

## Management Strategies Employed by Master Blaster Band in the 2014 Carnival Calabar

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### Abstract

Carnival is a festive activity. It typically involves public celebrations combining some elements of circus with masks, public street party and displays of folklore. This study tends to investigate, identify and evaluate the different management strategies that were employed in the management of the Master Blaster Band in the Carnival Calabar 2014. Information about the band and details that are not in public domain was revealed through interviews with the band personnel, Carnival Commission and some members of the Band. It is pertinent for the Band to have in their employ, creative managers in the different categories.

**Keywords:** Carnival Calabar; Management skills, Performance Arts; Band management; Master Blaster Band

### 1. Introduction

The history of carnivals could be viewed from different angles because of the differences in thought, date, time and belief of different scholars. But to these views are certain facts agreed upon by the totality in books (archives), cultures and even scholars themselves that cannot be abandoned when talking about carnivals. Carnival is a festive activity that occurs immediately before the Christian season of Lent. Carnival typically involves a public celebration combining some element of circus, masks, public street party and displays of folklore.

Long before the emergence of Christianity, people whom we call pagans today had wild celebrations centered on the winter and spring solstices, and spring and fall equinoxes, celebrations that the people did not want to give up, even after they became Christians. The Catholic Church, therefore, adopted many of the celebrations called saturnalia, dedicated to Saturn, the god of agriculture, and to the god of wine, Bacchus, a festival that used to be celebrated around the longest night of the year (December 17 under the old calendar), became the celebration of Christmas on December 25th. The licentiousness of the pagan celebration was postponed until the week before lent began, around the spring equinox. The new springtime celebration came to be called carnival or carnaval from the Latin words *carne* ("flesh" or "meat") and *levare* ("to leave off") because immediately after the carnival festival, came the time of Lent 40 solemn days of penance and sacrifice, which included not eating meat as well as the renunciation of other pleasures of the flesh. Meat of the medieval carnival festivals climaxed on Ash Wednesday (Guigni, 2003).

Lent ends on the Easter Sunday, this is the most sacred of Christian holy days because it is the day that the crucified Christ was resurrected. Although the word "Carnival" originated with this pre-Lenten celebration, the celebratory style of masking, inversion and grotesquery came to characterize other festivals as well, as a result, some scholars specify the pre-Lenten carnival with term *carnestolendas*.

As Christianity spread, so too did the celebration of carnival. It spread across Europe and eventually to the Americas, carried there by European conquistadors and colonists. The Europeans who went to the Americas met up with what Christopher Columbus mistakenly dubbed "Indians" believing he had reached islands off India's shore (Valdez, 1995).

The Indians, too, had their community celebrations, for instance, the Tainos the natives of Hispaniola community-wide song and dance celebrations that were enjoyed by young and old, male and female alike. *Areitos* were held to celebrate the planting of their principal crop, yucca from which they made *casaba* (cassava) bread, at harvest time, at marriages and coming of age ceremonies, to celebrate successful hunts, the arrival of visitors, or sometimes just for fun. The dancers wore jewellery on their foreheads, in their ears and around their necks, and colourful tattoos and painted designs on their bodies depicting spiritual guides, their '*zemies*'. They also wore shell anklets that tinkled like bells as they moved in rhythmic unison across their *bateyes* (plazas). Their *caciques* (chiefs) wore elaborately carved masks decorated with multi-coloured natural woods and masks in Africa, because the natural objects were believed to lend certain spiritual strengths to the wearer. Natural

materials are commonly used to fabricate costumes in the Americas, too, for the same reasons from various parts of the African continent, the slaves brought with them such varied traditions as stilt-walking, carrying puppet as part of the their elaborate costumes, and fighting mock battles with sticks. Most importantly, perhaps, Africans brought with them a lively variety of musical instruments, dance rhythms, and singing styles and a stinging sense of humour that they use not just against their leaders, but often to make fun of themselves.

