

BRITISH GUIANA, LONG BEFORE THE RAMBLERS

Sources: Stanislaus (Bing) Serrão, Bernard Serrão, Maurice Serrão

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

Bing, Maurice and Bernie, the last of nine siblings, 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. Our age difference, spanning about five years, perhaps explains the extensive repertoire of music that we play and is possibly the main reason why the band has survived for so many years.

Very few people know that my real name is Stanislaus Serrão. 'Bing' is a nickname given to me by a wonderful lady named Henny. When I was about four years old, she used to take me out for walks and often we used to listen to the militia band in the Botanical Gardens. Ever since then I have been known as 'Bing'.

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.

THE ORIGINALS ... THE SEED

One could not relate the birth of The Ramblers unless we go back to my own very young life and my early teenage recollections of the seedling memories. In those days, I used to listen to Eddie Arnold's morning radio programme.

MY EARLY SCHOOL DAYS

My education began when I was 6 years of age at St. Mary's Roman Catholic School at Brickdam and Camp Streets. The school was administered by Roman Catholic nuns and disciplinary action, was by admonishment, which might be accompanied by a few lashes with the nun's belt. While not painful, but perhaps scary for a little guy, the nuns' intentions were obvious. Those were the days when respect for others and a certain measure of discipline were paramount, unless, as one grew older, you were willing (or not) to put up with a whipping, usually with a cane (we called it a wild cane). I attended this school up to what was known as 4th standard.

I was a pretty smart young fellow and went on to attend St. Stanislaus College from 1946 (12 years old) until 1950. It was, at that time, a boys-only college. Instructors were lay teachers and Roman Catholic priests of the Jesuit order. This is where I learned about the authority of a prefect. Detention, or lashes from a priest, with a ferrula was the type of discipline administered. The ferrula was a strap of leather of various thicknesses (depending on the seriousness of the punishment, I suppose), in the shape of a shoe sole. I was a quiet, obedient young fellow, yet to this day I cannot come to grips with the fact that I was punished with a ferrula approximately 6 or more times although I would give an edge of doubt to the one time I had to empty my pockets of rubber bands and paper slugs.

MICHAEL ANDREWS AT ST. STANISLAUS COLLEGE

In my early teens, perhaps in form 2A at St. Stanislaus College, I met Michael Andrews. His Dad, a bank employee, was transferred to Guyana from Barbados. Michael was fair skinned, just over 6 feet tall, and a day younger than I. The top of my head reached just below his armpits. We quickly became good friends.

I remember that he asked if we had an autumn in Guyana, when he saw some leaves fall from the trees on Brickdam Street. He had also brought a pair of ice skates with him and wondered if someone would like to buy them.

Michael was much more the outgoing type and much more exuberant about having fun with music, but not interested enough to become a musician. As just another young boy having fun with music, neither was I, but nature plays tricks on us, fortunately sometimes, nice tricks, and I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. It is difficult to know where the little group inspired by Michael's energy fits into the proper timeframe of the birth of what was later to become The Ramblers, but up to this time there was no thought of forming a group to play music except for having fun, as young boys are prone to do.

Only for the sake of having fun, Michael encouraged others, including myself to begin 'fooling around' with making music. He acquired a fairly large 'shack shack', which was really one of a pair of busted up maracas, held together with a metal nut and washer at the top. We had to be careful that it did not come apart while using it. Michael thought it was just great for having fun. Somehow, somewhere, he acquired a broken, busted ukulele, and recruited Mark Steeles (harmonica), Romeo Rego ('banjo'), Charlie Schuler (a fun guy) and myself (probably the mandolin) to form a group, just for the fun of it.

So, with our busted 'shack-shack, a 'quatro' and a harmonica and perhaps the mandolin, we would visit Michael's neighbours, on a Sunday afternoon, to expose ourselves to their criticisms. I would say to Michael, "maybe we shouldn't be bothering the neighbours on a Sunday afternoon", and he would reply "they can say 'No' if they are not interested". It seemed I was the only objector, so reluctantly I went along with the group. It was fun while it lasted.

A year or two later Michael left St. Stanislaus College for the U.K. to train as a seaman on the HMS Conway. Now, there was no Michael, but the bug had gotten to us.

ERIC MENEZES, COUSIN

As a teenager, my inspiration for becoming a musician was my cousin Eric Menezes, a resident of New Amsterdam, Berbice. For a few years he lived at our parent's residence in Georgetown while he was employed at J.P.Santos & Co. Ltd. on Water Street. He played the guitar, and would entertain the very young Serrão boys with songs like 'Old King Cole', 'Mary Had A Little Lamb', and one of his favourites, 'A Postman Dropped A Letter At My Door', which I think he learned while on his trips as a sailor. I still remember Bernie and I jumping on the bed at 7 North Road, Bourda.

Later, I often spent my school holidays at Eric's parents, Uncle Joe and Aunt Georgie, at Main & Pope streets, in New Amsterdam. Whenever Eric was around he would let me try out his guitar. I seemed so interested in playing the guitar that my Aunt Georgie, not knowing that it was a guitar, wrote to my mother, saying that it seemed that Bing was showing an interest in playing the 'banjo'.

SARDINE CANS AND RUBBER BANDS

During these young years Bernie and I used to make our version of a guitar composed of empty herring cans with a wooden pole protruding from bottom to top. Four rubber bands somehow held together along the pole, represented the strings of the guitar. Bernie recalls that our other 'instruments' were an Echo brand mouth organ, a comb and tissue paper instrument, and a maraca (shaker) made from a tin can with buck beads, rice or split peas.

As time went by, unwittingly, a slightly more talented and stable group was slowly being formed. Mario and Romeo De Freitas hung out with the group. Romeo (Mario's brother) had a green BSA motorcycle and used to lead the way to various homes. The rest of us would follow him on our bicycles, according to Bernie. The group was beginning to expand, and encouraged by family, friends and well-wishers, we began playing at the homes of relatives and friends.

ONE MORE STEP FORWARD

As we continued, the group experienced dropouts and additions right under our noses. We started playing around at friends' home parties and for the many fund raising or school concerts organized by hard working well-wishers to raise money for the less fortunate.

Out of this core group of 'musicians' who played just for the fun of it grew a group known as The Ramblers. Our recollections of the members of this young group were Bing Serrão, Bernard Serrão, Ambrose DeSouza, George Baldenvick and Romeo Rego. Ambrose played with the band from 1952 / 53 until 1956 / 57, when he got married.

During the Christmas holidays we would play on a dray cart full of carolers, our instruments not yet amplified. At other times we played at what was known as barn dances, a sort of pickup party arranged on a whim, perhaps just because it was a weekend, with straw strewn around the floor of the home where these events were held.

Sometimes most of the music for the party was played from 78 rpm records on a relative's record player ... yep, like the Plessey record-changer; the type where you had to change the needles every so often.

Maurice joined the group in 1954, when Romeo Rego was transferred to the interior as an assistant land surveyor. Maurice remembers that Roy Charan joined the band perhaps in 1955 when we had a booking to play for the American Survey Team at Atkinson Field. He had to indicate to Roy when to hit the conga drum by nodding his head. From 1956, Malcolm DeSouza (Ambrose's younger brother) played bongos for the group, until he left for the U.K. in 1958.

The Ramblers became very popular as we played at many private parties, weddings, dances and charity fund raisers as well as company parties and Christmas dances. I suppose we were able to maintain the busy schedules and keep our regular jobs only because we were young men, full of energy and the excitement of the experience. Being a musician can be a tiring and expensive pastime, and one should always hold on to regular full-time employment. This is how we were kept properly grounded and able to earn just enough so as to be able to purchase and repair equipment. Being only a full-time musician would have been too risky an endeavour.

THE RAMBLERS IN BRITISH GUIANA

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

The group revolutionized music performances in British Guiana with a youthful energy and creativity and changed the style of music and band composition. They pioneered a new generation of musicians in Guyana's history with the use of amplified guitars and vocals. These changes influenced many musicians and helped spawn the formation of other groups of guitarists performing under titles such as The Rhythmaires, Combo Seven, The Young Ones, The Casanovas, The Latin Boys, and many others. Pianos were replaced with electronic keyboards, and amplification expanded to include more guitars, conga drums, bongos, scratchers (güiros), electric basses, etc. The changes 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 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 other's talents, and a true competitive, yet friendly approach to creating and producing this new kind of great music.

One could say that this was blossom time for British Guiana's young musical groups of the 50's and 60's. Sharing a common interest, we got along extremely well with these groups and other outstanding Guyanese performers.

This would have been a prime time in British Guiana to have resources available to promote and record the performances of the many emerging musical groups. We were all the best musical talent available at that time and we generated major changes in musical presentation.

Two resources available for promoting British Guiana's musical talent at that time were Al Seales of Gems Record Store on Robb Street and Vivian Lee, formerly of Radio Demerara. Without entrepreneurs such as these, we would all have found it even more difficult to get the exposure and expertise of former Guianese musicians. These folks gave us advice and imported our instruments when we did not know where to turn for help. They were the people who helped afford us the exposure to the public. Without that support, we might not have had the desire to continue with the necessary hope and hard work to become a part of Guiana's rich musical talent.

Let me repeat, it is hard work, and the admiration and encouragement of others enabled and energized us to continue to perform.

Because of the political unrest, many left British Guiana's shores. Sadly, Roy Charan (in 1961) and Vic Gonsalves (in 1962) emigrated to Canada and the U.K. respectively. In 1962 Bernie left for a holiday in Toronto, Canada, but after an encounter with Canadian Immigration officials, decided to take up an offer of permanent residence in Canada. At this point, The Ramblers ceased performing as a group in British Guiana. Albert Rodrigues, who had been playing in The Ramblers since 1954, left for Canada in 1963 to reside in Alberta. Now, only three original members of The Ramblers, Bing, Maurice, and Vincent Xavier, still remained.

