On not enough occasions we have chats with him when he visits Toronto, or on the phone, when he is spending time with his daughters in Canada or the U.S.A.. He is a remarkable person, still 'kicking' and one of the most talented, pleasant people I have ever known. John is a beautiful person, unfortunately a great loss to Guyana.

AN AUDIENCE ON THE ROADSIDE

Practise days / evenings, outside our parents' residence

The Ramblers practised in a room beneath our parents residence on Lamaha Street. I remember painting a sign that read 'RAMDEN' over the door of the room. My mother would make sandwiches and refreshments when our practices went on longer than was anticipated.

As was usual with the other bands of our kind, (The Rhythmaires and the Combo 7, The Cassanovas), other young aspiring musicians, braced on their bicycles, would gather on the roadside outside of our home on practice afternoons / evenings, or outside of the homes where we might be playing, to listen and make comparisons of the various musical groups of our kind which were beginning to make their mark.

Sometimes Maurice and I also spent a few nights in Gems Record Store after business hours, watching Al Seales do recordings of various artists. I think on one occasion we witnessed Lord Melody doing a recording here. I believe also that The Latin Boys (Chattie Christianie, Al Stone and others) recording was done here. This was a good musical group, but I believe that this was the only recording of The Latin Boys. I was especially interested in this recording because Chattie Christiani had showed me 'a couple of things' on the guitar when I was just learning to play the instrument. I believe that one track was a bolero tempo recording of 'I've got you under my skin'.

Guyana was now well on its way to a new genre of musicians. But unfortunately, the opportunity for better exposure and management did not afford these bands to become the star musicians they really were. But in Georgetown especially, the tide was changing in favour of groups playing

amplified guitars and keyboards. Later on there would be some outstanding vocalists also appearing with these groups of entertainers.

ABOUT RECORDINGS IN GUYANA

The Ramblers produced only three recordings in Guyana, as follows:

The first was a demo 45 r.p.m. flexible disc of the band and Guyana's calypsonian King Cobra in KB's Store on, I think, Wellington street. I do not recall the name of the song, but the chording was based on what was then known as a syncopation. The chord progression was as follows. ... C C7 F Fm C Am Dm G7, and the background line (melody) would be .. c E F F#, G A d G, played repeatedly ..(the uppercase notes being higher than the lower case notes, .. some other musicians who also do not read/write music prefer the exact opposite interpretation), and the vocalist would improvise a melody around the pattern. That was a lot of fun, especially to hear King Cobra's extemporization, and experiencing the excitement of recording for the first time. I have no idea as to whatever happened to this recording.

Later, after a song competition in which The Ramblers accompanied Othmar Arthur on two or three of Leonard Fernandes' compositions, in the finals, one of his compositions won 3rd. place. (**Lennox Greaves' 'So long for now'** won the 1st. place)

Mr. Goldfish of Cook Records of Trinidad flew over to Georgetown, Guyana to record three compositions by Leonard Fernandes (pen name 'Johnny Leonard'). The Ramblers taped his compositions in Radio Demerara's studio on High street. In the Radio Demerara's studio control room also were Ayube Hamid Khan of Radio Demerara and the recording engineer. What is interesting about these recordings is that I was under the impression that these were demos of three of my friend Leonard Fernandes's compositions for Mr. Goldberg's consideration, not a recording to be released.

But someone suggested that we do a fourth tune (I don't know who made this late observation) so that there might be a side B tune for a second 45 r.p.m., and when asked, we decided to record our 'The 3 in 1 Saga', (the flip side of Leonard Fernandes's 'Nothing in Common'), a composition by myself, Maurice and Bernie. We mentioned that we had a composition and with no special discussion, arrangement or preparation, we quite casually recorded 'The 3 in 1 Saga', perhaps to be considered if good enough for the Side B of the second 45 r.p.m. disc. at least that is what we thought !.

Some time later, without any other communication from Cook Records or anyone else, I found out that the recordings were to be released.

I wrote Mr. Goldberg explaining that I did not think that the recording of the 3 in 1 Saga was up to par for release. I received communication from Mr. Goldberg

stating that was too bad, and that the recording was already released.

The final result was the production of two 45 r.p.m. disks, as follows:

-- In a corner of your heart / True love is a treasure on one disk
(both, Bing vocalizing)

-- Nothing in Common / 3 in 1 Saga on the second disk
(both instrumentals).