## 2. History of Carnival Calabar

The carnival Calabar formally started in the millennium year 2000 by the then Governor of Cross River State Mr Donald Duke. It was listed as one of the events to mark the Cross River state annual Christmas festival. The first parade showcased major landmarks of the state such as famous export commodity cocoa pod, the low land gorilla of the last rain forest in West Africa, the leopard of the Ekpe cultural group, the old residency building which once served as the seat of Government of the entire colonial Nigeria, the Mary Slessor caravan, monoliths and many more.

The Carnival Calabar is usually sponsored by many corporate organizations. Examples of these organizations are: First Bank Plc., Zenith Bank Plc., Guinness Nigeria Plc., Dangote Industries, Unicem Cements, Digital satellite Television (Dstv), High Television (Hitv).

In the year 2004, wife of the former state Governor Mrs Onari Duke, decided to introduce costume characters to give it depth and colour for variety and progression. This was highly successful especially the Carnival Calabar in Cross River state, also tagged "Africa's Biggest Street Party" was created by governor Donald Duke as part of the vision of making Cross River state the number one tourist destination for Nigerians and for tourists all over the world. The festivities which begins on the 1st of December and lasts till 31st has boosted the cultural mosaic of the Nigerian people while entertaining the millions of spectators within and outside the state and boosting industry for all stakeholders.

The street party has also become for the state and its citizens an ideal tool for tourism and ultimately socio-economic development. The carnival has ultimately become one of the major drivers of economic activity in Cross River state. The carnival route which is a 12km stretch offers huge vending and branding opportunities during the run-up to the carnival. There are benefits for a wide range and sections of businesses, especially the textile, haberdashery and tailoring sector. Some of the carnival bands buy pre-fabricated costumes and imported trimmings such as feathers and beads. The Cross River state has a body known as the Carnival Commission, this agency is fully committed to ensuring the safety of the participants and a successful event.

During the duration of the carnival, the government makes sure that all the law enforcement agencies like the Police Force, Road Safety Commission, Red Cross Society, Fire Service, Civil Defence Corps, etc. are all involved in the carnival. Most times, they participate in the carnival process ensuring the safety of the performers.

On the day of the event, most roads are always temporarily closed to traffic for safety reasons. The government usually advices spectators and participants to use public transport to get to the carnival venue, or if in any case they are driving, they are advised to leave early preferably before 6am to enable them park their cars at a convenient and designated parking space to ensure their safety. The government also provides welfare and refreshments for every member of the carnival participant to boost their energy more for the event. The government also provides some tips on what to do to ensure that the carnival day is a day of fun for all. The tips are as follows:

- Be mentally prepared for a long walk.
- Rest well on Christmas day.
- Take breakfast before leaving home on carnival day.
- Drink plenty of water before leaving home to avoid dehydration. Take along at least a litre of bottled water.
- Take enough fruit before the carnival.
- Wear a trouser and flat shoes or joggers to give you freedom of movement.
- Arrive at the stadium well before 9 am or at the time agreed with your band leaders at your band's designated mustering point.
- Arrange to meet friends and family before entering the carnival area.
- Have a set meeting place in case you lose family or friends.
- Make arrangements for your return journey before leaving for the carnival.
- Carry at least two handkerchiefs or a face towel.

- If you cannot withstand the sun, wear sun glasses.
- Hold some money for refreshments in case you are exhausted before the time of refreshment.
- Make up your mind to feel good throughout the carnival.
- Encourage your relations and friends to watch out for you in the carnival train.
- Stop at designated rest points to refresh.
- Be alert, pick pockets may be attracted to large crowds.
- Don't bring your valuables e.g. expensive jewellery, mobile phones, etc.
- Obey all the rules and regulations of your section and band respectively.
- Obey and respect your section leaders and band leaders respectively by complying with the directives they give you.
- Obey the Carnival Commission's Marshals. They are there for your safety and welfare.
- Use mobile toilets provided at the rest points when the need arises.

