

Rapsoul the new generation

By CORDIELLE STREET

HE has been away too long. Brother Shortman, one of the founders of rapso, has spent 13 years away from his native Trinidad. Now, like the mythical Phoenix, he rises out of his ashes, having "died" to be reborn anew. This time he's come with rapsoul.

"I want to thank the brothers in the band for keeping the music alive, and thank also the calypsonians who have supported the rapso circuit and helped in so many ways, especially Stalin, Valentino, Ras Shorty, Explainer, Rootsman, and so many others."

The "Thank You's" were first on the list for Everard Romany, whose self-exile from the music he helped to create lasted over a decade.

The famed rapso Rhythm Network Band began with Romany, Brother Resistance, Curtis "Slinger" Hughes and Wayne "Moppsman" Blackman. Hughes was the first to leave the band, Blackman passed away, and Romany continued the exodus in 1985. He was replaced by Karega Mandela.

The origin of the music, he said, was a humble one. "It started with brothers liming on the block." The year, Brother Shortman estimated, was 1969.

"Rapso was a cry for help for people of the East Dry River. We are PNM knights from generation to generation, and nothing has been done and it keeps getting more violent."

"We had dreams of touring the world and Resistance and them have basically accomplished that," said Brother Shortman.

It came as quite a shock for many when Brother Shortman left the band and then rapso altogether. "I went very, very far underground because of personal problems. I was dead. I like to say that I am resurrected. I was depressed. My wife had left me. I was in chaos. I never had a time like that in life."

"You just don't want to be on the same island as that person." Romany sought refuge in Sweden. A brief holiday turned into an opportunity to begin life again leaving all that was painful in the past—in Trinidad and Tobago.

"I wanted to be on the moon and I only reached Sweden," said Romany.

"And he landed in my lap," piped in Anna, his wife.

"My wife—she is the person who motivated the journey back."

Anna, a teacher and a Swede, met Romany after he taught himself to speak Swedish in only five months and opened his own business. Romany, a tailor by profession, became the all-round "fix-it guy", working on anything from boats and fishing nets to suitcases and bags.

Together, Anna and Romany have five children all from previous relationships. Now the happily married couple have sold their home, car and business to relocate to Trinidad and Tobago. "If anybody would have told me two years ago that I would be with you in the Express building being interviewed, I would say, 'Yeah right,'" admitted Romany, with a laugh.

"We had been talking about it for 12 years, how much he wanted to go," explained Anna. Yet it was only two years ago that Brother Shortman began to make music again. "I just turned off."

Now the music is back and it has evolved as Romany has. "I am not the same. I am not carnal. I am in a spiritual period of my



BROTHER SHORTMAN, one of the founding fathers of the rapso movement, and his Swedish wife, **Anna**, have relocated to Trinidad to fulfil Shortman's dream of starting yet another "freedom music" genre called rapsoul. Shortman has spent close to 13 years away from his native Trinidad. Photo: MICHEAL BRUCE

life. I don't want to go and talk about politics like we use to do because it didn't help. We are going to wake up the people with the music.

I have talked about the same issues in rapso and when I look around I see more poverty, more poor people. These things (politics) are synthetic. It is not real. If they were real then you would see their fruits."

Brother Shortman continued, "Rapso artistes must have a dedication to the people. That is the similarity between rapso and rapsoul. The difference I think is the spiritual role and the journey continues and the flesh is so weak. So you have to go a little deeper to find yourself."

As much as the younger generation of rapso does not know Brother Shortman, the "father" himself does not recognise his "sons and daughters". Names like Ataklan, 3 Canal and Sister Ava are unknown to Romany.

"I don't think I would have seen that far. I was 100 per cent sure that this was something beautiful. But to see it grow to generations, to have them embrace it... no," said Shortman with a semi-puzzled

smile on his face.

"That is how powerful this music (rapso) is." With the same focus and somewhat unconcerned thought for the future, Romany pursues rapsoul.

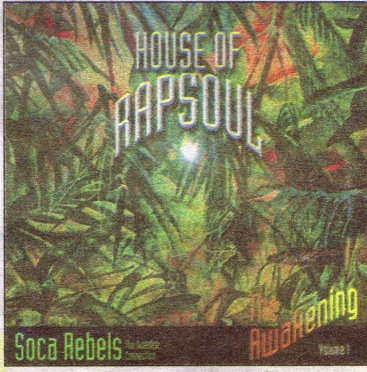
His first CD, *House of Rapsoul—The Awakening*, contains only four tracks but is memorable if only for the fact that all musicians save himself are Swedish. He is backed by the European band Soca Rebels—The Swedish Connection.

"These guys—they play for Crazy as well," said Romany as he described the six-member band which has visited Trinidad and Tobago on numerous occasions. Although Soca Rebels has not performed in Trinidad and Tobago, having done all their work in Europe (including that with Crazy), they are well versed with instruments such as the drums and the steelpan.

Romany's love for the music has even infected Anna, who lends her vocals to the CD.

"We are in the studio and people hear her and they don't even know that she has now started."

Brother Shortman believes this ac-



House of Rapsoul—The Awakening, Brother Shortman's first CD.

complishment is due to the music. "I think firstly you have to open the doors to your inner self. You will want to be a better person. It's not about producing some CD and wanting to be a super star. It's all inwards... finding your inner treasures."