I recall that we received a total 'royalty' payment of about \$80.00 from Mr. Goldberg (Bernie thinks it was less) for our composition, period.

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS OF THE RAMBLERS, in Guyana

IN GUYANA ... Bing Serrão, Bernie Serrão, Maurice Serrão, Vic (Albert, Victor) Gonsalves, Charlie Barkoy, Albert 'Pak Pak' Rodrigues (nephew of Zakey Rodrigues of the Serenaders), Ambrose De Souza, Vincent 'Sandwich' Xavier, Malcolm De Souza, Romeo Rego, Royston Charan, George Baldenvick.

Short 'stints' with the Ramblers, in Guyana

Bongo players 'Bongo' Charlie and Mickey DaSilva ... Mickey said he played in Edmundo Ross' orchestra for a short while, but was fired for doing too much of 'his own thing'.

HERE ARE SOME RAMBLERS PERFORMANCES WHICH I REMEMBER

Fund Raising for Charitable Organizations

Lions club, Jaycees, Olga Lopes-Seales concerts, Ladies of Charity, St. Vincent De Paul Women's Thomas street Old Folks home, The Mahaica Hospital, The Nazareth Home, The Palms (previously the Alms House), Red Cross raffles with 'Gun' Fernandes promoting the raffle on the West bank of the Demerara river, and many more.

Highlights / Memories

Playing for the official opening of Radio Station BGBS show at the Tower Hotel which included a TV presentation by Philips of Holland.
Attendees included the Governor and other members of the government, and members of the Guyana Chamber of Commerce.

The Ramblers, the opening band for the Brook Benton Show, and Maurice playing our 3/4 inch double bass for Brooke Benton's show because of the absentee bassist.

Bing, after the Brooke Benton performance, asked by Lillian Frazier to appear live on Radio Demerara to play my own music selections, for one week (Bertie Chancellor helped me in the music library with my selections).

Performing at the Hotel Tower, The Ramblers were regularly booked at The Cactus Club Lounge, sometimes live on air, hosted by Ayube Hamid Khan

Government House (for Governor Savage).

The Ramblers playing alongside The Royal Welsh Fusiliers / The Black Watch, for their NAAFI dances.

OTHER MUSICAL GROUPS

BEFORE, AFTER, AND DURING the time of THE RAMBLERS

These are some of the bands / musicians of our time. I am unable to list the personnel of many groups, and may be omitting other outstanding groups, but here goes

Tom Charles and The Syncopators		
New Luckies Orchestra	Personnel	Nello
Eddie Rogers	Personnel	Eddie, Clem Thomas
Bert Rogers		Personnel
Sonny Thomas	Personnel	Three piece band
The Washboards	Personnel	Al Seales, Harry Whittaker,
The Cassanovas	Personnel	Andy Nichols, Michael Marks, Harold Gonsalves
The Rhythmaires	Personnel	George Simmons
The Young Ones	Personnel	Alex Rego, Patrick Rego, Gary Gonsalves, Carlton Rampersaud
The Combo 7	Personnel	Des Glasford, Colin Stephenson, Warbler, Colin Wharton (Bumble)
The Latin Boys,	Personnel	Chattie Christiani, Allan Stone
Chet and The Diamonds	Personnel	Samuel Ramdehol (Chet)
Noel Campbell and the Hotshots		

.....and more

... MEMBERS OF THE RAMBLERS, DEPARTURES FROM GUYANA ...

IN 1961, ROYSTON CHARAN LEFT GUYANA FOR TORONTO, CANADA

IN 1961, VIC GONSALVES ALSO LEFT FOR THE U.K.

IN 1962, BERNIE SERRÃO LEFT GUYANA FOR TORONTO, CANADA

The Ramblers played in Guyana until December 31st. 1962

1963 THE TELSTARS WERE FORMED, AND MAURICE PLAYED BASS GUITAR IN THE BAND. After Clive Nobrega's accident, Bing played lead Guitar with the Telstars until leaving for Canada August 9th. 1964.

ALBERT RODRIGUES LEFT GUYANA FOR CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA IN 1963. Played Bongoes for The Telstars, until his departure for Canada.

August 9th. 1964 BING AND MAURICE LEFT GUYANA FOR TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA.