Bing and Maurice continued to play with The Telstars from April / May 1963 through August 22nd. 1964 when they left for Toronto, Ontario.

1950 / 53 - 1962, THE Ramblers

Encouraged by our many fans and well-wishers, The Ramblers and other groups of musicians like ours provided years of entertainment throughout those years. The staunch support from so many propelled the group into prominence from a group of young teenagers 'fooling around' with their own brand of musical 'entertainment', just for the fun of it.

Playing as The Ramblers during our years in Guiana provided us with many musical experiences. Numerous performances and dedicated fans, buoyed by many well-wishers and admirers, led us to a place that only fate could have reserved for us. The Ramblers were now in pause mode in Guyana, until Maurice and Bing emigrated to Toronto, Canada.

A TRIP BACK IN TIME

THE SERENADERS ON ZFY RADIO

Personnel

- Tony Rodrigues (Albert Rodrigues Jr.'s Dad) - maracas
- Albert Rodrigues Sr. ('Zakee' - Albert Jr.'s uncle) - mandolin
- Ruben Nobrega - guitar
- Francis Nobrega ('Meling') - guitar & violin

While still a young teen, I made every effort to listen to this group of musicians playing un-amplified mandolin and guitars on the radio station ZFY, which was the only radio station in what was then British Guiana. The theme song for The Serenaders weekly show was the song "She'll be coming 'round the mountain". As a result of this show, I developed an interest in playing the mandolin.

Fortunately for me, The Serenaders mandolin player, Albert 'Zakee' Rodrigues, was a fellow employee of my Dad at The (Mannie Gonsalves') Cash Store and he was sometimes invited to our home. Since I was already trying to learn to play the mandolin ('fooling around'), these visits were a further incentive for me to continue, and it was 'Zakee' who showed me how to tune the mandolin properly.

In 1949, as I showed a continued interest in becoming involved with music, my older brother Charlie gave me a guitar as a present for my fifteenth birthday. Some time later, my father arranged with his friend 'Zakee' Rodrigues for me to visit two guitarists from The Serenaders, most likely Ruben and Frances 'Meling' Nobrega. I can vividly recall these two men sitting relaxed, on their 'landing' at the top of their front stairs, playing 'Quizás, Quizás, Quizás' and a few other tunes for me. They were in their house slippers, cross-legged and played with their guitars under their arms. What a thrill that was for me, indeed.

Later, as I showed that I had a more serious interest in playing the guitar, another of my father's friends, 'Boysie' De Barros, also showed me a few 'things' on the ukulele and explained that the four strings of a ukulele were tuned more or less the same as the first four strings of a guitar. Finally, I was getting underway as a multi-talented musician!

LET WILLIAM HUSSEIN BUILD YOU A MANDOLIN

I was still reeling from the sounds of the Serenaders ZFY performance. With their mandolin player's contribution to the group, their theme song "She'll be coming 'round the mountain", still fresh in my mind, I knew that I wanted to get one of these instruments for myself and asked around as to where I could have one made for me. Up until this time Bernie would go to Gregory Gonsalves' home on Croal Street to borrow his mandolin for our band practice, and take it back to him the following day.

We learned that there was someone named William Hussein who built mandolins and guitars in Georgetown. His business was in such a small room that there was little space to walk around without knocking over something. There was an exciting smell of

varnish that lingered in the small space, with works in progress hung up or lying around, and guitar frames holding the beginnings of other instrument in place. However, I cannot recall the exact location of the business.

We discovered that William was a pleasant, friendly person, some years older than we were. I asked him to make me a mandolin and, soon enough the instrument was ready for pick up. I do not know exactly how much I paid, but I think it was about \$13.00, and I hurried home to start learning to play my mandolin.

GOT THE MANDOLIN, NOW WHAT?

I started 'playing the heck' out of the mandolin, but too often the first string broke. This was annoying. Money was hard to come by so when a string was broken, depending on where the break was, we would tie it back together. Yes, we would literally tie the two pieces of string back together, only if the tie was behind the bridge. At that age I also read a lot and somewhere in the back of my mind I thought that it was possible to avoid the problem if the mandolin neck was made a little shorter. When it was time for a new instrument, I spoke to William Hussein about the problem. He agreed with my theory and I asked him to make me another mandolin, with a shorter neck. Sure enough, that solved the breaking string problem.

Georgetown was a small city. As we would say, everyone knew everyone else. My father gave me the opportunity to meet his friend 'Zakee' Rodrigues of the Serenaders. It was a thrill to meet him, since he was the mandolinist in the group. 'Zakee' was an inspiration and a great help encouraging me to continue playing the mandolin. He was always easily available if I had any questions or needed some mandolin help. When you were as young as I was, about age fourteen, interested in knowing how to play the mandolin, and most importantly how to tune the instrument, one's mind is focused mostly on learning to play the instrument and not really on who is showing you how it is tuned. If I did at the time consider the kindness of this person, I would have been more appreciative, but I was much more focused on the instrument. A lot of time has passed since then and I never had the opportunity to thank him. So, to Zakee, who passed away some years ago in Alberta, Canada, I say, "Thank you so much, Zakee".

This would be a good place to thank other performers, acquaintances and friends who encouraged me to continue playing, especially those who played guitar or mandolin. Chattie Christiani and Jack Casmere were two of these people who unselfishly showed me a thing or two on the guitar. Chattie and I were often part of a group of close friends hanging out every so often. He was a friendly but reserved person and had to be prompted to play (maybe after one or two drinks), even among friends. Jack was already a radio performer and was one of a group of artists who performed frequently along with our group and others at charity concerts. Both gentlemen were accomplished guitarists.

'Boysie' DeBarros was just one of the friendliest older persons you would want to know. He and 'Zakee' were my father's good friends and without question would give me encouragement and help if I needed it. 'Boysie' was not a serious musician but he was fun to be with and would help just for the fun of it.

There were others, but these four individuals stand out for me. They were always willing to share their talent with me and were genuine, friendly gentlemen.

RADIO APPEARANCE - not yet The Ramblers

(STILL IN SHORT PANTS ON) ZFY REDIFFUSION RADIO STATION

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 at many functions while still in short pants.

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

The lyrics (as I remember them) for 'We are the Ovaltinees', their theme song, were

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 girls and boys

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

The group became a natural successor to The Serenaders, playing un-amplified on ZFY radio. We were not quite ready for private parties, but being on the radio 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.

On one of the first nights appearing on the air, we had a problem with a guitar cord. By the time we got the problem solved, it was too late to get to ZFY's studio on time for the show. Pretty embarrassed, and too late to be allowed on the show, we asked Mr. Greene, the nice, pleasant guard at the station to intervene on our behalf. He agreed to speak to Mr. Ulric Gouveia, but Mr. Gouveia made an appearance at the top of the stairs to the studio and made it very clear that we were not going to be allowed in.

I also recall playing on the same program, providing the musical accompaniment for a rendition of 'That Lucky Old Sun' by Billy Ryan, a Guianese singer who had returned from the U.K. to reside in Georgetown. He worked at Gun Fernandes store on Robb Street and in the Blue Room restaurant in the back of the store.

BUT WE NEEDED SOME MORE “STUFF”

SNARE DRUM, MARACAS, BONGOS AND A CONGA DRUM

It would be interesting if I could recall the first event where we used the new amplifier for my mandolin (also William Hussein built), but at that time my mind was full of ideas for including other instruments into the band.

And what about for the slower rhythms for the more ‘straight’ music like the Patti Page sort of tunes and country songs? Of course, we would need something like a snare drum. So, I came up with the idea of using a biscuit tin cover and a snare brush for that. Ingenious! That worked out for quite a while until we knew that we would have to get a drum set. Including a drum set into the band is another interesting story.

HOW THE RAMBLERS GOT THEIR NAME

Although we had been playing out as ‘The Serrão Brothers’, we were becoming more popular, especially for fundraisers for charitable organizations. The band was getting more and more requests to play out at concerts for the C.Y.O., The Guild Club and the Ursuline and Charlestown Convents. A concert was coming up soon and we needed to have a formal name for the group for advertising purposes. To this day, I am not sure if we had yet played out as The Ramblers.

My suggestion for the band name was ‘The Renegades’; a title with a provocative tone to it, unlike my own quiet, reserved personality. Even to this day, I am not interested with making too much fuss about personality labels and things of that nature. My business was playing and making music.

The only other suggestion I can remember was ‘The Ramblers’, and it came from our guitarist Ambrose DeSouza, who loved country and Western songs. I did not put up an argument. So, although I was not comfortable with the final decision, my opinion was shelved and from then on, instead of being introduced as the Serrão brothers, et al, we became known as The Ramblers.

Soon we were old enough to play at Father Pro dances, usually held at The Guild Club hall. There are so many memories of playing at these dances that I would not go into describing them, except to say that we enjoyed every minute of it. When I am performing I do not see or hear much more than my own performance and whatever else demands my attention. But there are many of our fans, who even to this day attend our performances in and around Toronto, and many in Guyana today, who would recall the excitement of being a teenager, dancing to The Ramblers, and the excitement which comes along with attending a good party. These are the memories that linger on in one’s mind when we are well into our older years, and are perhaps the best memories of one’s life. Thanks to those who are still followers of The Ramblers and remember those wonderful years.

THE RAMBLERS FIRST PAID GIG

Our first paid gig for \$20.00 Guiana 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. Mr. De Ryck asked how much we would charge and Bernie quoted him \$30.00 Guiana Currency. The band members for this event were Bing, Bernie, Romeo Rego, Vincent Xavier, Ambrose De Souza, George Baldinick, and Charlie Barkoy. At this point Vincent Xavier and George Baldinick joined The Ramblers.