### **3. Benefits of Carnival Calabar to Cross River State's Economy**

The Carnival Calabar was created by the then Governor of Cross River State, Mr Donald Duke as part of the vision of making the state the hub for tourism and hospitality in Nigeria and in Africa. The Carnival presents a perfect platform for brand visibility and market awareness-According to the former executive secretary of the Carnival Commission and acting Director of the Cross River State Tourism Bureau Mrs Elenda Osima Dokubo, "The Carnival Calabar aims to include more aspects of the local heritage and culture, and at the same time strengthens the capacity of the locals to participate in an economically beneficial way."

Residents of the state enjoy benefits of the Carnival Calabar through the one-month-long activities lined up for the Christmas festival in the state. Starting from the 1st of December to the 31st, all the hotels in Calabar are usually highly booked up, and there is hardly any room left. The annual one-month-long Carnival festival is also lucrative that even the private residences are not left out as home owners rent out their space at this time of the year.

The airport, bus parks and even the water ways tell the same story of never ending activities, from commerce to entertainment. In its ninth year, this is one tourism event that has proven to be a game changer for the state.

Over the past years, the Cross River State Government has used this carnival to drive its tourism sector and provide exposure for its citizens, as well as develop its vast tourism sites and infrastructure such as the Obudu Ranch Resort, the Tinapa Business Resort and Marina Resort. The Carnival Calabar brings in tourists from all over the world to the state, and through these, they generate income for the development of the state. Africa is said to be the fastest growing tourism region. The world tourism organization rated Nigeria as the most visited country in West Africa. If the benefits and activities of the travels and tourism are utilized effectively, it could be a force for economic growth and especially for a developing state like Cross River State.

The tourism market has the potential to enhance lives in a sustainable framework through its incessant wealth creation, choice, innovation and competition. The travel and tourism industry contain elements that enable it become a dynamic market force for sustainability in the future. It has the capacity to increase exports, bring in investments, boost economies and create employment.

### **4. The Five Competing Bands in Carnival Calabar**

#### *4.1 Bayside Band*

Bayside band is one of the five carnival bands registered in the annual Christmas festival of Cross River State of Nigeria. Membership in the band is open to all Nigerians and foreigners. The band is easily identified by its characteristics and distinctive aqua marine colour. The band is divided into:

- Sections of 1000 members headed by section heads
- 25 subsections of 200 members headed by subsection heads

Officers of the band are band leader, deputy band leader and leaders of sections.

Bayside band is a corporate body with charity and sustenance of carnival spirit as its objectives. Its corporate structure comprises a 7- member advisory board and an administrative office headed by a program manager. The control and management of the band is vested in the advisory board which meets quarterly to consider all transactions relating to the band.

Funding for the band is derived from membership contributions, gains of year round entertainment activities which includes but are not limited to theatre shows and orchestra. The band is organized and coordinated by the

following leaders; Mr Donald Duke-Band Leader Mr John Odey-Deputy Band Leader.

#### 4.2 *Freedom Band*

Freedom band which is identified with the colour yellow was founded by Captain Henry Brisibe and Mr Larry Esin. Since its establishment, the band has consistently been among the best three in all previous editions of Carnival Calabar event. The band is made up of four sections namely; hip-hop, African hip-hop, calypso and reggae, with a total membership of over 1000 members. The distinguished personalities of the band are; Dr. Iyam Ugot as the band leader, Mr Patrick Ogar, Mr Ben, Chief Austin Dorgu, Mr Edward Archibong. His Excellency, Barr. Efiok Cobham is presently the grand patron of the band.

#### 4.3 *Passion Four*

Before now, Passion Four had been the most successful band in Carnival Calabar, having been six edition champions and two edition first runners up in the competition aspect of the carnival. Passion Four was declared as Africa's most outstanding band by all its adjudicators as the band continues to grow in creativity, organization and in the Africa's biggest street party. Passion Four's former leader and founder Mr Chris Agibe now serves as the executive secretary of the Cross River State Carnival Commission. His task is to handle the carnival and extend the creativity of Passion Four to all other bands. The band's new leader is Barr. Attah Ochinke, the Attorney General and commissioner for justice of Cross River State.