The Ramblers re-grouped in Toronto as Bing Serrão and the Ramblers and are still playing in and around Toronto.

For further research on The Ramblers, one will find many, many articles regarding The Ramblers (and others) appearances in Georgetown, Guyana, as indicated below, if this information is still available.

From 1950 / 53 - 1962, The Ramblers

Guyana News Publications Entertainment Section Coverage

**The Daily Chronicle,
The Guiana Graphic,
The Argosy,
The Evening Post**

GUYANA, 1962 TO AUGUST, 1964

Prior to Maurice and Bing emigrating to Canada

THE TROUBADOURS

Bing and Maurice join The Troubadours steel band.

In the late 1950's, before Maurice and I left Guyana I had been keeping to myself as usual, when I learned that Alvic Gonsalves and others had formed a Steel band and that Maurice was a member. I was surprised that I did not know of this earlier, so I decided to investigate, and was encouraged by Maurice and Harold Gonsalves. When I first investigated this news, I was surprised to hear that the band had once or twice already played in the streets performing as Convicts. And when soon after I arrived at the John Fernandes wharf where all the activity was going on, I saw young men painting black stripes on bleached sheets of flour bags. They were actually making convict uniforms. How ingenious, I thought!. I believe that it was the late Godfrey Chin's idea, Guyana's notable historian (recently deceased, in January 2012 in Guyana .. and what a tragic loss it was). I had heard of Godfrey but was not a close friend at that time.

So, I became a member of the band playing the first pan alongside Alvic Gonsalves. Maurice played the second pan and Gayman Gomes and Harold Gonsalves played the tune bass. Maurice and Harold, who were in the band earlier than I was, will be able to provide more information about the members of the band and their activities around the city.

Out of this beginning was born The Troubadours. Alvic, Maurice, Harold and I were members of the Troubadours. This was a group formed from within those parading as Convicts, and was more of a group than a band, and who played mostly for private parties.

So, now The Troubadours Steel Band now included members of The Ramblers who had performed often at The Carib previously. But can you imagine The Ramblers and The Troubadours playing at The Carib Hotel ? Yes, that really happened. We swapped places within the two bands as we performed on such nights. A sort of a thrill for every one of us !.

THE TELSTARS .. BING AND MAURICE

I first met two young men, George Jardim and Clive Nobrega. when they were still in short pants. They were interested in playing the guitar. I can recall giving them a little advice about playing the guitar but after a while I lost sight of them. I knew however, that George Jardim would be a good rhythm guitarist and that Clive Nobrega would be a lead guitarist.

The next time I saw them they were in long pants, much taller, and had become fans of the British group 'The Shadows' (Hank Marvin on the lead guitar), who used solid body Fender guitars. Solid guitars and basses were becoming so

popular that they asked William Hussein to make two solid body guitars and a solid body bass guitar for the group.

They also knew that the Shadows guitar amps were the British made Vox amplifier and they imported one through Gems Record Store on Robb street. I did not know yet that George, Clive, and my nephew Tony Teixeira who previously played drums for The Ramblers, had formed a trio and had asked Maurice to play the electric bass for them. Maurice was eager to help out and was able to show them some more guitar chords while playing the bass for them.

This was the core of Guyana's Telstars who played, among other Caribbean and Latin rhythms, the most popular of The Shadows hits, such as Kontiki, Atlantis, Peace Pipe, etc., to Guyanese audiences. When Clive Nobrega passed away in a tragic motor cycle accident a young Bernard Rodrigues took over the role of the bassist, since Maurice and I were soon to emigrate to Toronto, Ontario, also. So, Guyana's original Telstars was born, with Clive Nobrega on lead guitar, George Jardim on the rhythm guitar, Maurice Serrão on the bass and Tony 'Freco' Teixeira on the drums, and went on to establish themselves as one of Guyana's top musical groups. Vincent Xavier, also formerly of The Ramblers, was by now playing double conga drums for The Telstars, and Albert Rodrigues played the bongoes. After Clive Nobrega's accident, members of The Telstars attended a concert in October, 1963 and discovered and recruited Winston Duggin and Bernard Rodrigues as future lead and bass guitarists. Maurice and I continued to associate with the Telstars, encouraging them and giving any advice we could, until we would leave for Canada.