CONCERTS AND OTHER FUND RAISERS

MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS OF PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

So far, I believe that members of the group were Bing, Bernie, Romeo Rego and Ambrose De Souza. We had already been playing out for a while, but a few performances stand out especially in my mind.

On one of my first appearances 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, a Guianese, who later emigrated to Trinidad.

At another C.Y.O appearance, we were asked to play for a concert based on the movie 'South Pacific' and I was asked if we could read the song melodies from music sheets. Since I didn't know how to read music, they arranged that a pianist would play the songs while I listened. Eventually I was able to play songs like 'I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair' and perhaps one or two more.

On yet another occasion, Dennis DeSouza performed on the C.Y.O. stage. I remember, as if it was yesterday, that he stomped the time of the tunes with a very heavy foot. Who knows, maybe he was as nervous on stage as I was! This was before he left for Trinidad, later to become a well-known pianist.

We were still little guys, perhaps fourteen or fifteen years old, performing at the Guild Club for another charity fundraiser. The Guild club was always packed with attendees. For whatever reason, we played on the floor of the hall; little guys in short pants. I can recall that we played the 'Tennessee Waltz' and '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 enough to leave a mark in my memory.

Suffice to say that playing at these 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. 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 that this life holds for us. And

though some may try to, clearly no one can boast of finishing the journey on their own steam. Audience appreciation of our talents and the people around us create the energy that drives us to perform.

There were many fortunate influences that led to the success of The Ramblers. 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 fundraisers for the less fortunate of society. This afforded us greater exposure to the public, ultimately resulting in a group of very young men becoming known as The Ramblers.

I would think that our radio performance, sponsored by Lee's Photo Studio was the first really big boost for the band. The Ramblers played on Radio Demerara for about four years; the first two as The Ramblers and the latter two as The Ramblers and Stanvic and the Stardusters.

THE RAMBLERS RADIO BROADCASTS

LEE'S PHOTO STUDIO PRESENTS 'RHYTHM BY THE RAMBLERS'.

In 1955 Lee's Photo Studio sponsored a fifteen minute weekly programme over Radio Demerara at 8.30 p.m. on Saturday evenings. The theme song for this segment was the baião 'Anna', one of the most popular Ramblers renditions. Another popular one was 'Maldito Celos'. After our second year on the show, 'Rhythm by The Ramblers' was increased to half an hour.

Members of The Ramblers on the Lee's Photo Studio programme were as follows:

Bing Serrão (mandolin), Bernie Serrão (lead / rhythm guitar), Maurice Serrão ('banjo'), Albert Rodrigues (rhythm guitar), Roy Charan (single conga drum), George Baldinick (maracas), Malcolm DeSouza (bongos) and Charlie Barkoy (3/4 upright bass).

I also got the chance to play a few tunes, such as 'Brazil' on the Alto Sax, and a few others on the electric steel guitar before 'giving up' on both instruments. The mandolin amplifier we used was the William Hussein built 10-watt amplifier.

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

MORE OF 'THE STUFF'

THE BONGOS

A couple of the reasons for the survival of musical groups and musicians are innovation and investment. One must try to keep up with what is new or becoming more popular. In today's world, this can be an expansive experience. Now, our group needed a good pair of maracas and a pair of bongos. The maracas would have been cheap enough, and easy to come by in the stores, but bongos would cost a few dollars if we had to import

them. Luckily we learned of someone who could build a pair for us. I would say that this person was another Guianese innovator.

Building the bongos would be difficult because a proper metal mechanism for tightening the heads (skins) for the instrument was not easily available in British Guiana. We would need to import the necessary parts, which would cost a fair bit, and, considering the state of our finances, not practical. The job was assigned to an ingenious person who lived near our home at 58 Robb & Alexander Streets. This turned out to be another little miracle. The young man did not even have electricity in his home.

The material used to create the instrument was local wallaba wood, quite heavy, but easy to obtain. The hardware used for tightening the heads (skins) would most certainly be considered the work of a genius. I remember that he used the metal parts of the braking system of an upright bicycle.

When the job was finally completed the total cost for the pair of bongos was \$16.00. Now, why wouldn't we have made a note of the man who did the job? His creativity alone must have been worth much more than what we paid for the instrument. In one sense perhaps, we paid for that by having to put up with the weight of the wallaba bongos between our legs for the length of our performances.

Ambrose De Souza probably played the bongos for us at this time.

WHAT ABOUT VIOLINS, OR A HARP?

My next inspiration concerning the band was after I had seen the movie 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'. I came out of the movie with a lot of thoughts for improving the band; like, perhaps a violin or two, maybe a harp, or an expanded percussion section with one or two more maracas or other percussive instruments. I played with these ideas until I decided that since I did not know where I would get a harp, I would explore the violin idea.

Our friend Malcolm DeFreitas, now raising cattle in the Rupununi, was a young violinist who had a few certificates of his competence as a budding violinist. Then, there was another violinist named Vervoot whom I had heard on the radio and at concerts. He seemed to be slightly on the eccentric side, not a bad guy, but a little strange, I thought. I decided to give my friend the first tryout. He was good when he had his music sheets with him, but take away the music sheets and there was a serious problem playing in time or improvising on the melody. His mother was also not very happy with him playing popular music and preferred that he continue learning to play classically as he was being taught.

So I decided I would have to give Mister Vervoot a chance. He was good, but although I didn't know if he could read music, I had to seriously consider his compatibility with the rest of the group. I decided that I would have to do without him, and there the idea of having violin(s) in the group died. The harp idea though, still lingers on in my mind.

THE CONGA DRUM

Our next project was to obtain a conga drum. Up to this time the pair of bongos was doing the job for us, but eventually we would need a pair of conga drums. We got hold of one drum, although I don't recall where we bought it or how much we paid for it. I would guess that it was a used conga drum.

Roy Charan lived opposite our house on 58 Robb Street in Georgetown. We could see him across the street, sitting in his rocking chair. Sometimes we played table tennis in the yard under his house. By necessity and good fortune for us, he was selected to be the player. We figured that if he had time to rock in his gallery, he could be useful in the band playing the conga drum. I remember well that we explained to him how to play the conga drum for the many boleros we used to play at that time. I could still hear in my mind Maurice counting out to him, "one, two, three and four **and**" where the conga drum was required to be played on the 'four and' beat.

In 1956, Ambrose's brother, Malcolm DeSouza joined the band as the bongo player, but left to reside in the U.K. in 1958.

Then we discovered, or perhaps, he discovered us, Vincent Xavier. He seemed to have conga drumming in his blood. So he played the conga drum and Roy played the bongos until we finally purchased a set of Premier drums through Gems Record Store.

It is interesting to note that over time, and for a short while, Mickey Da Silva and 'Bongo Charlie' played the bongos. I do not know if this is true, but I seem to recall that Mickey Da Silva said that he had played with the Edmundo Ros band for a short while, and only for a short while because he was too innovative and that Edmundo wanted a steady pattern played on the bongos. Hey, this is what I seem to recall, and I am not being 'innovative'.

THE ELECTRIC STEEL GUITAR

I decided that I would try my hand at playing another instrument and we had William Hussein build me an electric steel guitar. I did my best to play this instrument well, and perhaps I did well enough to play it on some of the Lee's Photo Studio radio shows. The tuning was different, and playing a harmony note with the melody note, using what is a rounded piece of steel, made it difficult to play and an inconvenience which I could not put up with. Looking back, I think that I should have stuck with it, but being young and foolish (as an older friend of mine would say), I did not continue to play the instrument for very long.

THE SAXOPHONE

For whatever reason, I decided that I would also like to learn how to play the saxophone. I found out that I could have a Hohner 'President' alto saxophone imported through D.M. Fernandes Ltd., on High Street and that it would cost \$300.00. But money was hard to come by on my salary; I had only \$100.00 in cash on hand, and I did not think that my parents would have the remaining \$200.00 or the whole amount of money at hand. So, I decided to approach our General Manager, John Jardim, at J.P. Santos &

company for a company loan. He had been having some problems with loans to employees and was tightening up the process, so he had designed a request voucher, about 5 inches by 8 inches, on white paper. It would have been embarrassing enough having my request processed by those I knew in the accounts department and I wanted to keep my loan as private as possible. I waited until lunchtime when most of the other employees were out to lunch to make my move, and approached the Secretary of the company, Desmond DeSouza. I knew him well, and he filled out and penned his approval signature to the form for me.

However, I still had to go to John Jardim for his final authorization. Apprehensively, I presented the form to him and explained that I wanted to buy an instrument. He knew that I was a musician, took a look at the form and remarked, 'I presume this is for a musical instrument'. I said, "Yes, it is for the purchase of a saxophone". He took another quick look at the application form, wrote on it with a red pen 'For the purchase of a musical instrument', and signed his approval. Nice, now everyone who worked in the accounts department would know, and the word would be out!

When I went home that day, excited and a little nervous, I told my mother that I had taken out the loan, and in a soft, calm voice she said to me 'I have a few dollars hidden away, you could have asked me to lend you the money'. Quite frankly, I never knew that there was any money enough to hide some away. Unfortunately, it was too late for me with my reluctance to ask my boss for the loan.

I placed the order with D.M. Fernandes Ltd. for the saxophone. When it arrived, the manager, a brother of a well-known businessman and saxophonist who also performed at concerts which included the Ramblers, called and said that I could pick up the instrument just after closing time. I could hardly wait to collect the instrument, and after work I bicycled over to D.M. Fernandes Ltd., on High Street. The doors were just closed but they were expecting me and invited me in. I thought that I could just pick up the saxophone, race home to try playing something, anything, but the security guard (the watchman, to Guianese) also recognized me as being from the Ramblers and insisted that I play at least one note before I took off for home.

