Date Printed: 04/23/2009

JTS Box Number: IFES_72

Tab Number:

125

Document Title: Suriname Emerges

Document Date: n.d.

Document Country: Suriname

Document Language: English

IFES ID:

CE01874

SURINAME EMERGES Wan Nju Sranan Opo

by

Terry Holcomb and Gary Brana-Schute

This play is intended as a device to teach civic values by stimulating discussion of the concepts and images presented to the audience. The performance by thirteen Surinamese actor/-teachers would take about thirty minutes. The performers and a civic education specialist would then lead audiences in discussion of the ideas and events presented in the piece.

This brief paper describes the action of the performance. The play as written contains detailed narrative, stage directions, and dialogue in Creole with English translation. However, the details of actual production would be a collaborative effort of the performers, director, and playwrights to produce the finished work. The performers would be encouraged to create action and dialogue in keeping with the overall structure and theme of the piece. Rehearsal would not be rote memorization and rehearsal of a script. Rather, the play would develop through the creative improvisation of all participants. It is expected that this preparation effort would provide new insights and actions that would make the process itself a microcosm of building a democratic, pluralistic society.

F Clifton White Resource Center
International Foundation for Election Systems

About the Play

The action takes place in an imaginary future in an imaginary meeting place of the citizens of a reborn, democratic, and cohesive Suriname. A narrator leads a troupe of actors in the telling of the story of flood, cleansing, and re-creation of the nation of Suriname in the imaginary twenty-first century.

There are few props or costumes. The narrator describes what the audience must imagine. There are musical instruments that the storytellers use to highlight the events. The Narrator stands under the cottonwood tree (kankantri), a holy place connecting heaven and earth.

The narrator and characters speak in Creole. But the play is told in the language of gesture and motion. Someone who does not speak the language should be able to follow the story. The story follows the general outline of water myths found in many cultures both in Suriname and around the world.

Scene:

An open space, arena, three-fourths round, or proscenium. The open space represents an open raft and other spaces that the actors and audience imagine. The narrator describes each scene.

Time:

Many years after a flood in the late 1990's destroyed Suriname leading to a rebirth of the country.

Characters:

Narrator. A woman in her forties of mixed ethnic descent; strong, wise, embodies rectitude and fair play, and speaks in the idiom of "Earth Mother" (Gron Mama) - an essential figure in the understanding all Surinamers have of life, spirituality and harmony. She represents the mother of the new Suriname.

Eleven Men. Each is from a different ethnic group in Suriname who represent the crew of the boat on its perilous journey. In the old Suriname, they were bitter rivals; now through the arduous journey and the sage advice of Earth Mother, they learn the lesson of cooperation and social justice. One man each from: the Caribs, the Arawaks, the Saramakka, the Ndjuka, the Paramakka, the Matawai, the East Indians, the Creoles, the Javanese, the Chinese, and the Europeans. They are symbolically represented by their garments and equipage.

Young Woman. Pregnant, of mixed ethnicity. She will be rescued by the crew and under their care give birth to the new Suriname. Her husband and the father of the baby has been lost.

Synopsis of the Story

The action begins with an open, empty space. The players make much noise with musical instruments to represent a storm.

The men act as chorus to make wind and storm sounds. Slowly, one man crawls upon the stage as if clambering aboard a raft. He fights the wind and rain.

Another man climbs aboard. The two look at each other suspiciously. One-by-one the men climb aboard the craft. Each time one joins the group, he is eyed warily.

Confrontations develop. One man has an automatic weapon and asserts himself as leader. All must follow because he has the power of the gun. But his decisions are bad, and he is corrupted by the power of the gun.

While he sleeps, a mutinous group agrees to overwhelm him and steal the gun. They do this, and one man takes the gun to claim leadership for himself. He is about to kill the first leader when the group convinces him to spare the man by pointing out that only he can do certain tasks. They then discuss the need to throw the automatic weapon overboard and work together to survive.

In a solemn ritual, they throw the weapon into the deep.

Then, they consider how to proceed as a group. They elect a chairman who consults everyone in order to bring the group to a consensus.

The group decides to work together to survive the flood.

Each claims a specific ability to help the group that was learned in his own community.

