

= Miss Calypso =

Miss Calypso is a 1957 album by writer and poet Maya Angelou . The album was released during a craze for calypso music catalyzed by Harry Belafonte the previous year . Angelou sings every song on the album , and she composed five of them . Behind Angelou 's voice , studio guitarist Tommy Tedesco and percussionist Al Bello created an exotic mood . Angelou toured in support of the album , performing calypso songs in nightclubs . The album was a modest success but Angelou did not make any further records as a singer .

Angelou later gained fame as an author and a poet , most notably her first autobiography , I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings . In her fourth autobiography , The Heart of a Woman , she downplays her singing career and assigns little importance to Miss Calypso . In 1995 , the album was re @-@ released as a CD during a period of customer interest in 1950s exotica . Its artistry was re @-@ examined in light of Angelou 's later fame ; it was said to exemplify the calypso music of the period , spiced with a feeling for the tradition 's roots .

= = Background = =

Maya Angelou had modest success as a singer , dancer , and performer beginning in 1954 , when her marriage to her first husband , Tosh Angelos , ended . She performed in clubs around San Francisco , including the Purple Onion , where she sang and danced calypso music . Up to that point she went by her birth name Marguerite Johnson , or by the name Rita , but at the strong suggestion of her managers and supporters , she changed her professional name to " Maya Angelou " , a " distinctive name " that set her apart and captured the feel of her calypso dance performances .

During 1954 and 1955 Angelou toured 22 countries , mostly in Europe , with a production of the opera Porgy and Bess , which she describes in her third autobiography , Singin ' and Swingin ' and Gettin ' Merry Like Christmas (1976) . By February 1956 she was touring with her own new show , an exotic calypso act which played at the Keyboard in Beverly Hills , where she was " wooed by disk executives " , according to Billboard . She headlined at the Village Vanguard in March , gigged for four weeks at the Clouds in Honolulu in July ? August , and joined the Lester Horton dancers for a Halloween show at the Palladium . Angelou signed with Liberty Records in September . By November 1956 , Variety was describing the process of recording her first album , Miss Calypso , and even speculating that her second album might be a collection of Noël Coward songs , based on her playful ad @-@ libbing of a Coward tune between takes at the recording studio .

In 1957 Angelou appeared in an off @-@ Broadway revue that inspired her first film , Calypso Heat Wave , in which Angelou sang and performed her own compositions . Also in 1957 , the album Miss Calypso was completed and released ; it was reissued as a CD in 1995 . According to reviewer Hilton Als , Angelou sang and performed calypso because she " had followed the fashion of the time " , and not to develop as an artist . Als states about Miss Calypso : " But it was clear that the album itself was not the point . Developing her artistry was not the point . Fame , not art , was her spur ... " In 1958 , Angelou met blues singer Billie Holiday , who after walking out during one of Angelou 's calypso performances , told her , " You 're going to be famous . But it won 't be for singing " .

As she described in her fourth autobiography The Heart of a Woman , Angelou eventually gave up performing for a writing career , and became a poet and writer . According to Chuck Foster , who wrote the liner notes in the album 's 1995 reissue , her calypso music career is " given short shrift " and dismissed in the book . Her first autobiography , I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969) , brought her international recognition and acclaim .

= = Artwork = =

Richie Unterberger of Allmusic.com described the album 's cover as featuring Angelou " draped in a slip of a red dress , gyrating next to a fire in the middle of a (almost definitely fake) jungle " . After finding it in a used record bin in 1994 , Chuck Foster featured the cover in his column in Beat

Magazine . Foster considered the cover as one of the best examples of the calypso era . He described the cover art in this way : " A barely draped young Maya gyrates around a bonfire from which the flaming title emerges " .

= = Reviews = =

Miss Calypso was a modest success . Billboard Magazine 's review said about the album , " [Although] calypso addicts will question the authenticity of this package , Miss Angelou has enough sell in her voice to offer dealers a promising set . Selections include such oldies as " Run Joe " , " Stone Cold Dead in the Market " , and " Calypso Blues " , all of which are handled with finesse . Singer 's name value is a rising commodity via her nitery dates , and should increase some as a result of this wax " .

Unterberger wrote that the 1995 reissue of the album was " probably motivated by the exotica @-@ space age pop revival " . He called the album 's music " more or less straight @-@ ahead pop @-@ calypso " that was " not that strange or cheesy " . He complimented Angelou 's performance , saying that she " sung with respectable gutsiness " , and compared the album to Harry Belafonte 's calypso recordings of the same era .