He was a big guy and he just would not let me go until I played a note for him. Guianese can be a very provocative lot and I suspected that they all just wanted to have some fun with me. However, I unpacked the instrument, put on the mouthpiece and tried to play a note or two for them, as I was also anxious to get home and try it out. Well, let me tell you that to play even one note on a wind instrument, without having prior playing experience, is difficult and next to impossible, because you have to learn not to bite on the reed of the mouth piece. I got red in the face and he insisted that I try again and again until he had enough fun at my expense. One might think that you would be able to at least make some sort of half decent sound even if it was your first time on the instrument, but that was not to be. Finally, thank goodness, he let me go.

Eventually I was able to play a few tunes on the electric steel guitar and maybe 4 or 5 more tunes on the saxophone, including 'Brazil'. As I became just confident enough on

these two instruments, though not really happy with my expertise on either instrument, I was encouraged to play a few tunes on the Radio Demerara performances.

A little more than one year later, after hearing 'Gun' Fernandes play my Hohner saxophone at a friend's wedding reception, I felt that I would never be able to get such beautiful sounds out of the instrument. So, just prior to leaving for Canada I sold my saxophone (down payment \$20.00) to one of the members of The Washboards Orchestra. I am still waiting for the rest of the payments!

THE VIBRAPHONE

The 'Premier' vibraphone sat in Gems Record Store for sometime and was probably previously used in some of Al Seales' recording sessions. We had no idea who would play the instrument when The Ramblers bought it in 1960. Vic Gonsalves had recently joined the band and could play first pan, accordion and piano, so was chosen to play the vibraphone. It allowed The Ramblers to play a lounge style of music, most likely because it was well suited to the softer sounds of slower tunes and the band was becoming more versatile.

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

OUR FIRST, LARGER AMPLIFIER WITH A MICROPHONE

JOHN THIJS

For many years the Ramblers played un-amplified, for instance, on a dray cart filled with carolers, during the Christmas season. It was no fun, playing mandolin and guitars un-amplified in the open air, so, eventually we had William Hussein build (or purchase) a 10watt amplifier for the mandolin. As time went by and we started to play at more concerts and house parties we realized that we needed to amplify the whole band. This was a major step for us, and we were probably the first group of our kind to do this in Georgetown.

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 could build us an amplifier. I don't recall how I was introduced to John, but I was happy and fortunate that he agreed to build the amplifier for us. John and I went shopping together for the parts needed to build the amplifier. I can recall that most of the parts were bought at KB's Record Store and that the speaker had a distortion that John said was caused by the cone of the speaker being off-centre. Today, we would return the speaker for a replacement, but John said he could fix it, and he did. Our first microphone was a model made by Philips Electronics. I knew little or nothing about high and low impedance microphones, building amplifiers or repairing off-centre speaker cones. All of the advice I got concerning the features of the amplifier came from John Thijs.

Having purchased all the parts necessary for the job, I was so excited (yes, I get excited sometimes), that I would go straight from work to John's home in La Penitence. Many times I would arrive at his home before he did. His wife, Albert's sister, would have his dinner ready for him. But, when John arrived home from work he would loosen his tie and start working on the amplifier and continue working on building the amplifier while his wife attended to their young family and fussed about his dinner getting cold. When John would have his dinner was another matter because he would work on the amplifier until nearly midnight.

I wanted to amplify two instruments and a voice. 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 (maybe after a few salary raises) at J.P.Santos & Co., Ltd., and I honestly do not recall how much it all cost. 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 that we had put aside.

For 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 and having the patience to put up with me, all my thanks go to John Thijs who now resides in Alberta, Canada. Not often enough we have chats with him when he visits, 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.

WHEN, WHY, WHERE, DID BING START SINGING?

I was still quite young, and while having a shower I would beat a rhythm on the galvanized walls of the shower stall while humming, singing or 'Da Da - ing' a song or melody. Songs like 'Caravan' (Frankie Lane), or a samba rhythm, and other romantic songs like 'In Dreams I Kiss Your Hand, Madame' or 'You're Too Dangerous, Cherie'. I remember that one day my father remarked that for a young person, I sang very romantic songs.

After we had our new band amplifier built, we would place the microphone in the front of the band in case someone wanted to make an announcement or speech. It was soon after, and the first time ever, at Maureen Camacho's birthday party, when she heard me 'singing' almost in a whisper in the background, that she said I should go closer to the microphone. This was the first time that I sang close to a microphone and louder to be heard well enough. I think the song that I sang was Mona Lisa. It went over well enough for me to risk getting friendlier with the microphone as we continued to play out. I can still recall that Maureen's favourite number, which I played on the mandolin, was The Sleepy Lagoon (the old cells at work).

Later, when The Ramblers played at the Carib Hotel, I decided that I would try my hand at singing with the band. Shy as I was, I would sing no more than four songs, including

'Mona Lisa' and 'A Hundred Pounds of Clay'. I insisted that the lights had to be turned down during my renditions, and would do only one session of singing for the night. I was usually very relieved when those singing sessions were over.

AND MORE OF 'THE STUFF'

HOW ABOUT A SET OF DRUMS?

The time came when we thought that we should get a drum set for the band. Until then, our percussion instruments were a conga drum and a pair of bongos. One day we learned that Clem Thomas, drummer for Eddie Rogers' band, had a drum set for sale. He wanted \$200.00 for the set and this was a sum that we could afford if some of us pooled our money. We decided to go for it, closed the deal, and took the set home with us.

We set up the drums in the gallery of our home in Newmarket Street and right away started bashing on the cymbals and the drums. The gallery was located only a short distance away from our small dining room, separated by a small living room. But this was on a Saturday, and on Saturdays our father only worked to noon, and then headed to the bars for a weekend drink with his friends. He would arrive home with a few drinks under the belt, change into his pyjamas, eat the meal my mother had prepared for him, have one more shot of rum, and saunter over to the Berbice chair for a last cigarette before getting into bed for a rest. Before he could get to his next Saturday phase, which was lighting up a cigarette before jumping into bed, we started banging on the drums, and especially on the cymbals.

"Stanney", he said, from the dining table, "come over here for a minute". Well, whatever else he said I cannot recall but "don't you have enough drums in the band?" was the first sentence I can remember, followed quickly by a slightly slurred "either you get rid of those damned things you have there, or....". I cannot recall the rest of the 'conversation', except that I knew we could not keep the drum set. So we had to return the set. Luckily for us, we learned that the drummer's wife did not approve of him selling the set, so it was an easy transaction. We returned the drum set and we were refunded our \$200.00.

A few years later we bought our own set of Premier drums, imported through Gems Record Store. This store was one of the few resources where The Ramblers and other musicians could visit and order instruments they needed to be imported.

I believe that it was then that Roy Charan began playing the drums. The conga drum that Roy Charan used to play was later sold to a member of the American Air survey team for \$30.00 and Vincent Xavier took over playing the double conga drums.

So, over the years our instrumentation consisted of mandolin, guitar, 3/4 double bass, bongos, conga drums, drum set, vibes, accordion, steel pan, alto sax, steel guitar, timbales, maracas, claves, chocalho and güiros.

William Hussein and 'Sonny' Rodrigues made all our mandolin, guitars, 'banjos' and ukuleles locally.

AN AUDIENCE ON THE ROADSIDE

PRACTICE DAYS / EVENINGS, OUTSIDE OUR PARENTS' RESIDENCE

The Ramblers practiced 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 other bands of our kind, (The Rhythmaires, Combo 7, The Casanovas), 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 which were beginning to make their mark.

Sometimes Maurice and I 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 that other recordings with The Latin Boys (Chattie Christiani, Al Stone and others) were also done here. I was especially interested in the recording of The Latin Boys because Chattie Christiani had showed me 'a couple of things' on the guitar when I was just learning to play. I believe that one track was a bolero tempo recording of 'I've Got You Under My Skin'.

Guiana was now well on its way with a new genre of star musicians, but unfortunately, the opportunities for better exposure and management were not easily available. In Georgetown especially, the tide was turning in favour of groups playing amplified guitars and keyboards. Later on some outstanding vocalists would also emerge with these groups.

BING'S MUSICAL INFLUENCES

In British Guiana, located close to the equator, medium wave, shortwave and long wave broadcasts were received quite well, especially if you were excited enough to get up just before 5: 00 a.m. Locally, I could listen to British, North American, Caribbean and European styles of music, and recordings of bands like some Trio Los Panchos, Trio Los Paraguayos, Edmundo Ros, Xavier Cugat and others on our local radio. I could also listen to the big bands, and radio shows such as 'Much Binding in the Marsh' and 'Ray's a Laugh' from the British Broadcasting Operation (BBC) on the radio, or music on the 78 rpm records of that time which included bands like Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Harry James, Victor Sylvester, Benny Goodman, Joe Loss and Victor Sylvester Orchestras, etc.

I love Latin music, and when I was fifteen years old, the Latin group, Trio Irakitan, visited Guiana to perform at the Metropole Cinema on Robb Street. I was determined to hear this group perform. Usually I always bought house level tickets when going to see a movie but had only recently broken my Glen Miller style spectacles and, being near sighted, house tickets would have been too far away from the performers to really enjoy the show. This was my first time in the pit level. Although this would normally be

anathema for me, I endured the experience, probably unconscious of any odd noises or behaviour that would have normally bothered me.

Singers such as Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Dick Haynes, Frank Sinatra, Pat Boone, Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis and Brook Benton along with groups like the Andrews Sisters, The Ink Spots, The Platters, Elvis Presley and The Beatles were my favourites. I also liked country singers such as Eddie Arnold, The Drifters, Hank Williams, Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, and many of the popular singers of the time.

Perhaps all of this explains why I play and sing slower, more romantic songs, and why I like playing Latin music. I learned a great deal about improvisation from listening to big bands renditions. A good example is Tex Beneke's improvisation on Glen Miller's 'In The Mood'. Benny Goodman's mastery of the clarinet is another example of smooth improvisation. Musicians like Les Paul and Chet Atkins with their easygoing guitar mastery possibly also had something to do with my style of playing the guitar. But, who knows?