A member sees something floating in the water, and they all rush to see. It is a woman. They bring her on board. She is nearly drowned. After resuscitating her, they discover that she is pregnant. The woman says that her man is gone, and the baby will have no father. All vow to protect her and to serve as uncles to the child to be born. The narrator comments that if they are all uncles, then they must all be brothers.

The group now embarks on a perilous journey over rapids and danger to reach the land of milk and honey. They sing work songs and fight the beasts of the deep. The work songs have snippets from different ethnic groups.

Finally, the group is beached on a new land. As they step onto the land, they know that a new Suriname must be built together.

The woman has gone into labor. The men are little help, but they surround the woman by standing in a protective circle. The cries of the woman, the cries of the child, and the cries of joy and awe are blended together. The baby is lifted above the heads of the men.

As the mother sits in repose with the child in her arms, each man gets on one knee to pledge himself to his role as uncle of the child. Each man tells of the special gifts he brings for the child's upbringing from his past as a member of his ethnic group.

The narrator steps into the circle to proclaim that she is the child of the tempest and the Gron Mama of the new Suriname, born of the brotherhood of the storm.

The play ends.

Preparation and Production

Personnel

Project Director/Playwright (Terry Holcomb)

Consultant/Playwright/Advisor (Gary Brana-Schute)

Seminar Leader/Stage Manager (Surinamer to be appointed)

Cast: Two women and eleven men

Phase I

- * Complete final version of script (Holcomb, Brana-Schute)
- * Hire Seminar Leader/Stage Manager
- * Complete logistics and planning for DC rehearsal/training period
- * Audition performers, hire cast members, logistics planning, performance scheduling (ten days in-country for Holcomb, Brana-Schute)

Phase II

- * Seminar Leader/Stage Manager and entire cast come to DC
- * Fourteen days: civic education training, rehearsal and preparation of production, dress rehearsal
- * Performance of play for OAS audience followed by discussion and reception

Phase III

- * Tryouts and refinement of production in front of five live audiences in the interior; Holcomb and Brana-Schute advise Seminar Leader and cast, ten days in-country
- * Seminar Leader and cast performs official opening in Paramaribo, followed by reception
- * Seminar Leader and cast conducts civic education tour of production with discussion to locations throughout Suriname

Terry Holcomb

President Terry Holcomb Associates 703 - 548 - 1760

Terry Holcomb has a broad background in education, theatre, government, and mass communications. He holds a B.A. in Theatre from Vanderbilt University, an M.A. in Directing and Playwriting from Memphis State University, and was a Karl Bickel Fellow in Mass Communications at the University of Tennessee.

In his early career, Mr. Holcomb directed forty-five major theatrical productions and is the author of two published plays. He founded the Germantown Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, now in its twentieth season, and was Executive Director for the first three years of its existence. His academic career includes seventeen years teaching at various colleges, including the University of Tennessee, Memphis State University, and Belmont University.

In government, Holcomb served in the administration of Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, later U. S. Secretary of Education. Holcomb was Chief of Staff to the Honorable James M. Inhofe, Member of the United States Congress.

Currently, Mr. Holcomb is President of Terry Holcomb Associates which specializes in communications and civic education consulting. He conducts training seminars in communications for corporations and for various government agencies and lectures for the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. State Department.

Mr. Holcomb is author of <u>Leadership in a Democratic</u> <u>Society</u>, published in English and Romanian by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Mr. Holcomb conducted the Democratic Leadership Seminar in Bucharest, Romania in August, 1992, and was a technical assistant for the election in Guyana in October of 1992.

Gary Brana-Shute School of Area Studies Foreign Service Institute (703) 875-5169

Gary Brana-Shute is Deputy Chair of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the School of Foreign Studies, Foreign Service Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Florida (1974) and a Master's Degree in Anthropology from the University of Michigan (1969). Dr. Brana-Shute has held academic appointments at the University of South Carolina, the College of Charleston, the University of Utrecht (Netherlands), Florida International University, the University of Florida and was a Fulbright fellow with the University of Suriname. He is also adjunct graduate professor of anthropology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

He has written on various espects of Caribbean culture and social organization, including family and kinship, ritual and symbolism, economics, political stability, insurgency, militarization, crime and grass roots development. His applied work, for A.I.D., the Inter-American Foundation, and the Bureau of INR, in particular, has concentrated on developing and reviewing projects designed to increase agricultural production, creating skills training and income-generating programs for the unemployed, surveying the region's labor force, forecasting and planning long term political and economic trends, examining the impact of out-migration and remittances and participating in health care enhancement projects. He has done fieldwork in Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Haiti, Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean states.

