

Tony Cheeseman Eulogy

Charles Anthony Cheeseman also known as Tony or Pepe was born in the Ivy, St Michael, Barbados. He attended St Giles Elementary, the Modern High School and Combermere School. He left the island at 19 years of age by which time he had become an outstanding basketball player and a prominent musician.

In 1964 like many young men from Barbados Tony was recruited by London Transport and came to work at Poplar Bus Garage in East London as a conductor. He stayed for a short while and moved on to work in the rag trade. His love for music never faded and he formed a soul band "Tony C and the Cresants" who toured the UK and Europe during the 1970s. He was also the lead singer for the popular funk rock group Zapata. Tony wrote, produced, arranged and published music. His most successful single was on his own label Tony Cee Records which he released in 1981.

In addition to music he made other valuable contributions to the Arts in the London borough of Newham. In 1980 with others he founded and became the first development worker for the Newham Black Performing and Visual Arts Workshop. A voluntary organisation whose main aims was assisting in educating, developing, promoting and marketing Black Arts in the borough. It was based at 324/6 Romford Road E7 which is now the Forest Gate McDonalds restaurant.

Tony was one of the pioneers who worked for African unity in the borough and was a leading light in getting the African & Caribbean Resource Centre in Barking Road. He also supported East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO) in their formative years and many other local groups including the Newham Community Relations Council. He chaired an important and ground breaking African history project in Newham during the GLC 1984 Anti Racist Year. This was a series of ten lectures on the theme "Afrika - Mother of Civilisation." Tony gave the first lecture titled First World People – The Evidence. Other distinguished speakers during the three-week programme were Cecil Gutzmore, Winston James, Dr Aggrey Burke, Bro Drake Koka, Amon Saba Saakana, and Peter Blackman Senior among others.

Tony love for his people stretched far and wide, he was a member of the Pan African Congress, also an executive member of the Camden African Caribbean

Organisation. A discussion paper he wrote in 1983 for a Black Youth Work conference titled “Psychology of Racism” is still very relevant in helping us understand the mental state and condition of African people today.

He predicted the increase of Black on Black violence and always spoke passionately of the importance of knowing African history (World history) and using it to create positive change. He also wrote an interesting report on Reparations for the G.A.C conference in 2008. Tony attended Goldsmiths College and successfully completed a 2-year full time diploma course in Community & Social Work. He went on to work with Lewisham council as a social worker before returning to Barbados in 1985.

Pepe faced many challenges as a Barbadian returning home, but he overcame them. He remained proud of his African identity and reflected that mainly in his dress. Tony worked as a Musical Cultural Officer for the National Cultural Foundation and as a social worker at the Psychiatric Hospital until his retirement.

Tony was an African Liberationist and adopted an African centred approach when others were working on egalitarian and socialist models of changing society. His last visit to Newham was in 2008 when he stayed a few weeks with friends after returning from Ghana where he represented Barbados at the Global African Congress (G.A.C) Summit.

Tony passed on Emancipation Day the 1st August 2009 and his joyful going home celebration was held on Tuesday 11th August 2009. The Barbados Nation newspaper reported on the celebration and wrote that he will be “Remembered as a humble man who had a passion for the history of his people, a Barbadian musical pioneer, a deeply spiritual man – it was made clear Tony’s legacy would live on with those in the various organisations with which he came into contact.” Tony left two daughters Chidi Cheeseman and Julie Alleyne, former wife Lovette Cheeseman and grand children.

His message was simple. – We should listen to the voices and dreams of those who have gone before us. We should practice acts of kindness and hold securely to our beliefs of family values, community concerns and the unity of African peoples. - Many of his friends who worked closely with him during his sojourn in Newham still believe in the message and continue to keep it alive.

Presented by Harry Cumberbatch August 2009 (London memorial service).