Maurice and I managed to keep things going with the Telstars, contemplating our trip to Toronto. So, now it was Bing -- lead guitar, George -- rhythm guitar, Maurice -- bass guitar. In the meanwhile, Winston Duggin (Duggie) kept up with what was going on in preparation for taking over the lead guitar position, and Bernard Rodrigues kept his eye on the bass position.

Hardly anything difficult to do for someone like Winston who was already a pretty good player and a perfectionist at heart. He reminds me that my best suggestion was that he use the little finger of his left hand to increase his speed and perfect his guitar technique. Well, what are friends for ?. and Bernard Rodrigues, while paying attention to the Telstars repertoire, fitted perfectly into the position of bassist in the band. But he has yet to explain to me how it is that he played the bass so well with those short, stumpy fingers which I seem to recall were attached to his hands !.

The band would practice with Bing, Maurice, George, Duggie and Bernard Rodrigues in attendance, and over time, after Duggie and Bernard were comfortable with a song, they would play those song at gigs, instead of Bing and Maurice. As time went by, they would play more, and Bing and Maurice would play less. So, that was how it went until early August 1964 when Maurice and I left for Canada and Winston and Bernard permanently took over the lead and

bass guitar positions. They turned out to be a really good musicians, and on top of that they were both really nice guys, helping to propel the Telstars even farther with their musical talent to the front of the pack. The Telstars played a distinctively different flavour of music and arrangement than previously heard in Georgetown, Guyana. Later on, after Bing and Maurice had left to reside in Canada in 1964, The Telstars had a very successful tour to Barbados. Sometime after, a slightly newer version of The Telstars successfully toured the U.K..

The Telstars, among many others, made a terrific musical impact on musicians of other groups whose bands were formed and patterned after the solid body electric guitar. In Guyana around that time, musicians had to be resourceful and inventive to put a band together, and their efforts are deserving to be brought to the forefront of Guyana's rich music history. Research would prove that there are many other groups and musicians worthy of mention.

Other impressive bands of the time were The Rhythmaires (George Simmons on mandolin), The Casanovas, The Young Ones and The Combo Seven (Des Glasford on drums).

Musicians who played in other groups such as these could certainly name many more groups who enjoyed achieving similar successes in the 50's, 60's, and beyond.

Search Guyana News Publications Entertainment Section Coverage From 1957 - 1964, The Troubadours Steel band, The (original) Telstars

**The Daily Chronicle,
The Guiana Graphic,
The Argosy
The Evening Post**

**And now, continuing with Bing and Maurice,
PRIOR TO LEAVING FOR CANADA.**

A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE AT THE THEATRE GUILD

On one of our last performances, just prior to leaving Guyana for Canada, Bing, Maurice and gifted Guyanese pianist Hugh Sam played for a show entitled 'And All That Jazz', at The Theatre Guild for a show produced by Guyana's well-known entertainer Ken Corsbie.

After we came to Canada, we have appeared in several performances with Ken Corsbie in Toronto, including a Gala Event honouring Guyana's Cricket Heroes on June 2012 at The Hilton Markham Suites Hotel.

Now, Ken Corsbie, there's an outstanding Guyanese, if there ever was one !

TORONTO, CANADA, 1962 to 1964

BERNIE ...

Summary of Bernie Serrão's and Royston Charan's experiences in Toronto before Bing and Maurice arrived in August, 1964.

BING SERRÃO & THE RAMBLERS

When Bing and Maurice came to Toronto on August 20th. 1964 Bernie Serrão, Harold Stevenson and Claude Vasconcellas had organized a dance at Grace Church on College Street, as mentioned on Bernie's note. The dance was advertised as the first appearance of The Ramblers in Toronto. But we had no proper instruments of our own and had to hurriedly rent equipment. This group was comprised of Bing (lead guitar), Bernie (bass guitar), Maurice (rhythm guitar) and Royston Charan (Drums). The dance was a sold-out success. Guyanese resident in Toronto, and their friends, proved that there was a need in Toronto for the kind of music they had been accustomed to in Guyana.

Harold Gonsalves joined the Ramblers a little later on, when we played at The Latin Quarter and purchased a Hammond B3 Organ w/Leslie cabinet. This next paragraph explains how Roy Williams of The Latin Quarter Club learned about our band.