I believe that budding musicians are born with a natural ability to gravitate to the styles of other musicians who play what is pleasing to something deep inside of us. Some of those things that please us may infiltrate our own personalities. To imitate another performer's style note for note would not be as satisfying to me as just letting the style of other musicians lend a little extra flavour to your own style of playing.

RECORDINGS IN BRITISH GUIANA

The Ramblers produced three recordings in British Guiana

The first recording was a demo 45-rpm flexible disc of the band with one of Guiana's calypsonians, 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 syncopation. The chord progression was as follows: C C7 F Fm C Am Dm G7, with the background (melody) line: c E F F#, G A d G, played repeatedly, uppercase notes being higher than the lower case notes. Other musicians (who also do not read/write music) use the opposite interpretation of the notation. The vocalist would then improvise a melody around this pattern. It 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 what happened to that recording.

The second recording (two 45 rpm's) was made in July 1960 in the main studio of Radio Demerara on High Street, Georgetown. This session deserves a bit of a lengthy story. As I remember it, the fledgling Ramblers gave no contract or permission, but the recording was released prior to my communicating my concerns to Mr. Goldberg of Cook Records of Trinidad. As best as I can recall, the following paragraphs describe the story of the recording of two disks of Leonard Fernandes' (Johnny Leonard) compositions and our 3 in 1 Saga.

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 1st. place.

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

I don't know who made the suggestion that we should do a fourth tune for the B-side of the second 45-rpm disc, but when asked, we mentioned that we had a composition by myself, Maurice and Bernie, titled 'Three In One Saga'. It was decided to record our composition as the flip side of Leonard Fernandes's 'Nothing In Common'. With no special discussion, arrangement or preparation, we quite casually recorded the track to be considered, if good enough, for the B Side of the second disc. At least that was our understanding! We never signed any agreement for release of this recording, although perhaps Leonard Fernandes might have done so for his compositions. We, the musicians and the composers of the 'Three In One Saga', were taken for granted by Mr. Goldberg and Cook Records.

Some time later, without any communication from Cook Records or anyone else, I discovered that the recordings were to be released. I wrote Mr. Goldberg explaining that I did not think our recording of the 'Three In One Saga' was up to par for release. Mr. Goldberg responded, stating '**that was too bad, and that the recording was already released**'.

The final production release of the two disks was:

1. In A Corner Of Your Heart / True Love Is A Treasure – Bing vocals on both tracks
2. Nothing in Common / Three In One Saga - both instrumental tracks

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. But that was only the beginning of this tale.

By a strange co-incidence, a good family friend, who had decided to emigrate to Australia, wrote to our relatives that she was surprised when she heard the 'Three In One Saga' on the ship's P.A. system. She felt sure that it was our composition so she enquired on the ship for confirmation of her opinion and was shown an LP that included the 'Three In One Saga' recording. I must mention that we were not aware of any releases other than the 45-rpm recordings.

This perfectly illustrates why there is a need for union representation and other organizations to protect an artist's rights. It is fitting to note here that making music is hard work, and a lot of time, effort and money go into composing and creating the release of an artist's work.

Our experience highlights the need for prominently advertised avenues of advice for artists, and readily available, affordable legal recourse for protection of the rights of musicians and composers, as in developed countries around the world. Musicians and composers should be made aware that there are those who, without expressed, written permission, would invest in and reproduce recordings of other's talent and hard work for financial gain and get away with it.

We were only aware that the 'Three In One Saga' recording was released as a 45-rpm record and were surprised that it was released on an LP without our knowledge. We were able to obtain a copy of the LP and confirmed that it is our composition and recording of the 'Three In One Saga' track recorded at Radio Demerara's studio in 1960. The track, however, is mistakenly listed as being performed by Tom Charles and The Syncopators, another Guyanese band. The most unfortunate part of all this is that we were quite young and not yet exposed to the real world, which resulted in our work being 'railroaded' by others whose business was 'business'.

The last gig with the full band was at The Georgetown Club on 14th May 1962. The Ramblers played a final gig without Bernie at the G.F.C. Old Years Night (New Year's Eve) dance on December 31st, 1962.

DEPARTURES FROM BRITISH GUIANA

MEMBER	YEAR	DESTINATION
Roy Charan	1961	TORONTO, CANADA
Vic Gonsalves	1961	U.K.
Bernie Serrão	1962	TORONTO, CANADA
Albert Rodrigues	1963	CALGARY, CANADA
Bing Serrão	1964	TORONTO, CANADA
Maurice Serrão	1964	TORONTO, CANADA

A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE AT THE THEATRE GUILD

Just prior to leaving Guyana for Canada, Bing and Maurice performed with gifted Guyanese pianist Hugh Sam for a show entitled 'And All That Jazz', at The Theatre Guild. Well-known Guyanese entertainer Ken Corsbie produced the show. Now, there's an outstanding Guyanese, if there ever was one!

This was a unique experience for Maurice and me. I believe we were the opening act of the show, which was scheduled to begin at eight o'clock. It turned out to be a great show, but what I remember most was Hugh Sam arriving close to the starting time of the show. Maurice and I were anxiously standing on the roadside looking out for him when he showed up walking as cool and calm as ever, oblivious to the fact that Maurice and I were close to a nervous breakdown. I recall him saying something like, "I don't get

nervous about these things, really". Hugh Sam, cool as cool can be, now resides in the U.S.A.

TORONTO, CANADA, 1962 to 1964

BERNIE SERRÃO'S ACCOUNT OF HIS TIME IN TORONTO.

I arrived in Toronto on May 16th, 1962 and it was only after approximately three months, that I was able to find a job and move into an apartment. On my first visit to the Munding Music Store on St. Clair and Vaughan Road, I met store manager Frank Natale who introduced me to the owner, Mr. Munding. On that occasion, I purchased a Goya guitar and a small, black amplifier with a twelve-inch speaker.

On weekends I used to go into downtown Toronto, mainly the Yonge Street strip (Yonge and Bloor to King street) to listen to various bands. Gene Cooper used to play at the Colonial Tavern and I would also go to the Brass Rail Tavern at Yonge and Bloor Street to listen to a four-piece band, which consisted of lead guitarist, bass guitarist, accordion player and drummer. They played mostly North American music. Then, there was Ronnie Hawkins at the Zanzibar Tavern and The Brown Derby. Ronnie Hawkins played mostly rock and roll. In those days, the bars stopped serving alcohol at 11.00 p.m. on Saturday nights.

Royston Charan lived in the apartment next door to me on 50 Amherst Avenue and I remember one night that we decided to go to listen to a Mexican band on Bloor Street, near Yonge Street. We got in, sat down and ordered two shrimp cocktails and were shocked when we got the bill for \$9.00. We had a good laugh and soon found our way home. We were not able to do much barhopping after that occasion because my salary at that time was only \$65.00 per week.

Roy played drums with Eddie Edgehill, a Trinidadian, at The Wiff Club on College Street and Brunswick Ave. There, I met the Chef / Owner Mr. Gary, a very respectable man who ran a nice club. Sometimes I would go to the Wiff Club to listen to the band. Then, I met Nolan Yearwood, a Guyanese, who picked me up one night to play guitar with a nice bunch of guys from Jamaica and Ghana. On Sundays we used to go to one of the Jamaicans home to practice. They would cook curry and rice, and we would have a few drinks. Nolan and one of the guys from Ghana got a few gigs to play for concerts at public schools in the West end of Toronto. We frequently played in the Hamilton area for \$15.00 each, per gig. Mostly, we played music from Ghana with a lot of heavy percussion, mainly on conga drums. Eventually I lost contact with Nolan Yearwood. Around that time, Roy Charan told me that Eddie Edgehill wanted to see me.

Prior to moving on to play with Eddie Edgehill, Harold Gonsalves, a Guyanese friend, arrived in Canada and resided in Scarborough, Ontario with his cousin Elaine Wight (Leslie Wight's wife). I used to pick him up and bring him over to our apartment to sleep over on weekends.

Another well-known Guyanese, soccer player Charlie Nestor (Everton Club), had a club named The Pioneer Club just around the corner from the Wiff Club on College Street

and Brunswick Avenue. He knew about The Ramblers, so he asked me to form a group to play at his club. The group consisted of the following guys: Mike Thompson played the piano, (another Guyanese, Gayman Gomes, would sometimes sub for him). Harold Gonsalves played rhythm guitar and another guy played saxophone. I played the lead guitar and Roy Charan would play the drums when he was off from The Wiff Club.

The pay was \$15.00 per night, and we played from 8.00 p.m. to 3.00 a.m.. There was another Guyanese, Tony DaSilva (Dolly Teixeira's brother), who often requested that we play Stranger on the Shore. He would request this tune several times a night and would slip an American dollar in my hand every time we played his request.

Charlie Nestor's wife, Enid, sold delicious black pudding and souse at the dances. Another nice guy, Joe, had the floor shaking when he danced. Charlie Nestor used to dodge me when it was time to pay the band, and go up to the third floor of the club to play table tennis. I eventually found this out and when we were finished playing I would go up to the third floor, where he would keep me waiting until after 3.00 a.m. He would tell me that he didn't have the money to pay, but eventually would find it.

Sometime later he booked the band to play for an Easter weekend dance. When I arrived at the top of the stairs on the second floor with Harold Gonsalves, winter coat on and guitar and amplifier in my hand, I asked him to be paid before we performed. He told me that he was busy and would be back shortly. I told Harold that we should not play, and we went home. After that incident I never had any money issues with Charlie Nestor. We later became good friends.

