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STEEL PAN MASTER ANDY NARELL AND CALYPSO LEGEND RELATOR BRING JAZZ AND VINTAGE CALYPSO TOGETHER

**Featuring Dario Eskenazi, Pedro Martinez, Gregory Jones, Mark Walker,
and Special Guest Paquito D’Rivera**

With Andy Narell—who’s been playing calypso music from Trinidad since he was barely tall enough to reach the pan—it’s always been about expanding the role of the steelpan in jazz. Now, with the June 23, 2009 release of *University of Calypso* (HUCD3168) on Heads Up International, a division of Concord Music Group, Narell joins forces with calypso legend Relator to explore the role of jazz in vintage calypso. Together, they perform 15 classic compositions by Lord Kitchener, Lord Melody, Mighty Terror, Roaring Lion, Spider, and Relator, supported by a group of world-class Latin-jazz cats who can swing the calypso *and* blow *le jazz hot*. It’s been over 50 years since a major calypsonian went into the studio with a bunch of jazz players. This CD is cause for serious celebration!

In many ways this project was inspired by Lord Kitchener’s forays into jazz in the 1950s. Kitchener (real name Aldwyn Roberts; now respectfully nicknamed Grandmaster) was arguably the greatest songwriter in the history of calypso. Born in Trinidad in 1922 (where he passed away in 2000) he was largely responsible for calypso’s evolution into a melodically and harmonically sophisticated music. He was a fabulous lyricist as well, and a great commentator and humorist on a wide array of subjects. He emigrated from Trinidad to London in 1948, where he discovered jazz—and wrote a very hip composition called "Bebop Calypso" praising Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. He stayed in London throughout the ‘50s, playing with jazz musicians and making numerous recordings that revolutionized calypso music. Along with Trinidadian musicians like Rupert Nurse, Fitzroy Coleman, and Russ Henderson, Kitchener created a new jazz-influenced big band sound that suited calypso perfectly—and when he returned to Trinidad, 17 years later, it was as a hugely successful entertainer with scores of hit records to his credit. Nearly half this album is drawn from his songbook. "Oddly enough," Narell points out, "there has been very little interaction between calypsonians and small jazz bands since the ‘50s. Relator and I are drawing a lot of inspiration from the idea of picking up where Kitchener left off 50 years ago."

Relator (real name Willard Harris) is one of Trinidad’s finest calypsonians. He’s a brilliant singer-songwriter, with a long series of outstanding compositions to his credit. He is also one of the greatest living masters of *extempo*, an improvised calypso cutting contest in which, like hip-hop freestyle

competitions, two singers attempt to blow each other away. He has been featured in two recent films about Trinidad music, *Calypso at Dirty Jim's* and *Calypso Dreams*.

Starting his career in 1971, Relator became famous for his amazing rhymes, and the dazzling phrasing he employs to sing his way through even the trickiest lyrics. In 1980, with the now-classic "Food Prices," he won the Calypso Monarch competition—an honor to which every calypsonian aspires—and he's still considered one of the masters of the art form today. He is also a great interpreter of classic calypsos, with a vast knowledge of other calypsonians' songs, especially those of Lord Kitchener.

Following upon the critical successes of *The Passage* and *Tatoom*, Narell was invited to present a concert of his steelband music at the Trinidad and Tobago Steelpan and Jazz Festival, playing with the great Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra. While he was on the island, he sat in with Relator at a tribute to Lord Kitchener. "There were four different sets," Narell recalls, "ranging from solo piano to big band and steelband, and everybody played Kitch's music. Relator did a beautiful set with just his guitar and a percussionist, and at one point I heard him say that he had gone to the University of Kitch, and was proud to be one of its best students. I knew that Relator had sung in Kitchener's tent for 17 years, and that they were very close, and that he has a deep understanding of Kitchener's music. I've been playing Kitchener's music since I was a little kid, so the 'University of Kitch' really resonated for me. When we decided to record together, I proposed that we call the project 'University of Calypso' to capture that feeling that we share."

Narell and Relator also share a deep affection for classic calypso that infuses this session with a unique energy that hasn't been heard in a while. When Relator speaks of being a calypsonian, his passion for the art is clear. "Is a tradition we upholdin'. We know what standards are set, what values, and we stay true to that. We are true servants to de t'ing. We are not mockin' pretenders or exploiters or opportunists lookin' to be popular an' t'ing. We believe that vintage calypso must be preserved, and that is the line that we are on."

Recently, Relator has been advocating a year-round focus on calypso music in Trinidad, as opposed to the traditional model in which calypso disappears when Carnival is over. "I'm not catering to someone who tells me that after Carnival my thing is finished," he says. "I did 25 years of that. Every week I write a calypso, but you don't get the coverage because it is not Carnival season. We have to get into an area where we can write a song any time in the year and they play it on the radio."

Hopefully, *University of Calypso* will help Narell and Relator bring this marvelous music to a new audience, all year round. "I believe this project has great potential to reach people," says Narell. "The music is so accessible, people can latch on to so many different things—the beautiful melodies, the groove for dancing, the stories told in the lyrics, the humor, the jazz elements, how the band plays together and interacts, the soloing—and on top of it all, we've got an incredibly dynamic guy out front singing these songs, a real storyteller in the great calypso tradition. I wanted to record some of this music right away in order to breathe life into the project and get it off the ground, but the real goal in my mind is to get in front of people and play it live."

"There are so many great calypsos," Narell continues, "and Relator's knowledge of it all is so vast that we could make a dozen albums right now and still have plenty of great material to work with. But 15 tunes is a good first outing. With this concept we have for the University of Calypso, and with our 'professor' out front, we'll be able to keep changing the repertoire, learning and exploring the possibilities of this beautiful art form."

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