Dr. Brana-Shute lectures regularly at the JFK School, Fort Bragg; the Inter-American Defense College, Fort McNair; the Defense Intelligence College; the School of the Americas, Ft. Benning; DISAM, Wright-Patterson Field; the Command and Staff College, Quantico; and the Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field. In 1991 he served as an OAS election monitor in Suriname and in 1992 he served as an election monitor in Guyana for the President Jimmy Carter Center. He is the author of On the Corner: Male Social Life in a Paramaribo Creole Neighborhood, Crime and Punishment in the Caribbean, and Resistance and Rebellion in Suriname: Old and New. Articles have appeared in Caribbean Review, Caribbean Studies, Caribbean Affairs, Hemisphere. the Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs, the New West Indies Guide, Urban Anthropology and he is an annual contributor to Latin American and Caribbean Contemporary Record.

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Spriname Emerges

(Wan Now Sranan Opo)

Terry Holcomb and Gary Brana-Shute

Cast:

Narrator - A woman in her forties of mixed ethnic descent; strong, wise, embodies rechtitude and fair play, and speaks in the idiom of "Earth Mother" (Gron Mama) - an essential figure in the understanding all Surinamers have of life, spirituality and harmony. She represents the mother of the new Suriname.

Eleven men, each from a different ethnic group in Suriname, who represent the crew of the boat on its perilous journey. In the old Suriname they were bitter rivals; now through the arduous journey and the sage advice of Earth Mother, they are learning the lesson of cooperation and social justice.

One each from: the Caribs, the Arawaks, the Saramakka, the Ndjuka, the Paramakka, the Matawai, the East Indians, the Creoles, the Javanese, the Chinese, and the Europeans. They can be symbolically represented by their garments and equipage: walking sticks for Maroons, feathers for Amerindians, colors (Orange for East Indian), caps (for Javanese), amulets (for Creoles), shirt (Chinese and European) as well their as musical instrumentation: Creoles), Gammalongs Drums (Maroons and (Javanese), pan pipes (Amerindians), string instruments (East Indian), and horns (European/Chinese).

A young woman, pregnant, of mixed ethnicity will be rescued by the crew and under their care give birth to the new Suriname. Her

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husband and the father of the baby has been lost.

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Props: Minimal; a symbolic boat and oars for each man. The Narrator stands under a Cottonwood tree (kankantri), a holy place connecting heaven and earth.

Openning Scene: Men are off stage; narrator stands alone and forlorn under cotton wood tree. Suriname national anthem begins to play but is interrupted; scratchy, begins again, interrupted again ("Arise countrymen, you must arise.....braap, brapp, braap, etc. "Opo kondre man, oenoe moes' opo...")

Narrator begins: "Ai boi, mie swietie Sranan fa joe ben pori, fa joe ben broko in someni pisi leki wan fadon spiegri. San mie sa do. A kondre siki ma' datra no de foe dressi en. Ai baja, tranga dressi wie abi fanodoe. Libi sma na djaso na Sranan njang libi sma. Den strij, den feti.... Tan, San na dati die mie jeri bari so tranga!!!"

("What a mess, my dear Suriname is rotten to the core and broken into pieces like a shattered mirror. The country is sick but there is doctor to cure it. Oh boy, do we need strong medicine. Its dog eat dog here in Suriname--they fight, they....Wait, what is that awful racket I hear!!!")

Cacaphony of musical instrumentation -- dissonant sounds from all ethnic musical instruments, no harmony.

