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Calypso is a tropical contradiction in a city tamed by the blues.

The social message of Chicago blues is discharged through deliberate tempos and guttural vocals. Calypso's social message is delivered by bountiful melodies and evocative harmonies.

And it is calypso that will breeze into the borough of the blues with Caribbean Musicfest '87 Sunday at the Park West, 322 W. Armitage. Headlining the bill is Trinidad's legendary Mighty Sparrow, regarded as the king of calypso. Also appearing is Eddie Lovette (who leans more toward reggae than calypso) and the Caribbean Express Band. Sunday marks the first time a calypso concert of such magnitude has been created for Chicago.

"That is one of the unique qualities of the calypso," Sparrow said in a recent conversation from New York City. "We are able to live a very serious topic lightheartedly - still with a message and still making you want to dance to it. I look at that as a great achievement."

Based on fluent 4/4 time, calypso music incorporates the spirit of Latin bamba and salsa and the soul of African high life and American funk.

"It's like life," Sparrow said. "We cover politics, religion, violence and sex. We have the ability to cover so many different things only because so many different influences have fused themselves together. If you can get into it, you can understand how beautiful calypso is."

Sparrow, born 52 years ago as Slinger Francisco to a working-class family on the island of Grenada in the West Indies (his family migrated to Trinidad when he was 2 years old), said that to understand the songs you need to comprehend the singer.

"You have to understand the role of the calypsoian," he said. "He is considered as the mouthpiece of the underprivileged, which has been from the days of slavery until present time. This type of music was not always used as a happy music. It was used to make fun of master. It was used to plan escapes. It was used to bring consolation to the oppressed and news of the day.

"Anything of importance was brought to the attention of the public - enlightening of the masses through calypso. Whenever the media refuse to elaborate on certain aspects of a story, if the calypsoian is interested, he elaborates on it himself. But as as newspapers, radio and television developed, the role of the calypsoian diminished. The calypsoian remains a journalist of sorts, except he has to find a new melody each time. A regular journalist does not have to find melody, he does not have to rhyme. He just reports the story as it is."

Sunday, the Mighty Sparrow is expected to cover topical calypso material ranging from "Afraid of AIDS" to 1980's "Wanted: Dead or Alive" (a rhyming litany of fallen dictators) to "Vanessa," an upbeat tribute to Vanessa Williams, a former Miss America.

"Ah, you know me," Sparrow grinned through the phone. "It seemed they didn't like Vanessa because she was black, so I started defending her. Then I saw the pictures (of a nude Vanessa in lesbian poses), then I said, naaaah."

Sparrow began to sing from the song: " `I thought it was racial grudge, but 'twas a head attacking a tail. If I was a judge, I'd put both of them in jail.' "

He added, "Yet, I'm not trying to moralize."

Sparrow again started singing, " `Jealous, I will admit, not for what you did, but because it's not me you did it with.'

"Ha-ha-ha."

Sparrow's best-known hit is "Carnival Boycott," which he wrote in 1957. A private organization controlled the Trinidad Mardi Gras and the carnival's masqueraders, revelers, steel bands and calypsoians. "But we weren't being treated properly," he said. "We saw a lot of money being made and nobody got a fair share. So I decided to organize a group of my singers, and we boycotted the competition. The government of the day, the PNM (People's National Movement) knew of our situation. When we showed we had the gumption to stand up to them (the private organization) and decide we'd rather go hungry rather than let ourselves be exploited, they formed a new body called the Carnival Development Committee (CDC) that took over from the other organization.

"And we started getting a little better treatment."

For Sunday's show, Sparrow will be backed by a contemporary 10-piece calypso band, incorporating bass, guitar, synthesizers, saxophones, trumpets and background singers. Traditional calypso instrumentation such as tamboo bamboo (sticks) and pan (steel drums) will not be employed.

Still, Sparrow obtained his stage name in traditional calypso style.

"It is pretty much like your professional wrestling," he said. "Everybody has a particular name suited to their particular style. You have Junkyard Dog, Killer Bees and Andre the Giant. Because of my singing style, I was given the name Mighty Sparrow.

"In the old days, everybody used to stand and sing flat-footed," he said. "I was the

only one doing the dancing and jumping - like what

James Brown has been doing. And I started before him. So the guys would say, 'Why don't you stand and sing? You keep dancing around like a damn little sparrow!' And the name stuck, but I had to make it sound important. So I attached 'Mighty' to it."

Indeed, a fitting name for a free bird.