#### 4.4 *Seagull Band*

Seagull Band is one of the registered bands in the annual Carnival Calabar Christmas festival. It is the most stylish and coordinated body with the main objective of promoting and sustaining the Tourism and Hospitality industry within and at large, to enhance the status of the under privilege through charity. The band display the African culture through aesthetics, talents and innovation, paraded annually during the Carnival.

Seagull Band is identified with its eye catching distinctive colour red and maintains defined hierarchical structure. It is the band that recognizes and celebrates our own Nigerians and other artists, movie stars and beauty queens. The band is under the dynamic and charismatic leadership of the vibrant distinguished Senator (Princess) Florence Ita-Giwa. She is ably assisted by her management team which includes Mrs Affiong Effiom, Dr Margaret Akpan, Mr Louise Ikpeni, Mr Eric Anderson, Eme Iyamba and Elizabeth Asuquo among others.

#### 4.5 *Master Blaster Band*

Master Blaster band also known as "The Orange Family", is the largest and most entertaining of the five principal bands of the annual Carnival Calabar. The band has a membership base of over 10,000 members from all over the world. The Band has evolved over the years to become a brand name of choice and reference point, through the charismatic leadership of the band leader in the person of Senator Gershom Basse. The Master Blaster band caters for the "belonging" need of all segment of the society. The band inclusive approach to the Carnival Calabar encourages an enviable synergy between family, friends and embraces the participation of both local and international visitors to the joys of taking part in an international Carnival Calabar parade. The Orange Family is currently the overall champions of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Carnival Calabar. The band is on record as the only band that has won the most prizes in all categories of the competition within a single year in the entire history of the Carnival Calabar.

##### 4.5.1 *Origin of the Master Blaster Band*

How the Master Blaster band came to be is a little foggy. All the bands of the Cross River State Christmas festival started out as nameless groups spearheaded by different political and top government officials. In 2004, the then Governor Mr Donald Duke asked the leaders of various groups to designate names and colours for the groups. Five bands were subsequently approved, one of which is the Master Blaster band with its predominant colour being Orange with compliments of white and blue. The Master Blaster band as a result of its official recognition by the Cross River Carnival Commission is a limited liability company incorporated in Nigeria. The band is so registered to fulfil one of the regulations of the state's Carnival Commission. The band at the time of its inception had the highest membership poll making it the biggest band in the Christmas festival. The band also has a comprehensive database of all its registered members which helps the leaders and the members to stay in touch and keep abreast of the activities of the band.

##### 4.5.2 *The Band Leaders*

1. Senator Gershom Basse-Band Leader
2. High Chief Edem Duke-Chairman Planning Committee
3. Mr Gabriel Okulaja-Secretary

#### 4.5.3 Orange Family Bond and Band Membership

The Master Blaster band brings all its members together not only by organizing events but also by enabling members make conversations through the internet. The band has a database of all its members on the internet. These members are given a unique ID and a photo catalogue is made available for easy recognition on the internet.

The band has members within and outside Nigeria. Joining the 'Orange Family' requires a preliminary stage of picking up of forms at any of the band's registration points listed below.

Registration Points	Address
1.	Water Board premises Marian road, Calabar
2.	Telsat 137 Marian road. Calabar
3.	Marina Resort Marina Bar Calabar

#### 4.5.4 Steps Taken by the Master Blaster Band to Become the Winning Band

The Master Blaster Band was often seen as the band where people could have lots of fun just to enjoy themselves. This was the reason much thought was not given to the ultimate goal of being seen as the best and winning band in the Carnival Calabar. After some years of always emerging 5th in position, which is the last position in the competition; the band therefore decided to have a change of approach. Before the change in approach by the band leaders, the band was filled with fun lovers and revellers who just registered and joined the band on the day of the carnival parade just to catch fun without proper organization or having attended rehearsals. This often led to disruptions of the flow of activities in the band train as they were often rowdy. The band also did not take the interpretation of the yearly carnival themes seriously and were therefore unable to garner enough points to make them winners. For Master Blaster to get into the winning bracket, they had to strategize with the following:

1. Interpretation of the carnival theme: The Carnival Calabar comes with a yearly general theme which must be interpreted by the five bands through their costumes, choreographed dance, music, float and pageantry. After the release of the carnival theme, which was given as "Celebration Time", to celebrate the 10th edition of the Carnival Calabar, the band's script committee interpreted the theme, and came out with a story line which functioned as a working document and guide to what costume, music, choreography and the float for the band will display that year. Costumes and choreography are the most important part in the interpretation of the yearly theme.
2. Separating the revellers from the performers: Master Blaster band in an attempt to upgrade their performance had to separate the revellers and fun lovers i.e. those who don't attend rehearsals and those who just want to catch fun by joining the parade, from the main group of performers i.e. those who participate in the rehearsals and the activities of the band. This ensured that there was uniformity in the performances of the band while attempting to interpret the theme of the carnival.
3. Management Team Selection: The Master Blaster Band hired expert choreographers and costume designers from outside the country, precisely South Africa, with experience in the management of carnival bands.
4. Sectionalizing the band: The Master Blaster Band is made up of 20 sections; each section has a section head and leader. To ensure that the themes were interpreted with minimal risk of errors, each section was guided on the different part of the theme interpretation that they were involved in. This was to make sure that at the end of the interpretation of the theme by the different sections, there will be uniformity and a clear meaning when the performances of the various sections were joined together.
5. Setting up Committees: The following committees mentioned below were set up to ensure a successful outing for the year 2014. The committees are:
  - a. Carnival Day Control
  - b. Technical/Quality Control
  - c. Script Committee
  - d. Competition Committee
  - e. Costumes Committee
  - f. Choreography Committee
  - g. Kings and Queens Committee
  - h. Children Carnival Committee
  - i. Accommodation Committee
  - j. Budget/Finance/Procurement Committee

- k. Fund Raising Committee
  - l. Float committee
  - m. Music committee
6. Timeline of Activities for the Master Blaster Band (2014): The line-up of activities for the Master Blaster band for 2014 started on the 27th October and ended on the 26th of December 2014. The table of activities is drawn below. The table also shows the different strategies employed by the band in its quest to stay as champions.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activities</b>
October 27 <sup>th</sup>	Arrangement for four trucks to be used are made and concluded
October 29 <sup>th</sup>	Meeting with band leaders and section heads
October 30 <sup>th</sup>	Registration begins
October, 31 <sup>st</sup>	Audition and interview of additional choreographers/dancers. Letters for fund raising delivered. Update form finance committee. Submission of budget by secretariat, welfare, public relations and medicals. Plan of action by publicity and adverts
November 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Meeting presentation of storyline and interpretation
November 7 <sup>th</sup>	Meeting. Submission of music CD for storyline. Completed costumes designs based on storyline. Finance report
November 8 <sup>th</sup>	Sewing costumes begins children's rehearsals begins
November 10 <sup>th</sup>	Rehearsals for adult begin (4-6 pm)
November 11 <sup>th</sup>	Aerobics/Strengthening classes (4-6 pm) meeting (4-6 pm)
November, 12 <sup>th</sup>	Carnival commission's dry run (7:30 am) band rehearsals (4 pm)
November 13 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4 pm)
November 14 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4 pm)
November 15 <sup>th</sup>	Master blaster's dry run (7: 30 am) Children's rehearsals (10 am-12 am) Aerobics/Strengthening classes (4-6 pm)
November 16 <sup>th</sup>	Meeting to address any abnormalities observed, any other issue,/ matter arising (6 pm)
November 17 <sup>th</sup>	Purchase of costumes band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
November 18	Aerobic/Strengthening classes (4-6 pm)
November 19 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
November 20 <sup>th</sup>	Meeting (6 pm)
November 21 <sup>st</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm) classes
December 5 <sup>th</sup>	Ban rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 6 <sup>th</sup>	Children's rehearsals (10 am-12 noon) Aerobic/Strengthen classes (4 pm)
December 7 <sup>th</sup>	Band meeting (6 pm)
December 8 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 9 <sup>th</sup>	Aerobics/ Strengthening classes (4 pm)
December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4 pm)
December 11 <sup>th</sup>	Aerobics/Strengthening classes (4 pm)
December 12 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4 pm)
December 13 <sup>th</sup>	Children's dry run by carnival commission aerobics/strengthening
December 15 <sup>th</sup>	Carnival commission dry run (7:30 am) band
December 16 <sup>th</sup>	Aerobics/strengthening classes
December 17 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsal (4-6 pm)
December 18 <sup>th</sup>	Aerobics/ strengthening classes
December 19 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 20 <sup>th</sup>	Children's rehearsals (10 am-12 noon)
December 21 <sup>st</sup>	Meeting (6 pm)
December 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Master blaster dry run (3-6 pm) master blaster party (6 pm)
December 24 <sup>th</sup>	Band rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 26 <sup>th</sup>	Children's carnival Final adult rehearsals (4-6 pm)
December 27 <sup>th</sup>	Adult carnival