A Jamaican musician, a piano player who knew Bernie, called him one night looking for a bassist. Maurice did the job at The Latin Quarter, where about 30 persons were in attendance on that Saturday night. As a result of this incident, Roy Williams learned about The Ramblers and hired us to play there. This turned out to be good for everyone and we were contracted every three months to play at The Latin Quarter every Friday and Saturday night for the next eight years.

THE LATIN QUARTER CLUB

**Late 1964, at 290 1/2 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario.
Now the location of The Toronto Eaton Centre.**

The Ramblers were looking for regular weekend bookings and after one or two

appearances at The WIF Club, on College and Brunswick Streets, and having heard of The Ramblers Roy Williams booked the band to play at The Latin Quarter, now the location of The Toronto Eaton Centre.

It was not very long before Guyanese and other West Indian fun seekers learned about The Ramblers at The Latin Quarter Club. As time went by the attendance grew from about 30 patrons to a full house of almost 200 persons.

There were 44 steps to the second floor up (we know because we had to lift the equipment up the stairs). Eventually there were people lined up the stairs and onto the sidewalk waiting to get in.

The Latin Quarter was not a licensed bar, and a Special Occasion Liquor Permit from the L.C.B.O. (Liquor Control Board of Ontario) allowed the sale of liquor only up to 11.30 p.m.. But, being a private club, we would play until 3.00 a.m. So now there were The Ramblers at The Latin Quarter Club on 290 ½ Yonge Street and a few blocks away, Dave Martins and the Tradewinds at the Bermuda Tavern and the Tropics. Andy Niccols was a regular at Steeles Tavern and other well attended venues around Toronto.

In retrospect I must say that we really enjoyed playing at the Latin Quarter. Our performances there lasted from 1964 until 1972, and we were well treated and respected by the staff, owners and Manager Roy Williams and John Brooks. The staff were all courteous, kind, and pleasant and afforded us many lasting friendships and memorable times during our approximately eight year relationship with the The Latin Quarter.

Original Band Personnel:

Bing Serrão -- Lead guitar, Bernie Serrão -- Bass, and Maurice Serrão -- Rhythm guitar, Royston Charan -- Drums, Harold Gonsalves -- Hammond organ.

THE RAMBLERS JOIN THE TORONTO MUSICIANS' UNION

It wasn't much later that we were approached to join the Toronto Musicians' Union, and were invited to a meeting with the Secretary of the Union, Mr. Gurney Titmarsh. Despite our concerns, we decided to join the union, and it has not turned out badly. But the band has always been able to take care of its business sufficiently on its own, by insisting on proper respect and treatment while requesting a fair enough wage of our clients.

Our first tenuous encounter with Gurney Titmarsh was un-nerving and unexpected but there have since been many changes for the better. We believe that the Union is now a more flexible, considerate organization which protects musicians from deceitful employees.

Sometimes it is important to have serious discussions about wages and consideration regarding the behaviour of those who employ musicians, and the

musicians union is there to represent and support their members when needed. We are now lifetime members of The Toronto Musicians Union.

At the height of our success in Toronto, a sold out crowd approaching 1300 attended a dance at The Macedonian Hall on Overlea Boulevard Thorncliffe Park, Ontario, when we shared a billing with Dave Martins and The Tradewinds. Some overflow patrons proceeded to Dave Martin's 'We Place' night club.

In 1968 George Kissoondath and Russell Charter, heard The Ramblers performing at The Latin Quarter on 290 ½ Yonge street. Later on, George Kissoondath arranged for Bing Serrão and The Ramblers to play in Oshawa, Ontario. This resulted in more bookings at many venues in Oshawa for approximately ten years including the Jubilee hall for Club Carib. Attendance at these dances were consistently in the 600 range.

Later, George Kissoondath introduced Bing Serrão and The Ramblers to audiences in Saint John, New Brunswick, where we played twice to sold out audiences.

The band also played at many venues in Ottawa, Ontario, for the Guyanese and West Indian community at Britannia Place, Carlton University and The Holiday Inn. We also played in Hamilton, St.Catharines, St.Jacobs, and Kitchener, Ontario.

1972 .. BING SERRÃO AND THE RAMBLERS RECORDED OUR "BOYS' NIGHT OUT" 33 1/3 r.p.m. LP IN TRINIDAD AND PLAYED AT THE PEGASUS POOLSIDE IN GUYANA.

