

John Edwin Mason, *One Love, Ghoema Beat: Inside the Cape Town Carnival* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2010). pp. 128.

Alexa Sheldon

John Edwin Mason's *One Love, Ghoema Beat: Inside the Cape Town Carnival* is a picture book that adroitly captures the spirit and significance of Cape Town's captivating New Year's celebrations. Mason's interest in both African and photographic history led him to travel to Cape Town to photo-document the carnival. He joined the Pennsylvanian Crooning Minstrels carnival troupe. They have been crowned champions from 1997 to 2007. Mason, now a professor at the University of Virginia, continues to photo document different projects. His book is divided into three chapters, each consisting of a brief context to a series of action-filled illustrations. The introduction of the book establishes the tone and outlines the *ghoema* drum's role in the carnival. Chapter one, "*Tweede Nuwe Jaar*," provides a detailed description of the celebration's significance to the Coloured community. The second chapter, "Backstage at the Carnival," reveals how much work is put into preparing the festivities. In the final chapter, "Champions of Champions," Mason recounts his experiences with the Pennsylvanian Troupe. The carnival descriptions, although brief, educates the reader about celebration's history, preparation, and significance, while the colorful pictures portray the energy found in the Coloured neighborhoods of post-apartheid Cape Town.

The introduction is centered on the *ghoema* drum. The drum is the beat of the carnival and life of Cape Town. The carnival is centered around the "magnificent musical *bredie* (stew)."¹ Because Mason is an honorary member of the Pennsylvanians, he was able to explore both the public and private sides of the carnival.² The pictures of the Fabulous Woodstock Starlites and other performers holding a South African flag create the sense of power, unity, and energy within the New Year's celebration.³

*Tweede Nuwe Jaar*⁴ describes the New Year celebration's impact on the Coloured community. The streets awaken in a frenzy on January second as the height of the Carnival begins. This celebration is a symbol of pride and unity. It is a time of renewal and restoration for the Coloured people.⁵ The book's illustrations depict people's joyful faces as they beat the *ghoema* drum

and dance.⁶ This festival does not relate to the Christian calendar or the northern hemisphere, creating a distinct South African Coloured identity. Through the predominately large absence of white and Black peoples throughout the book, Mason further illuminates the Coloured identity.⁷ In the past, apartheid laws created these divisions, but now it is seemingly out of respect for the Coloured culture. The carnival is performed, watched, and celebrated primarily by these Coloured people. Moreover, brings feelings of restoration and healing from a troubled past.

In the second chapter, "Backstage at the Carnival," Mason reveals the detailed care carnival employees put into ensuring the show's success. He provides an inside look into the carnival's labor production and its artisans' pride. Despite financial insecurity to fund the carnival, the work still continues and the performers still practice their craft in constant preparation.

The last chapter, "Champions of Champions," documents Mason's experiences with the Pennsylvanian Crooning Minstrels. The competitions between the troupes throughout the year are important because they extend the carnival feeling beyond just the New Year.⁸ Being crowned champions brings many benefits like funding and access to talented new members.⁹ Although a symbol of the celebration, Green Points Stadium, has been replaced, the spirit of the carnival lives on through the competitions. Pictures show a number of these competitions in the various stadiums.¹⁰ Mason concludes his final chapter by asserting that the essence of the carnival does not end on the last day of February when the champions carry the trophy off the field, but continues the next day when troupes begin planning and dreaming of the next year.¹¹

Mason's book would benefit from more pictures and descriptions of the role, the history, the making, and maybe even an example of the beat of the *ghoema* drum in order to continue to emphasize the significance of this instrument. Lastly, Mason should have included more pictures of the onlookers. There are many pictures displaying the troupes, but the community that watches, dances, and sings along also plays an important role in these festivities.

Through his detailed descriptions and lively pictures, Mason is able to portray the excitement the carnival brings to the Coloured community and teach his audience about this unique cultural aspect of Cape Town. I would recommend this book to

anyone interested in festival celebrations and to people unaware of the Coloured community's traditions.

Notes

¹ John Edwin Mason, *Inside Cape Town Carnival: One Love, Ghoema Beat* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 15-19.

⁴ *Tweed Nuwe Jaar* is the minstrel festival of the Carnival that takes place on January second in Cape Town. Also known as the Second New Year.

⁵ Mason, *Inside Cape Town Carnival*, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96-117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.