Men Walk on stage, eying one another suspisciously, mill about with no apparent purpose. One cries out:

"Ma, mie famiri, mie afo nanga totro ben djari a moro bigi hebi fosi ten." He is laughed at contemptuously by another. "Joe famiri, joe famiri! Den ben njang te beri priti, sribi na safoe bedi--leki bigi bakra screfi! Mie famiri...." Another interjects. "Hori joe mofo. Mie famiri ben sabi sari, den ben sabi fadon ai watra. Den foe mie na a roetoe sma foe Sranan kondre..."

("Uhh, but it was people, my ancestors that endured the most discrimination." "Your family, they stuffed their bellies till bursting and slept in a feather bed like big white people. My family..." "Shut your mouths. My people knew misery; they knew what crying was. They are roots of the real Suriname.")

Rain and thunder begin but the men don't see, so engrossed are they in their bickering.

Narrator: "Ai, mie poti Sranan pikien. Den feti so te.. a kondre panja leki bruja fowroe. Den no sie fa alen fadon hebi, fa watra he so te...Meki mie kari den..mie pikien, mie pikien, hori oenoe screfi, loekoe a bigi watra kon, alla sani o sungoe, alla sani o wasi gowe. Lon, lon, sorgoe joe screfi."

("Oh my sorry children, constantly quarreling while the country falls apart. They don't even see that a mighty flood is

approaching. I have to alert them. My childrencontrol yourselves and prepare for the storm. Everything will sink and be lost. Run and look after yourselves.")

Men clamor and struggle aboard the boat and sit/squat separate from one another. Arguments and confrontations break out immediately.

"Jongoe, sari njang nanga dringi watra no de nofo. Meki mie teki mie boen foeroe pisi." Another cries out, "no fasi a najang baja noso joe sa mietie wan fianti."

("Damn, there is not enough food and water. I'm going to take as much as I can now." "You touch that food and you're going to meet trouble.")

One turns and says "San na disi mie ai sie, ete wan sma soekoe pressi na a boto." Another repilies, "Eh, Eh, jagi en, boto foeroe kaba. Meki en dede, meki mie wan libi."

("Hey, I see another person out there swimming towads us." "No, forget it and chase him off, the boat is full already. Let him die, I want to live.")

The stragler (the European-symbolic of colonialism and privilege) climbs on board while the men have their backs turned and are arguing. He pulls out an automatic weapon. He barks orders: "Opo hance, tapoe mofo--joe ben feti makandra leki skoroe pikien so te

joe no sie mie troe fasi. Mie na chef nu, mie nen na "Baas" nanga oenoe wroko gie mie. Oenoe no taki zondro mie permissie, oenoe no sribi zondro mie permissie, oenoe no do nooti zondro mie permissi."

("Hands up and shut your mouths. While you were bickering like school children you didn't see my true nature. I'm in charge now and I want to be called Boss and you all work for me. You don't talk without my permission, you don't sleep without my permission.")

He stalks around the boat, pushes people, sneers at them, reaches into the food bag and takes handful of eats and washes it down with a long draught of water. He continues, "Baas weri, meki mie didon sribi even. A gun wan sa zorgoe mie nanga hori mie na machti."

("The Boss is tired. I'm going to lay down and sleep. This gun will take care of me.")

He lies down and falls asleep. The men cower, no one willing to act decisively.

Narrator: "A gun pori diki ati. Ibri wan frede ma' mie pikien no abi a ondrofeni foe wroko makandra leki wan for wini vrijheid nanga troe-troe screfi-densi. Teki diki ati kondre man, teki diki ati. Teki joe kondre baka."

("Guns! They even destroy courage. Everyone is afraid because

they don't have the experience to cooperate and work together for their freedom and independence. Take courage men and take your country back!")

The men slowly mobilize and encircle the sleeping tyrant. One (Javanese - more or less the most innocent of ethnic groups) lunges forward and grabs the gun from the sleeping boss. He shouts "Mie na Baas nu, meki mie klari disi wan tron." He aims and prepares to fire but the group in unison cries out. "Wachti, wachti, Gron Mama abi leti. Gron mama taki we alla malla moesoe libi leki wan. Ifoe joe shoetoe a man dan wie broedoe sa lon leki watra, Sranan libi sa tron redi, wie man ati no sa pumpoe moro." The Javanese looks perplexed and asks "Foe sanede, sortoe koni a lau man disi abi for gi oenoe." They reply, "Alla libi sma abi den egi koni, den egi bribri, den egi waarderi. Ma' gun no leri joe waarderi, gun leri joe soso disco nanga sari. Meki en libi, meki en tron Sranan man ook toe."