In 1972 we left Toronto for Trinidad to record our 'Boys' Night Out 33 1/3 r.p.m. LP record and went on to Guyana to play poolside at the Pegasus Hotel for two nights and spend some time with our relatives and friends. In Trinidad we recorded our 'Boys Night Out', 33 1/3 r.p.m. LP (so named, after Bernie's composition ('Boys' Night Out'), at Max Serrão's studio in two days, with only about 5 re-takes. We stayed at the Chaconia Inn flats, and though we were not granted permission by the Trinidad Musician's Union to play in Trinidad for payment, we were satisfied that we played a guest appearance at the Chaconia Inn Club across the street and at JB's, a popular spot at that time, on the last Sunday in Trinidad, as a farewell to our friends.

We then left for Guyana and played a couple of nights poolside at The Pegasus along with The Dominators band, and at our sister's in-law's residence for a private party.

We had a great time in Trinidad and Guyana, a sort of holiday for us, as we have always been able to hold down a regular job and play our music from the days when we were teenagers in Guyana, which as you can imagine is not an easy

thing to do.

A TO-DATE SUMMARY OF THE RAMBLERS RECORDINGS

..... **In Guyana**

KB Store, Georgetown .. circa mid 1950's

A test 45 rpm recording on a flexible disc ... The Ramblers with Guiana's calypsonian King Cobra. King Cobra used to sing a song that went like this 'We want the PPP partner, O, Lord!'. I have no idea where this recording might be now, but I would guess probably somewhere in the garbage.

At Radio Demerara ... 1960

Released under the COOK label (Trinidad)

.. Two 45 r.p.m. records ..

**Three in one Saga (Bing, Bernie, Maurice composition),
In a corner of your Heart, True Love is a Treasure', Nothing in Common
(Leonard Fernandes compositions).**

..... **In Trinidad 1972**

A 33 1/3 r.p.m. LP recording 'Boys night out'

Released under the then HIBISCUS (Ramblers) label.

A 33 1/3 r.p.m. 12 inch vinyl record. Recorded by Max Serrão.

Boys' Night Out, King of Babylon, The Way of Love, Beautiful,
I'll Take You There, Spanish Eyes, Alone Again (naturally), Soldier's Prayer,
It's Impossible, Take Warning, Bum Bum, Marie Elena (s/b Maria Elena).

At 38 Romac Drive, Toronto, Canada.

Our resident Recording Studio (Serrão Digital Music)

-- 4 CD's --

Three in One Saga -15 tracks (14 are Bing, Maurice, Bernie's compositions, 1 track is a medley of Guyana folk songs))

Playing your Favourites -13 tracks (includes a mandolin version of Suhani Raat Dhal Chuki - track 13)

Boys' Night Out -15 tracks (12 tracks of the HIBISCUS (was our own label) 33 1/3 r.p.m. 1972 vinyl LP to CD (above), 2 tracks live at The Latin Quarter on Yonge Street (now the site of The Toronto Eaton's Centre) recorded on our own open reel tape recorder by Patrick Glen Williams, and the **original** 45 r.p.m. of the Three in One Saga originally recorded at Radio Demerara in 1960 (above).

CHRISTMAS CD

“CHRISTMAS with BING SERRÃO & THE RAMBLERS“

10 tracks (of which 2 are Bing's compositions (My Favourite Christmas Gift and Putting Up The Trees), one is Slingshot's composition; (63 Beach)

BING SERRÃO & THE RAMBLERS AWARDS

TORONTO - GUYANA INDEPENDENCE AWARD, TORONTO, CANADA, MAY 16th. 2003.

In recognition of your distinguished contribution to Guyanese Music and Culture over the past 50 years.

Presented by The Guyana Festival Committee on behalf of the Guyanese Community in Canada.

BROOKLYN, U.S.A. GUYANA FOLK FESTIVAL 2003, THE WORDSWORTH Mc ANDREW AWARD.

In recognition of our outstanding contribution to Guyana's Culture and Heritage.

LIST OF PRESENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF THE RAMBLERS IN GUYANA AND CANADA

PRESENT MEMBERS

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Bing | (Serrão) Mandolin / guitar lead. |
| Bernie | (Serrão) Lead / rhythm guitar in Guyana, Bass guitar in Canada. Left for Canada in May, 1962 and is the Manager of Bing Serrão & The Ramblers. |
| Maurice | (Serrão) Rhythm guitarist. First time played 'banjo' at |

Mr. LaBourde's (Bruce & Marie) party on Kingston Rd., in 1954.

