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## REVIEW: THE REVENGE OF KING JAB JAB

March 3, 2021 Harmony Farrell Reviews, Theatre [Leave a comment](#)



Afi Ford-Hopson as Jab Molassie in 'The Revenge of King Jab Jab' | Photo Credit: Saul Ramlal

### Hell is empty & all the devils are gyrating at the Little Carib Theatre!

In this year of 2021, the first time in over a century that the streets of Trinidad and Tobago will not be greeted by the revelry of masqueraders come carnival Monday and Tuesday, Brown Cotton Outreach has reminded us what carnival is really about. It is raw, real, rebellious, cathartic and often crude- encompassing all aspects of life from politics to pleasure to sex and sexuality.

The Revenge of King Jab Jab, whose 7PM performance I attended on Sunday 7th February, is a satire that was geniusly written by *Wayne Lee-Sing* and produced by *Louris Lee Sing*. It featured a mosaic of calypso, Shakespearean verse, and the oratory conventions of the carnival characters. The audience at the Little Carib was taken to the 'land of Mamaguy', where King Jab Jab is leading a sinister plot to create hell on earth. His four disciples: Jab Molassie, Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade and Jammette are all in collusion, as they present their proposals to create the most dreadful conditions in the land of the living.



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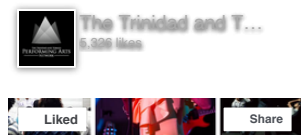
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The irony is clear when some of their seemingly unthinkable plans reflect present day realities in T&T and abroad. Take, for instance, the screaming laughter when Pierrot Grenade suggests that the perfect solution to traffic congestion would be to dig up the roads and create a world of potholes. The social and political commentary is razor-sharp & hilarious, like an old mas band, but with dialogue. It takes the vikey-vi politics of a world in turmoil and magnifies it to the point where you have to laugh at how strikingly you're able to see real life situations in its enormity.

The theatre world may want to revoke my license for saying this publicly, but I am of the opinion that Shakespeare can be passé at times, especially in a contemporary Caribbean context. However, Lee-Sing managed to work it beautifully. It is more than fitting for a carnival play, as speaking characters such as the Pierrot and Midnight Robber have evolved from the theatrical practice of quoting and reciting classical literature, of which Shakespeare has dominated. A most brilliant moment is where the Jab Molassie challenges his king to quote Walcott instead, holding onto the theme and setting of hell by making reference to our own Caribbean classic, *Ti Jean And His Brothers*.

*Ellen O'Malley-Camps* (Hellen Camps) had a small but outstanding cast to direct, and they all get five stars for truly world class acting. All of the male characters were played by women, and the only female was played by the playwright himself (though I think they could all well be considered gender neutral).

*Paula Hamilton-Smith* gives us a bonafide Midnight Robber who's "more venomous than the cobra, more vicious than the panther, fiercer than the tiger and faster than the toyota", never falling out of his signature gait. The Pierrot Grenade was magnificently portrayed by *Cindy F. Daniel*, with all of the flamboyant speechifying and spelling that you could ever want. *Afi Ford-Hopson* gave a loose-tongued and equally loose-waisted Jab Molassie, who shared the majority of stage time with Jab Jab himself, played by an ever eloquent *Danielle Elliott*.



*Paula Hamilton-Smith* gives us a bonafide Midnight Robber | Photo credit: Saul Ramla

However, while the actors performed their characters brilliantly, the manner in which their individual performances coalesced as a whole, left some things to be desired. For me, there wasn't a very strong sense of hierarchies and lowerarchies among the King and his minions in the Land of Mamaguy. From a distance, there appeared to be a lack of chemistry between the actors. Perhaps it might be chalked up to a peculiar presentation style. While it did dissolve the fourth wall and draw the audience in as part of the action, it felt as though the actors were delivering all of the lines as a series of asides and monologues, rather than interacting and reacting with each other on stage.

With a running time just over an hour, the show is compact, and ends with the hint that it might perhaps be continued in a sequel. This does not negate that it was too abrupt a denouement for me. Had it not been for the very direct declaration that the show was about to end when it did, I would not have known that the curtain call was approaching. Perhaps it was so enjoyable that I was left wanting more, but I did not feel as though the plot swelled and petered out toward a finale.



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#AuditionTips: Perspective is EVERYTHING 🎭

Sometimes there are not enough roles, or not enough of the budget to cast all the talent we see. While you may feel hurt, 'rejection' may not necessarily be a bad thing 😊 I @OnstageBlog [ow.ly/dFJf50E39Ex](https://ow.ly/dFJf50E39Ex)

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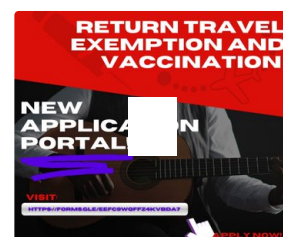
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The Pierrot Grenade was magnificently portrayed by *Cindy F. Daniel* | Photo Credit: Saul Ramlal

Between Mervin De Goeas with makeup and Ronald Guy-James with costume design, the aesthetic is pretty ugly, and by that I mean a great balance between the beautiful and grotesque that make up a masquerade. Each of the characters looked like a walking, talking, wining masterpiece, and every moment on the stage was picture-worthy. Stunning all round.

And for the music! One cannot talk about a carnival show without the music. This show had kaiso fuh so, and the actors sung just as well as they spoke. The cast breathed life into classics like Kitchener's 'Trouble in Arima', Lord Melody's 'Belmont Jackass' and 'Carnival Celebration' by Small Island Pride. The most unexpected of the interludes was an interpretive dance to Jadakins' 'Va Va Vroom Vroom'. In that instance, the audience lost it.



Photo credit: Saul Ramlal

At the same time however, the song and dance breaks felt a bit arbitrary at times, with characters calling on the maestro to run the track just for the sake of it. In a play that is dominated by the highest of high comedy, some of the musical bits were bordering on slapstick. Nevertheless, that is exactly what makes mas what it is – that sweet spot where Shakespeare meets Jadakins in a Jouvert band.

All in all, *The Revenge of King Jab Jab* is a sweet taste of carnival in this famine that is COVID-19. I'm happy to hear that Brown Cotton Outreach has announced that the devils will rise again. If you missed it the first time, **Brown Cotton Outreach's production of 'The Revenge of King Jab Jab' will return to the Little Carib Theatre March 6th + 7th. See flyer below for details.**



**THE REVENGE OF KING  
JAB JAB**  
**PLAY MAS WITH SHAKESPEARE**

**SATURDAY 6TH MARCH 7PM**    **SUNDAY 7TH MARCH 7PM**    **VENUE: THE LITTLE CARIB THEATRE**    **Tickets: \$150. Call/Message: 686-9965 for bookings**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Harmony is a poet, actor, dancer, stage singer, researcher, educator, content creator...and the list goes on! In 2019 she graduated from the Guildford School of Acting/University of Surrey with a first class honours degree in Theatre & Performance with Creative Writing, where she grew an interest in writing about the arts. Her passion for performing emerged somewhere between being involved as an ensemble member & soloist for groups in musical theatre, parang, choral singing, dance (ballet, tap and contemporary), spoken word, comedy videos and again, the list can go on. Harmony's writing is situated between her scholarly focus and her practitioner's insight.

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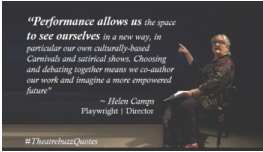
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