("I'm the Boss now and I'm going to finish him off." "Wait man, wait. The earth mother is right. She said we all have to live together. If you shoot him our blood will run like water, our rivers will run red and our hearts will wither and die." "What do I care, what can this guy give to us." "All living people have their own qualities and their own worth. But guns do not teach you that. Guns teach only discrimmination and misery. Let him live; let him become a Surinamer.")

They lay hands on him and advise "Gun wie no abi fanodoe moro." He nods his head and pitches the gun over the side. The men take to their cars and begin paddling in unison. No one is in charge but they all seem to know what to do.

("We don't need guns anymore.")

Narrator: "Eindelijk den kon na wan, eindelijk den sie alla libi sma abi den eigi waarderi nanga taki joe moesoe foe abi lespeki gie all tra wan. Ma a wroko disi no makkelijk, ibri de joe opo joe moesoe foe promisie joe screfi taki mie sa do ogri tegen tra wan. Dati na a les die mie moesoe leri den.

("Finally, they have joined together; finally they see that each person has his own virtues and that respect is a precondition for life. But this work isn't easy; every day you have to work at it and promise yourself not to do wickedness. That is the lesson.')

A rumbling noise is heard and the men grow noticeably nervous. The roar increases and they realize they are approaching a a giant waterfall. The man at the front howls "Ai masra gado bigi soela de, wie alla sa dede, meki mie djompo abra..." The crew hollers back "No mati, no tan fasti, tan. Ifoe joe wan djompo joe sa dede ma ifi wie alla wroko wie kan abra a soela nanga libi sa go doro."

("Oh great God a rapids; we are all going to die, I'm jumping off the boat..." "No friend, stand your ground. If you jump then we

all die; we need you because if we work together we can get through the rapids and on with our lives.")

The men dig their oars into the swirling water, they grimace, they cry out. They cry out "Gron mama jepi oenoe, jepi begi gadoe jepi, no frigetti oenoe pikien mama."

("Earth Mother help us; we beg God to help help. Please don't forget us Mother.")

Narrator: "No span, gadoe sa blessi oenoe foe a diki ati die joe alla malla abi. No span, no frede, go doro, go doro."

("Calm yourselves, God will bless you for your courage. Don't be afraid, press on, press on.")

Sudenly there is quiet and the men enter a sunlight and tranquile body of water. They shake hands around and hug one another (abrasa--a form of friendly male greeting in Suriname). Wipe their brows, share a bottle of water, eat together.

One man turns and looks and says "Eh, eh, san mie e sie drape tap' a watra." They turn an look and see a young woman. One man notices "Na wan jongoe vrouw...mie gado!! a oema disi abi bere, a zwanger so te..." The men reach over the side, "Hari, Hari, hari en na boto ini, no meki en lassi en libi, nanga a nju pikien di moesoe gebori."

("What! What is that I see over there." "Its a young woman..great God she's pregnant.." "Pull, pull, pull her aboard. Don't let her die, the baby must be born.")

Narrator: "So wan jongoe vrouw, a ben lassi en masra nanga famiri in a bigi watra. En wan in en bere djari a toekomst for Sranan. Oema sma kan do someni sani leki man sma, ma den wan abi a gado blessi foe meki pikien nanga djari libi go doro te na ini a toekomst."

("Such a young woman to have lost her husband and family in the flood. And, she has in her belly the future of Suriname. Women can do almost everything that men can do but they have a blessing from God that men don't have...they can make life and continue us into the future.")

She comes to consciousness and cries out in despair.

"Alla sani mie e lassi, mie no abi masra, mie no abi ma nanga pa, so-so mie wan de. Mie no abi lustoe for libi moro. Mie baby no abi sma foe kwechi en."

("I have lost everything, no husband, no mother or father, only I am left. I don't want to live anymore. Even my baby doesn't have people to care for her.")