The three Serrão brothers (Bing, Maurice and Bernie), are the present members of the band. We play lead guitar (w/ guitar synthesizer) and mandolin, rhythm guitar, and electric bass guitar, respectively.

PAST MEMBERS

- Albert** **(Rodrigues)** Rhythm guitar from 1954, then played the 3/4" upright bass which we imported through Gems Record Store, when Charlie Barkoy left the Ramblers. Albert left for Canada in 1963 and resides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.
- Romeo** **(Rego)** PLayer 'Banjo' made by William Hussein. Passed away in Guyana of a foot injury.
- Roy** **(Charan)** Initially played Conga drum. Played drum set for the first time at U.S.A. NAFFI dance in 1961. Left for Canada in 1961. Passed away December 29th., 2010 in Toronto, Canada.
- Georgie** **(Baldinick)** Biscuit tin cover / Maracas / rented snare drum (before we purchased the Premier drum set). Passed away in Guyana.
- Vincent** **(Xavier)** Played conga drums. Played with The Telstars when The Ramblers left Guyana. Passed away in Guyana.
- Charlie** **(Barkoy)** Played 3/4' upright bass, some years later left the band to join the Casanovas (perhaps in 1958). Passed away in Guyana.
- Vic** **(Gonsalves)** Played the steel pan (1st. pan), and the vibraphone when we purchased it through Al Seales (Gems Record Store). Later on Vic played the accordion. Vic passed away May 12, 2010 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U.S.A..
- Harold** **(Gonsalves)** Played Hammond B3 organ and keyboard. Currently plays with The Vibes and resides in Burlington, Ontario, Canada.

- Ambrose** **(DeSouza)** Played rhythm guitar in Guyana 1952/3 to 1956 / 57. Resides in Malton, Ontario, Canada.
- Malcolm** **(DeSouza)** Played bongos during 1956 - 1957. Left for the U.K. in 1958. Passed away early 2012 in the U.K.
- Iggy** **(Vaz)** Played keyboard. Resides in Ontario, Canada.
- Tony** **(Teixeira)** Our nephew, joined the band as the drummer in 1961 when Royston Charan left for Canada. While in Toronto on a business course, Tony played drums at The Latin Quarter, to fill in for Royston Charan who took a two week vacation to get married, (probably in 1965 / 1966). Now resides in Whitby, Ontario, Canada.
- Philip** **(Teixeira)** Tony's younger brother, Resides in Whitby, Ontario, Canada. Played drums when Royston Charan decided that being 40 years old, he should quit playing out.

SPECIAL PERSONALITIES

IN TORONTO

Toronto, Ontario. Band Movers:

Ivan Menezes Coined the expression 'In the van, out the van'

Mike Palmer (Mike also set up the P.A. System)

Short 'stints' with the Ramblers, in Toronto, Ontario.

Iggy Vaz, Tony Teixeira, Philip Teixeira.

Very short 'stints' with the Ramblers, in Toronto

The Canadian flute guy, and Bernie Serrão Jr. on drums

The Demerara Club dance organizers:

Gordon Gonsalves, Gerry 'Nippy' Ferreira, and Mike

'Scoochie' Gonsalves assisted us in arranging dances in the early days of the **Demerara Social Club**, which was formed in 1974. Thank you so much guys, for the dedication and all your help.

INTERESTING EXPERIENCES IN TORONTO, CANADA

Frank Natalie, Munding Music & Scarborough Music House.

Bing and Maurice ... Bar stints at Eglinton and Dufferin intersection (3 locations).

SPECIAL NOTES:

Below are some of the performers of our musical era, who performed often in Georgetown before emigrating to reside in the U.S.A. (eg. Andy Niccols, Hugh Sam, etc.)

Prior to leaving for Florida, USA Andy resided in Toronto and performed frequently at Steeles Tavern on Yonge Street. Since we were both musicians and good friends in Guyana, he would be a good source of information.

Hugh Sam performed with my brother Maurice and me at Ken Corsbie's 'And All That Jazz' Theatre Guild production just prior to leaving for the United States.