A while later, I started playing lead and rhythm guitar with Eddie Edgehill at The Calypso Club on Front and Yonge Streets. He played conga drums and he was fascinated to hear me play the tune 'More'. His popular numbers were 'Any Ice, dear Lady' and the traditional 'Jamaican Farewell', 'Yellow Bird', 'Island in the Sun', etc. Eddie used to arrive at the club around 8.00 p.m. when we were about to start playing, already with a few drinks under his belt, and always with a mickey in his pocket. The Calypso Club did not have a liquor license so they used to serve coffee, tea, and juice. Amazingly, ladies would come in, drink coffee all night, and, at the end of the evening Eddie would call a cab and go off with one of them. This was the norm for Eddie.

The owner of The Calypso Club was a short, Jewish guy named Harry Windtroup. I was paid \$15.00 per night and played every Friday and Saturday night from 8.00 p.m. to 3.00 a.m. After that, I would lug my amplifier and guitar home on the bus in the freezing cold. I mean really freezing cold!

I distinctly remember one Sunday morning when I was finished playing at The Calypso Club around 3.30 p.m. The subway had stopped running, it was snowing quite a lot, and I couldn't get a bus. So I decided to walk with my guitar and amplifier from Yonge and Front Streets to St. Clair Avenue. That was already a long distance but when I got to St. Clair Avenue it was snowing heavily and I tried unsuccessfully to flag down a cab. I continued to walk to Vaughan Road, still no cab would stop, so I had to walk all the way home where I finally arrived at about 4.15 a.m., an unforgettable experience.

Mr. Windtroupe insisted that each member of the band wear a red silk shirt that he supplied. At the end of each gig he used to deduct twenty cents per night as laundry fee for cleaning the shirt. The gross pay for both nights was \$30.00 less forty cents, a net pay of \$29.60.

THE RAMBLERS - TORONTO, CANADA

BING AND MAURICE ARRIVE IN TORONTO, CANADA - AUGUST 1964

Bing and Maurice arrived in Toronto on August 22nd., 1964. Harold Stephenson and Claude Vasconcellos organized the first dance in Toronto featuring The Ramblers at Grace Church on College Street. The dance was advertised as the first appearance of The Ramblers in Toronto. We had no proper instruments of our own so we had to hurriedly rent equipment. The group was comprised of Bing (lead guitar), Bernie (bass guitar), Maurice (rhythm guitar) and Roy Charan (Drums). The dance was a sold-out success. Guyanese residents in Toronto, and their friends, proved that there was a need in Toronto for the kind of music they had been accustomed to hearing in Guyana.

A little later on, when we played at The Latin Quarter, Harold Gonsalves joined The Ramblers on Lowrey Organ w/Leslie cabinet.

A Jamaican 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 Mr. Roy Williams, the Manager, 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 there every Friday and Saturday night for the next 3 or 4 years.

THE LATIN QUARTER CLUB,

In late 1964, The Ramblers were looking for regular weekend bookings. Having heard of The Ramblers and after attending one or two of their performances at The Wiff Club, 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 42 steps up to the first floor (we know because we had to lift our equipment up those 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 Yonge Street and a few blocks away, Dave Martins and the Tradewinds at The We Place.

The Tradewinds also performed at Bermuda Tavern, and Andy Niccols was a regular at Steels Tavern and other popular venues around Toronto.

In retrospect I must say that we really enjoyed playing at the Latin Quarter. Our performances there lasted for about eight years and we were well treated and respected by the staff, owners and manager Mr. Roy Williams. 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 Latin Quarter.

Original Toronto Band Personnel:-

- Bing Serrão - Lead guitar
- Bernie Serrão - Bass
- Maurice Serrão - Rhythm guitar
- Roy Charan - Drums
- Harold Gonsalves - Lowrey organ.

THE RAMBLERS JOIN THE MUSICIANS UNION

One night while performing at the Latin Quarter Club on Yonge Street, a young man approached us and wanted to know more about The Ramblers. He said he was a teacher and was doing some research on bands like ours for his students. Still fairly new to Toronto, and happy that someone seemed so interested in the group, we gave him whatever information he requested. Needless to say, we were flattered that someone was interested enough to enquire about the history of the band.

THE MUSICIANS UNION (GURNEY TITMARSH)

Shortly after our encounter with the young man, we were approached to join the Musicians' Union, and were invited to a meeting with the Secretary of the union, Mr. Gurney Titmarsh. The meeting, at first, seemed to be a friendly, inquisitive conversation about The Ramblers and the benefits of joining the union until Maurice asked what would happen if we did not agree to become members. Almost immediately, we were warned that we could be put on the union's blacklist. When Maurice repeated his question, Mr. Titmarsh advised us that we could form our own union if we wished. This retort was a shock to us. It felt like being up against a wall while someone kept on punching you in the face. In the back of my mind was a comment by Mr. Titmarsh that we were not to disclose any information concerning the union rulebook. It left me with the impression that the union was some sort of secret lodge.

Of course we would have been glad to have some representation if our booking arrangements turned out to be problematic, but we left the meeting with a feeling of being threatened by Mr. Titmarsh's approach. Not understanding completely the consequences of not joining the union, we felt as if there was a cloud hanging over us, threatening a severe downpour of something nasty if we decided not to join. Despite our concerns however, we decided to join the union and it has not turned out badly. In one instance, it was disgusting where a location was on the union's blacklist and caused a relocation of the party. In another incident, beneficial, when we arrived late for a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Christmas booking, due to very bad weather and delays in unloading our instruments, and the Union ruled in our favour.

In 1964, after playing at Latin Quarter for a while, we discovered that they were not paying union scale. Roy Williams refused to pay and we stopped playing for three weeks. We finally resolved the issue with The Latin Quarter and were paid the Toronto Musicians' scale fees on all future engagements.

Due to the demand for our music and the lingering uncertainty of being blacklisted by The Musicians Union, we left our regular bookings at The Latin Quarter Club and ventured out for more private bookings.

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 from our clients.

Since our incursion into The Musicians Union a lot of time has passed. Our first tenuous encounter with Gurney Titmarsh was unnerving and unexpected but since then there have been many changes for the better. We believe that the union is now a more flexible, considerate organization that protects musicians from potentially 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.

THE DEMERARA CLUB

To satisfy the need for our kind of music in the Guyanese community, The Ramblers started THE DEMERARA CLUB, eventually accumulating an address list of up to 900 names. A Special Occasion Liquor Permit was required for the dances, which meant that we had to provide the L.C.B.O. (Liquor Control Board of Ontario) with a list of approximately 200 members.

BING SERRÃO & THE RAMBLERS

CHANGING THE NAME OF THE BAND

To promote the Demerara Club dances, we had to send out flyers. At that point we discovered that there were many North American groups performing as The Ramblers and that led to a slight change in the name of the group. It was Bernie's idea that we should call the group 'Bing Serrão and The Ramblers'.

We promoted several Demerara Club dances over the years that followed. Sometimes our New Years Eve dances catered to sold-out audiences of about 500 to 600 attendees. The band was often booked for dances at popular cricket clubs such as the Yorkshire Cricket Club, Victoria Park Cricket Club, Maple Leaf Cricket Club, Toronto Cricket Club and the West Indian Cricket Club.

At the height of our success in Toronto, a sold out crowd of about 1300 people attended a dance at The Macedonia Hall on Overlea Blvd. where we shared a billing with Dave Martins and The Tradewinds.

In 1968 George Kissoondath and Russell Charter heard the band performing at The Latin Quarter on Yonge Street. Later on, George Kissoondath arranged for Bing Serrão and the Ramblers to play in Oshawa, Ontario. This resulted in bookings at many venues in Oshawa, including the Jubilee Hall for Club Carib. Attendance at these dances was consistently sold out in the range of 600 people

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

In May 1972, Bing Serrão & The Ramblers, along with the Jamaican group Tomorrows Children, played at the opening of Ontario Place.

TRINIDAD/ GUYANA TRIP

In 1972 we left Toronto for Trinidad to record our 'Boys' Night Out' LP at Max Serrão's studio (no relationship). The recording was completed in two days, with about five re-takes and was named, after Bernie's composition 'Boys' Night Out'. While in Trinidad, we stayed at the Chaconia Inn flats. We were not granted permission to play in Trinidad for payment, but we were satisfied to play guest appearances at the Chaconia Inn Club across the street, and at JB's, a popular spot at that time, as a farewell to our friends on our last Sunday in Trinidad.

After Trinidad, we went on to Guyana to perform at the Pegasus Hotel poolside for two nights before spending some time with our relatives and friends. At The Pegasus we played along with Ray Seales's (Al Seales's son) band. We also played for a private party at our sister in-law's residence.

The trip to Trinidad and Guyana was a sort of holiday for us and we had a great time.

St. KITTS and NEVIS

Worrell Nero is the Honorary Consul General for St. Kitts & Nevis in Philadelphia, USA. He is a big fan of the track 'Boys Night Out' on our CD of the same name. During a visit to St. Kitts, Tyrone Serrão, our cousin, heard Mr. Nero playing the track in his car and told him "they are my cousins".

In November 2017, Tyrone, Lisa Sheriff and Leonora (Lee) Walwyn planned a surprise birthday party for Worrell Nero and arranged for us to visit and perform at the party in Nevis. He was very pleasantly surprised when he arrived at the party during a live performance of The Ramblers playing his favourite, 'Boys Night Out'. A few days later Mr. Nero entertained us at a scrumptious dinner party at his home where we enjoyed his company along with Lee and several of their friends. The day before we returned to Toronto, we travelled to St. Kitts where we were entertained at another wonderful party.

We wish to thank Tyrone for hosting us and for arranging our accommodations at the Four Seasons Hotel in Nevis and the Marriott Hotel in St. Kitts, as well as all transportation during our visit. Both Tyrone and Lisa went out of their way to ensure we enjoyed our stay.

THE STUDIO

In August 2001, Bernie retired and in 2002, he started construction of a home recording studio to enable Bing Serrão & The Ramblers to record and produce CD's at their leisure and to eliminate the hassles with the big recording companies.

