

OPENING OF PEN CAYETANO'S ART EXHIBITION
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“The problem with history, is that it is written by college professors about great men. That’s NOT what history is. History is a HELL OF A LOT OF PEOPLE getting together, and deciding they want a better life for themselves, and their children.” A Community Organizer

The concept of culture implies ways of behaviour, language, belief systems, lifestyle, etc. Our cultural traits are symbols for purposes of self-identification, and for identification by others. But to what extent is culture used as a basis for investment in a people’s economic development?

For example, Punta Rock has received national acceptance as Belize’s own dance and music. So for the past two decades, this music has been a cultural trait that we all share as Belizeans. Unfortunately, after all these years, Punta Rock as an economic contribution, is still more a potential than a reality. You see in our quest for modernization, which is mainly copying from outsiders, we have yet to learn to equate culture with development.

What IF punta rock, or any other cultural trait is treated seriously enough to warrant economic potential? It would be developed, skills sharpened, as in the case of any other product. The benefits of capital investment in culture leading to economic growth are many. It is not only the expected economic outcome, but more importantly, in a non-material sense, it leads to improved concept of self, and a greater community spirit---the silent side of development that is absent from our communities.

In comes a much lived example, a demonstration of how important culture is as tool for development, as the technology of self-respect. It is personified by the son of Victorina Lino Cayetano and George Cayetano, husband of Ingrid and father of a daughter Mali, and two sons. He is no other than Delvin Cayetano better known as PEN.

I first became aware of Pen’s talent around 1974 in Belmopan, when a group of us organized the first celebration of the arrival of the Garifuna to the shores of Belize. Being a committee that was broke, Pen and the original Turtle Shell Band offered to play free of cost to our celebration. Pen and the Band literally invaded middle class Belmopan!! Later, he dared Dangriga by setting up Punta Rock Music Blocks on St. Vincent St.

I lost touch with Pen until 1983/1984 when my son dragged me to his humble studio near Canal Street in Dangriga. My son had discovered that someone was selling calabash with sketches of local sceneries, and the reason for taking me along was to pay of course. Lo and behold, it was Pen’s studio—the man is not only creative in music but also in painting. We walked away with 4 calabashes and 4 paintings, and so began several of our pilgrimages to Pens’ studio.

Thirty years ago, Pen dared to live, breath and eat from his culture. He had the foresight and is ever willing to share his experiences. Thirty years later, when international organizations are now touting cultural development to aide in sustainable development and poverty alleviation, Pen Cayetano is THE example of upliftment through utilizing his culture as a Tool for Development. He not only Rocked the traditional Punta, but introduced the Turtle Shell as a musical instrument. Added to that is the fact that he is an accomplished international painter. Today is a celebration of culture on canvas through the eyes of Pen Cayetano.