7. Rehearsals: The venue for the Master Blaster band rehearsals is usually the State's Water Board premises and the venue where their meetings are held is the Political Parlour in the State Governor's Lodge. The committees mentioned above were given terms of references and they worked together as a team to achieve the great expectations of the band. The major components of the carnival included costumes, choreography, music, king and queen competition and the carnival float. These areas required special attention and experts in those areas were invited for regular meetings to bring out the blueprint for the Master Blaster Band's presentation for 2014. Suffice it to say that they worked hard and

surprised everybody and won the following awards:

- a. Best band of the year
- b. Best reflection of carnival spirit
- c. Best king and queen
- d. Best interpretation of carnival theme
- e. Overall First Position

Besides the foregoing, the Master Blaster band has a yearly event calendar that includes picnics, concerts, travels, tours, exhibitions, parties, film shows, training workshops and seminars apart from the carnival to which the registered members are invited to. These no doubt contribute significantly to the recent success of the master Blaster Band.

## 5. Conclusion

From the discussion, it is clear that in every event or competition, proper management has a lot to do if that event must come out successful. This is seen in the various managerial strategies employed by the Master Blaster Band which has made them winners for three consecutive years in Carnival Calabar. The Carnival Calabar being a unique display of African heritage showcases the dance, music and visual creativity. This is reflected in the floats, costumes, make-up and choreographed dances.

Since the inception of Carnival Calabar, Master Blaster Band always emerged last in the competition, but following the laid down processes earlier discussed in this work, the band upgraded its status in the festival. The Calabar metropolis has significantly improved in their standard of living in terms of maintaining clean and healthy green environments, this is due to Carnival Calabar which has through tourism created commercial opportunities, employment, importation and exportation, new investments and boosting of the economy of the state generally. Management is an art. It can be argued that it is more of an art than an act because it requires creativity to showcase an event and make it beautiful and inviting for the prospective audience and also to leave a lasting impression on the audience after the event. To manage an event needs a wide array of skills from the event manager. He/she must be able to control those under him, be creative, be firm on what he wants and the concepts he plans to use. This is seen in the uniquely different ways the Carnival Calabar is being put out each year. All the bands display their best managerial skills and turn out in their best, and this is rightly played out by the Master Blaster band in particular. The unique management skills used by the Master Blaster Band make Carnival Calabar refreshing each year. The storyline, the colour scheme, the choreography and the costuming, all contributed in making the Master Blaster Band carnival a good study guide for events managers, students and even professionals in other field

Based on findings, the Carnival Calabar does not have an organized documentation of the yearly events and a library where a researcher can walk in and pick up materials for reference purposes. I recommend that the Cross River State Government should make provision for that to help develop a first class publicity reference literature for any researcher in Nigeria and those in the diaspora.

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