It was here that we recorded our CD's. Many late nights, and too many hours reading, were spent learning to do our best at the art of recording. We still have a way to go. It is hard work, especially when you are on your own.

The cost of having to rent a professional studio, for the average musician, can be prohibitive. As a result, many performers do their best to create a suitable environment and purchase equipment that they can use to produce their own recordings. It is expensive and hard work, but you do the best with the limited finances at your disposal.

Professionals, with more experience and much better equipment and software than the average musician could afford, do the mastering of our recordings. After all of this hard work and expense someone comes along, copies your CD and sells it, often very poor copies, for a few dollars.

This piracy denies performers the rightful payment for their efforts, and cheats the composers of their royalties. It is considered criminal activity in many countries and huge fines are imposed when offenders are prosecuted.

In Guyana we would like to see some action taken against those who blatantly practice this activity in broad daylight. Proof that our hard work has been compromised, and our recordings have been counterfeited is available. Not only offensive, but also robbery, this illegal practice should be deemed as such with severe penalties applied.

APPENDICES

THE RAMBLERS IN BRITISH GUIANA

VARIOUS GROUP MEMBERS

- Bing Serrão
- Bernie Serrão
- Maurice Serrão
- Vic (Albert, Victor) Gonsalves
- Charlie Barkoy
- Albert 'Pak Pak' Rodrigues
- Ambrose De Souza
- Vincent 'Sandwich' Xavier
- Malcolm De Souza
- Romeo Rego
- Royston Charan
- George Baldenvick

SHORT 'STINTS' WITH THE RAMBLERS, IN BRITISH GUIANA

- Bongo players: 'Bongo' Charlie, and Mickey DaSilva.

Mickey claimed that he played in Edmundo Ros's orchestra for a short while, but was fired for doing too much of 'his own thing'.

- Tony Gaspar, a friend, sometimes played the maracas for the fun of it.

THE RAMBLERS

PRESENT MEMBERS

Bing Serrão	Mandolin / Lead guitar.
Bernie Serrão	Lead guitar in British Guiana, Bass guitar in Canada, manager.
Maurice Serrão	Rhythm guitar. First time played 'banjo' at Mr. La Borde's (Bruce & Marie) party on Kingston Rd., in 1954.

FORMER MEMBERS

Albert Rodrigues	Rhythm guitar from 1954, 3/4" upright bass when Charlie Barkoy left the Ramblers. Albert resides in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.
Romeo Rego	Banjo made by William Hussein. Passed away in British Guiana.
Roy Charan	Conga drum. Played drum set for the first time at U.S.A. NAFFI dance in 1961. Passed away December 29th, 2010 in Toronto, Canada.
Georgie Baldwinic	Biscuit tin cover / Maracas / rented snare drum (before we purchased the Premier drum set). Passed away in British Guiana.

Vincent Xavier	Conga drums. Played with The Telstars when The Ramblers left British Guiana. Passed away in British Guiana.
Charlie Barkoy	3/4' upright bass, some years later left the band to join the Casanovas (perhaps in 1958). Passed away in British Guiana.
Vic Gonsalves	Steel pan (1st. pan), vibraphone, accordion. Passed away May 12, 2010 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, U.S.A..
Harold Gonsalves	Lowrey organ and keyboard. Resides in Burlington, Ontario, Canada.
Ambrose DeSouza	Rhythm guitar in British Guiana 1952/3 to 1956/7. Resides in Toronto, Canada.
Malcolm DeSouza	Bongos during 1956 - 1957. Passed away early 2012 in the U.K.
Iggy Vaz	Keyboard. Resides in Ontario, Canada.
Tony Teixeira	Drums in 1961. Tony also played drums at The Latin Quarter, to fill in for Roy Charan for two weeks. Now resides in Whitby, Ontario, Canada.
Philip Teixeira	Drums Tony's younger brother. Resides in Whitby, Ontario, Canada. Played drums when Roy Charan decided that he should quit playing out at 40 years old,.

SPECIAL PERSONALITIES

OUR ELECTRICIAN

- John Thijs

TORONTO 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

- Iggy Vaz
- Tony Teixeira
- Philip Teixeira.

VERY SHORT 'STINTS' WITH THE RAMBLERS, IN TORONTO

- The Canadian flute guy
- Bernie Serrão Jr. on drums

THE DEMERARA CLUB DANCE ORGANIZERS:

- Martin Vieira
- Gordon Gonsalves
- Gerry 'Nippy' Ferreira
- Mike 'Scoochie' Gonsalves

Thank you so much guys, for the dedication and all the good, hard work.

RECORDINGS BY THE RAMBLERS

BRITISH GUIANA

KB Store, Georgetown – mid-1950's

45-rpm record - 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.

Radio Demerara - 1960 - Released under the COOK label (Trinidad)

Two 45-rpm 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).

TRINIDAD 1972

33 1/3 LP record 'Boys Night Out' - Released under the HYBISCUS label.

Recording engineer: Max Serrão (not related).

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.

OUR STUDIO - TORONTO, CANADA

5 CD's.

Three In One Saga - 15 tracks. 14 tracks are Bing, Maurice and Bernie's compositions and one track is a medley of British Guiana folk songs.

Playing Your Favourites - 13 tracks, including a mandolin version of Suhani Raat Dhal Chuki. Camille A. Serrão suggested the title of this CD.

Boys' Night Out - 15 tracks (12 tracks of the HYBISCUS (original Ramblers label) 1972 LP, 2 tracks live at The Latin Quarter on Yonge Street recorded on our own open reel tape recorder by Patrick Glen Williams, and the Three in One Saga version originally recorded at Radio Demerara in 1960.

Christmas CD - 10 tracks. 2 compositions by Bing: My Favourite Christmas Gift and Putting Up The Trees, 1 composition by John Drepaal (Slingshot): 63 Beach.

The Golden Years – 15 tracks. 6 tracks are compositions by Bing, Maurice and Bernie. This CD was recorded in 11 days in our Toronto studio with Dennis Nieves as sound engineer. The final tracks were mastered in Miami by Dennis Nieves.

MIAMI

The Serrão Family CD - Originally not-for sale.

While on a trip to Miami to celebrate our cousin's (Tyrone's Dad) birthday, we took part in a Serrão family CD, produced by Tyrone. The CD reflects the talent of the Serrão's Canadian and Venezuelan family. The Ramblers provided some vocals, and guitar and bass work for this CD, which was distributed as a gift from Tyrone to the Serrãos and their relatives at a family picnic in July 2013.

THE RAMBLERS AWARDS

Toronto

BRITISH GUIANA INDEPENDENCE AWARD, TORONTO, CANADA, MAY 16TH, 2003 - In recognition of our distinguished contribution to Guyanese Music and Culture over the past 50 years. Presented by The British Guiana Festival Committee on behalf of the Guyanese Community in Canada.

Brooklyn, U.S.A.

BRITISH GUIANA FOLK FESTIVAL 2003, THE WORDSWORTH McANDREW AWARD - In recognition of our outstanding contribution to British Guiana's Culture and Heritage.

APPEARANCES IN BRITISH GUIANA

FUND RAISING FOR CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Lions club, Jaycees, 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, the President and members of the 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 to fill in for the absentee bassist.
- Bing, after the Brooke Benton performance, was asked by Lillian Frazier to appear live on Radio Demerara to play his own music selections, for one week. Bertie Chancellor who worked in the radio station's music library helped with the selections.

Venues

- Hotel Tower (The Cactus Club Lounge, sometimes live on air).
- Radio Demerara Christmas dance
- Other company dances
- The Rendezvous Club on Robb street (A.J. Seymour).
- The 'Blue Room' (Gun Fernandes)
- Tower Hotel (Cactus Club)-Venezuelan Independence and U.S.Consulate cocktail parties
- The Park Hotel
- The Palm Court
- The Woodbine Hotel
- The CYO
- Guild Club (Father Pro Youth Group dances)
- Bookers Sports Club
- The Georgetown Club
- The Portuguese Club
- The Rowing Club
- The GFC Club
- The GCC Club
- The EICC Club
- The Chinese Association
- The Carib nightclub
- Vivian Lee's shows at various cinemas
- Government House (for Governor Savage)
- Charity parties at Peter D'Aguiar's BelAir residence grounds.
- Sugar estate dances (Wales, Leonora, Versailles, Ogle, etc.)
- The Chinese Association
- Birthday parties, other private parties
- Weddings
- Alongside The Royal Welsh Fusiliers / The Black Watch, for their NAAFI dances.
- Through the Governor's ADC, Mr. Rex Jones and Police Sergeant Neil Isaacs of the Brickdam Police Station, we practiced for the Government House and Georgetown Club dances in the police mess hall.
- New Amsterdam, Berbice - a wedding reception, a church concert.