The mandolinist of The Rhythmaires (George Simmons) is another friend and is a resident of Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

George Jardim of The Telstars (U.S.A. / Guyana), Andy Niccols, Michael Marks, and George Simmons would be good sources of information regarding groups like ours who performed in Georgetown, Guyana.

I must mention that going through the history of radio in British Guiana on the internet, I was no less than absolutely amazed that there is no mention of The Ramblers performances on ZFY, Radio Demerara and BGBS. The Ramblers performed at the official opening of BGBS at The Tower Hotel in Georgetown.

Our many appearances on Station ZFY, Radio Demerara and BGBS was during the days of broadcasting staff and performing personalities such as Ulric Gouveia, Ayube Hamid Khan, Rafiq Khan, Lillian Fraser, Greg Poole, Pat Cameron, Vivian Lee, Bertie Chancellor and Wilbert Holder. The Ramblers first recordings were done in 1960 at Radio Demerara's studio for Cook Records of Trinidad. Mr. Goldfish of Cook Records supervised the recording session.

The hit on the two 45 r.p.m. discs was 'The Three in one Saga' where I played the steel pan. The other compositions were of Johnny Leonard's (Fernandes) 'In a corner of your heart', 'True love is a treasure' (I did the vocals for these two), and 'Nothing in Common' was the other instrumental.

Here is also a quick recall of many of our performances in Guyana, beginning from when I was in my mid-teens and prior to leaving Guyana August, 1964.

The Ramblers played many years for dances or shows, helping to raise funds for various charitable organizations, performing around Georgetown alongside entertainers such as Auntie Olga, The Serenaders, Randolph Profitt, Billy Ryan, Oscar Dummett, Othmar Arthur, Willie Rodrigues, Ormond Lam, Mrs. Duncan's Dance School.

The Guyana Graphic, The Evening Post and The Daily Chronicle especially, reported extensively on many of the private and public appearances where The Ramblers performed. Weddings, fundraisers, radio appearances and other entertainment news were published weekly.

So, what has happened to these extensive news paper entertainment reports seems to be a mystery to me. I read about The Telstars. My brother Maurice and I were among the original members of The Troubadours Steel band (Road name 'The Convicts') and The Telstars.

Yet I see not enough, if any, articles on The Ramblers, who were the group which inspired the formation of other bands like The Telstars, The Rhythmaires, The Combo Seven, The Young Ones, The Casanovas and others.

Those bands evolved into groups playing solid amplified guitars and electronic keyboards. It completely revolutionized the presentation and style of music in Guyana. Guyana's artists are really second to none. The problem was that at that time, except for the efforts of Vivian Lee, Gem's Record Store and perhaps a few others, there seemed to be no one concentrating on promoting, even recording, these talented groups.

To me it seems impossible and unreal that there has been no significant account of the part which The Ramblers played in Guyana's musical history. I (Bing Serrão) was inspired by The Serenaders radio show sponsored by Correia's Wine Factory. Before we were known as The Ramblers, at Christmas time, one or two of us played un-amplified on dray carts of carollers. This is when I think that bands, performing with un-amplified, acoustic instruments at that time, were referred to as 'string bands'.

Guyana should get serious about its accomplishments, and Guyanese musicians

should be encouraged and promoted properly. I am so glad to report to you the experiences of The Ramblers. Talented musicians should be brought to the forefront of news reporting and given the encouragement, even the tools if necessary, to practice their art to perfection. They should be lauded in the country as ambassadors of Guyana's talent, and encouraged, promoted and respected for the artists that they are.

For whatever reason, it seems to me that more recently there is a recognition of the country's talented artists, and the hard work it takes to become good or great at what one does.

We should not let this hard work go unnoticed, and I am happy to see that respect for the efforts of Guyana's artists is perhaps now being recognized as it should have been many years ago. Perhaps, though, enough knowledge of their talent receded into the background of the turmoil of political unrest at that time.

We wish to sincerely thank our fans for their loyalty and continuing support.

We also wish to thank Ken Bahadur for his assistance in producing this Biography.

The contents of this Biography was prepared by Stan. (Bing) Serrão, with the assistance of Bernard (Bernie) Serrão, and Maurice Serrão.

BING SERRÃO & THE RAMBLERS

Stanislaus (Bing) Serrão
Bernard (Bernie) Serrão
Maurice Serrão

[Return to The Ramblers website](#)