Variety reviewed one of Angelou 's live calypso performances , a gig in Chicago at Mr. Kelly 's nightclub during much of December 1956 . Hal Spector quoted the review in the album 's 1957 liner notes . Stef , the Variety reviewer , called Angelou 's act " sizzling " and a " unique creation in the jazz world when everything progressive is expected to be on the cool side " . He called the song " Polymon Bongo " " recitative " and complimented its conversational nature with the drums . He commented on the intimacy and sharpness in Angelou 's performance of " The Heat is On " , a song she wrote but one that does not appear on the album . He called " Calypso Blues " , written by Nat King Cole and Don George , " an artfully simple welding of idioms " and another song she composed , " Scandal in the Family " , " standard Trinidad calypso stuff " and reported that her performance of it " rocked the house " .

Spector , also in the album 's 1957 liner notes , reported on another of Angelou 's concerts in the Beverly Hills nightclub The Keyboard , when she performed many of the songs on Miss Calypso . He called her a polite , soft @-@ spoken , calm , and poised young woman " that completely mystified the audience " . He found that Angelou 's performance made an indelible impression and that she had an unusual voice and striking appearance . Spector stated , " She had captured the audience swiftly and effectively with her calm and affectionate manner " , and promised that she would do the same for listeners of the album . He also predicted that she was " destined to become a very big name in show business " . Spector characterized Angelou 's music as " calypso style with a liberal sprinkling of Afro @-@ Cuban , and a dash of blues mixed together with delicate jazz " .

Foster , in the album 's liner notes its 1995 reissue , called the music " fresh as the day it was recorded and entirely captivating " , but that it followed the tradition of the calypso of its era . He described the album 's genre as having " Jazz , Afro @-@ Cuban rhythms , Odetta @-@ style folk " , with " gospel and blues voicings and Belafonte @-@ influenced Caribbean flavors " . Foster considered Tommy Tedesco 's guitar and Al Bello 's percussion as having a " Beat @-@ era spiritual sound " . He thought that Angelou brought out the best in the calypso standards " Peas and Rice " and " Run Joe " , but that she reached her peak with " Scandal in the Family " , all of which he found as authentic as the songs she wrote . He stated that two of the songs Angelou wrote , " Mambo in Africa " and " Neighbor , Neighbor " , effectively combined her skills as a poet and composer . He compared her music with other calypso artists of the same era , but considered hers more " uptown " and more like the music of modern artists such as Tracy Chapman . Foster also compared Angelou 's music in Miss Calypso with her later writing , and called both " hot and spicy , peppered with a roots flavoring " . Jessica Letkemann of Billboard Magazine stated that Angelou 's tuneful and distinctive voice would " serve her so well in later years as a spoken word artist " .

= = Track listing = =

All songs performed by Maya Angelou .

" Run Joe " (Louis Jordan , Walter Merrick , Joe Willoughby) ? 2 : 28

" Oo @-@ Dla @-@ Ba @-@ Doo " (Maya Angelou) ? 1 : 00

" Scandal in the Family " (Angelou) ? 2 : 41

" Mambo in Africa " (Angelou) ? 1 : 37

" Since Me Man Has Done Gone and Went " (Merrick) ? 1 : 48

" Polymon Bongo " (E. White) ? 1 : 58

" Neighbor , Neighbor " (Angelou) ? 2 : 13

" Donkey City " (K. Radio) ? 2 : 58

" Stone Cold Dead in the Market " (Wilmoth Houdini) ? 2 : 06

" Calypso Blues " (Nat King Cole , Don George) ? 3 : 08

" Tamo " (Angelou) ? 1 : 59

" Peas and Rice " (Milt Larkin) ? 2 : 33

" Flo and Joe " (Milton Leeds , Ted Varnick) ? 2 : 02

" Push Ka Pici Pi " (Jordan , Merrick , Willoughby) ? 2 : 40

= = Personnel = =

Maya Angelou ? composer , vocals

Al Bello ? bongos , congas , drums

Tommy Tedesco ? guitar

Pete Ciccone ? art direction

Alan Douches ? digital remastering

Chuck Foster ? annotation , liner notes

Walter Kerr ? producer

John Kraus ? engineer

Ashley Warren ? reissue coordinator