PERFORMANCES IN CANADA

- The Royal York, The Sheraton, The Radisson, The Skyline, The Westin, Park Hotel, King Eddie Hotel, etc.
- Appearing at the opening ceremonies of The Ontario Place Forum with Dave Martins and the Tradewinds, Jackie Mittoo, and Tomorrow's Children from Jamaica, in 1972
- The Island Mix, Leela's on Morningside Ave, etc.
- St, Catharines
- Kitchener
- Hamilton
- Burlington
- New Brunswick

INCIDENTS OVER THE YEARS

BRITISH GUIANA

- Going home late at night (early in the morning!), Georgie barking at the barking dogs.
- Guild Club Dances
- Victor D'Aguiar's brother at the GCC dance - powdered face, huge handkerchief.
- Fight at the GCC (GFC)? - Ivan, Gerry protecting the band.
- Playing at the Portuguese Club for \$40.00 a night, 'had too many drinks already'
- Playing at the Portuguese Club with the police constable pianist - a bad sounding, badly tuned rented piano and a handful of felt hammers.
- Playing at The Portuguese Club Xmas or New Year's eve party, 'Gun' Fernandes cutting someone's tie in half, wrecking the waiter's tray.
- Playing at Government House (twice?). 'Are you there, Moriarty?'
- The two American Air Survey soldiers, AC and DC - 'plastic surgery' on their karate hands they said, bought our conga drum for \$30.00
- Playing at the NAAFI dances, the American soldier at the NAAFI party who wanted steel pan lessons.
- Playing past the emergency hours during the riots, ending up at Brickdam Police Station, getting 'sauce'd up', sleeping it off at George Baldwin's home.
- Playing at Mrs. Hastings house at Golden Grove, locating missing Welsh Fusiliers
- Playing at the Woodbine hotel, HMS Ulster soldiers fight, one unconscious, soldiers put off limits to the Hotel
- British army dance at the Woodbine hotel, someone (soldier) tried to grab the hula dancer during her performance

- Vincent Xavier - How he got his nickname 'Sandwich'
- Vincent Xavier, when playing at weddings, 'I know the bride, she liked me'
- Charlie Barkoy sauced up, we had to finish getting him dressed.
- Mister DeAbrue, George Baldinick and 'You nah come 'ere for dat'
- Playing for the ladies' old folks home - "Elizabeth didn't come because Margaret attended".
- Incidents playing at 'Lee's Photo Studio' taping and broadcast.
- Going in to tape our weekly 'Lee's Photo' broadcast, Radio Demerara's reception, blind folks weaving baskets and quarrelling.
- Radio Demerara - heating up the conga drum skin for a program taping (it popped!).
- Playing at the Mahaica leprosy hospital, (Honest) John Fernandes tearful farewell speeches.
- Playing at the overseers parties at the sugar estates dances across the Demerara river, the pick up by jeeps, the morning breakfasts, the frightful trips back to the Vreedenoop stelling in speeding jeeps, grabbing a wink on sugar and rice bags on the stelling waiting for the first ferry boat of the day to arrive.
- Arriving late at ZFY broadcast station, Ulric Gouveia's 'This is not a cook shop'
- George Baldinick – 'Stop the bus, I want to pee', when The Troubadours Steel Band were returning to Georgetown from Atkinson field. Ulric Gouveia did not want to stop,
- Soldiers ordered to help us with our instruments at Government House.

TORONTO

- People you meet, Incidents at the bar stints where Bing and Maurice played for a while.
- Demerara Club - Man, when are you going to play 'Release me'? Wife threw a bottle at him.
- Latin Quarter stories - Chiclets / laxative, the limbo dancers, losing the Hofner keyboard, the gifts from well-wishers at The Latin Quarter on Valentine's, birthdays and Xmas.
- Betting that Reggie McLean would not win a raffle again, tall Tina, Alex Knox, many other stories.
- Walking to Roy Charan's home on Eglinton Avenue, pushing his son's paper wagon down the street after threats from the other band at the dance hall on Oakwood Ave., the club manager cutting off the power, closing the door, Roy charging at the door, eyes popping out.

NEW BRUNSWICK

- The wonderful arrival and departure parties, being noisy going to the hotel for a night's sleep, the beautiful hall decorations, Russell Charter reassembling the Caribana float.

- Flying back from New Brunswick - The fire eater and the Limbo girls, vulgar language on the plane.

THE TRINIDAD TRIP

- Moving the equipment on a rickety 'bus', the stay at the Chaconia Inn, an evening appearance at the Chaconia nightclub.
- The party at the BelAir hotel on the Sunday before we left for Guyana.

RELATED GROUPS

STANVIC AND THE STARDUSTERS

When a radio program sponsored by Joe Chin & Co. at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday evenings was proposed, the group 'Stanvic and The Stardusters' was born.

Bing (STAN) played guitar, Maurice played rhythm guitar and (VIC (Gonsalves) played vibes. The guitar and vibes were the lead instruments for the show and the theme song was Hoagey Carmichael's 'STARDUST'. Put bits of our names together and you get **STANVIC**. Take into account the mood of the music, 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**.

For the last two years we played two shows every week; 'Rhythm by The Ramblers' and 'Stanvic and The Stardusters'. The hosts for these broadcasts were Ayube Hamid, Greg Poole and James Fung.

THE TROUBADOURS

In 1958, 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, encouraged by Maurice and Harold Gonsalves, I decided to investigate.

What shocked and humoured me was that the guys, mostly of Portuguese descent, had tried to make their own steel pans, which at that time was even more intriguing than Portuguese guys playing steel pans. I understood that the effort was not successful and that beating in the head of a steel drum was too much for the guys.

I was surprised to hear that the band had already played in the streets once or twice, performing under the name 'Convicts'. When 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, actually making convict uniforms. I believe that it was Godfrey Chin's idea. How ingenious, I thought!

As a young man Godfrey was a talented creator of band costumes. I had heard of him but was not a close friend at that time. He later became one of Guyana's notable historians until his untimely passing in 2012; a tragic loss for Guyana.

So, I became a member of the band playing first pan alongside Alvic and a fellow named Pereira. Maurice played second pan and Harold Gonsalves played tune bass.

From within the group parading on the street as The Convicts, another group emerged. This group, named The Troubadours, was more of an orchestra than a band, and played mostly for private parties. Alvic, Maurice, Harold and I were members of the Troubadours.

The Troubadours Steel Band now included members of The Ramblers. On one occasion The Ramblers and The Troubadours played on the same night at The Carib Hotel. We swapped places with the two bands as we performed; a thrill for every one of us!

THE TELSTARS

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

The next time I saw Clive and George, they were much taller, and had become fans of the British group 'The Shadows'. In that group, Hank Marvin played lead guitar and they used solid body Fender guitars. Solid body guitars and basses were becoming so popular that Clive and George asked William Hussein to make solid body guitars for their group. They also knew that the Shadows used British made Vox amplifiers and they imported one through Gems Record Store.

I was unaware that George, Clive, and my nephew, Tony Teixeira who previously played drums for The Ramblers, had formed a trio. They asked Maurice to play the electric bass for them and he taught them some more guitar chords.

So, British Guiana's original Telstars was born, with Clive Nobrega on lead guitar, George Jardim on rhythm guitar, Maurice Serrão on bass and Tony 'Freco' Teixeira on the drums. Vincent Xavier, also formerly of the Ramblers, was now playing double conga drums for The Telstars.

This was the core of British Guiana's Telstars. They played multiple musical styles, including Caribbean and Latin rhythms, and brought the most popular of The Shadows hits, such as Kon-Tiki, Atlantis, Peace Pipe, etc., to Guyanese audiences.

In an unfortunate accident on Friday, September 13th, 1963, Clive Nobrega died as a result of an accident on the Seawall Road when his motorcycle ran head-on into a park bench on the poorly lit road. The last time I saw him; he was in the hospital unconscious, with a huge bump on his forehead. He never regained consciousness and passed away a few days later.

Here, It is interesting to note that after playing at a GFC dance on Friday, December 13th 1963, while the rest of the band was packing up the equipment,

George left to give someone a lift home, and on his way back to the G.F.C. he was involved in an accident which broke his leg in three places. His Honda 125 motorcycle was a write off. Recalling Clive's death, his father had insisted that he wear a helmet, and this was gouged deeply in the accident. Most interestingly, and strange, was that Clive (Nobbie) had his fatal accident exactly three months earlier.

Because of Clive's untimely departure, the Telstars needed an immediate replacement lead guitarist and I was chosen to fill the gap. This required intense practice to be ready to perform in about a week. I knew little about the Shadows repertoire, had never played any of their tunes and had never before played a solid body electric guitar.

The lead guitar was a Futurama with a tremolo arm, another something new for me, with a beautiful selection of various tones generated by the European designed electronics. I believe The Telstars imported this instrument through Gems Record Store.

So, now it was Bing on lead guitar, George on rhythm guitar and Maurice on bass.

Maurice and I, while contemplating our trip to Toronto, managed to keep things going with the Telstars. In October 1963, members of The Telstars attended a concert and discovered and recruited Winston (Duggie) Duggin and Bernard Rodrigues as future lead and bass guitarists.

Since Maurice and I were planning to emigrate to Toronto soon, young Bernard Rodrigues assumed the role of bass guitarist. We continued to associate with The Telstars, encouraging them and giving any advice we could.

While we continued to perform, our new recruits kept up with what was going on. 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 that 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 songs 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 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, British Guiana. After Bing and Maurice left, the Telstars had a very successful tour to Barbados. Sometime after, a slightly newer version of The Telstars successfully toured the U.K. They went on to establish themselves as one of British Guiana's top musical groups.

In 2009 we were a part of The Telstars reunion appearance in Toronto. Winston, one of the primary organizers of the reunion, resides and performs in Miami, Florida. Bernard (Byron Flea) Rodrigues, who had left to reside in Alberta, Canada, could not attend. Bing showed off the only original Telstars jacket at the reunion.

The Telstars, like many others, made a terrific musical impact on other groups that were formed and patterned around the solid body electric guitar. In British Guiana around that time, musicians had to be resourceful and inventive to put a band together, and their efforts deserve to be brought to the forefront of British Guiana's rich music history.

SPECIAL PERSONALITIES IN BRITISH GUIANA

Fund Raisers

- **Members of the Ladies of Charity and the Guild of the Blessed Sacrament**, and countless other charitable organizations who organized the many fund raiser concerts in British Guiana, notably 'Honest John' Fernandes, who financed trips to entertain the folks at The Mahaica Hospital, Auntie Olga', The Lions Club and The Jaycees.

British Guiana should applaud the efforts of all those organizations, which have freely devoted time and effort to caring for others. Let us also not forget the numerous artistes who gave performances for free over and over again, without hesitation.

Entrepreneurs

- Vivian Lee
- Al Seals (Gems Record Store)