The men look at each other and talk among themselves. One speaks

The woman has gone into labor. The men ar they surround the woman by standing in a protec cries of the woman, the cries of the child, and and awe are blended together. The baby is lift of the men.

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The narrator steps into the circle to proceed the child of the tempest and the Gron Mama of born of the brotherhood of the storm.

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The play ends.

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out for the concensus "No begi missi, no cre, no meki joe ati fadon so sari. Joe pikien sa gro leki wan kankantri bom; tranga nanga boen. Wie alla malla djaso sa hori a jongoe wan leki omoe. Wie sa leri en, wie sa meki en ati tranga nanga en ton-ton koni. A sa sabi troe nanga waarheid, boen nanga rechtvaardiheid, lobi nanga discipline. A sa leri Sranan man sani foe meki a begin foe a nju Sranan. Wie samen, sa leri en oenoe cultroe--wan pisi foe boesi ondrofeni, wan pisi for foto man sabi, wan pisi foe pranasi sabi dieri, wan pisi foe liba ondrofeni, alla sani sa kon na wan foe meki a nju begin baka. Wie ben wini a bigi watra, wie ben abra a soela, wie wroko makandra--wie abi a ondrofeni nanga alla man sabi if ondrofeni no de, sabi diri no de.."

("No miss, don't cry, don't have a heavy heart. Your child will grow like a cottonwood tree; strong and straight. We all will care for her as uncles. We will teach her, we will make her heart strong and her head wise. She will know truth, justice and discipline. She will teach Surinamers what they must know to begin again. We together will teach her our cultures; something of the rainforest, something of the city, something from the countryside, something from the rivers, everything that she needs to know. We defeated the flood, we passed the rapids, we work together—we have the knowledge of us all—from our experiences comes true knowledge.")

Narrator: "Mie ati pumpoe nanga trots gie mie Sranan kondreman pikien. Ma wan sani...den man sma no ben sabi san den taki. Jere a swieitie foe a tori; ifi den alla malla de omoe foe a pikien, dati wan wani taki dati den alla malla de brada nanga den screfi makandra. Dati na a swietie foe a tori."

("I am so proud of them. But there is one thing that I am most proud of and the men themselves didn't realize what they said. This is the nice part of the story; if they are all uncles of the child then they have to all brothers of one another, isn't that so! What a story!")

The men dig into the water with their oars while the woman reclines in the back. Each contributes a portion of a work song.

"Kri kra, meki singi san mie oeders ben leri mie,....."
-- "Kri kra, meki mie gie wan mofo...." and so on.

("Once upon a time, my ancestors taught me this song..." "Once upon a time, I learned to sing...")

The boats lands on a sunlite beach and the men deboard and look around with interest. They shake hands

Narrator: "Den feni nju gron, nju kondre. Nu a wroko begin baka. Mie hopoe taki den ben leri...."

("They have discovered a new land. Now the work begins. I hope that they have learned...")

They turn and bring the woman from the boat. She cries out and enters labor. The men protectively encircle her and lock their arms around one another. Suddenly there is the cry of a baby. The men drop to one knee and bow their heads while the woman stands and holds the baby above them.

Narrator: softly, "A nju wan gebori, a nju wan nanga wan Sranan ma nanga alla Sranan omoe."

("A new one is born. A new one with a Suriname mother and all of these Suriname uncles.")

The mother and child sit and each man comes forth to pledge his support and share of the upbringing.

"Langa ten pasa kaba mie famiri ben leri mie libi sma moesoe hunti busi meti, mie sa leri joe...."

("A long time ago my ancestors taught me how to hunt in the jungle, I will teach you...")

"Mie famiri ben leri mie foe bouw oso, dati mie sa leri joe..."

("My family taught me how to build houses, I am going to teach you that.")

"Mie pa ben leri mie foe rij tap watra nanga coriaal nanga prani

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alesi, dati koni mie sa leri joe."

("My forefathers taught me canoing and how to plant rice, that I will pass on to you.")

etcetera.

The men go off to help one another clear new planting grounds and build shelters.

Narrator: "Mie gadoe, a pikien disi sa lie koni foe alla Sranan!!"
Narrator steps from under the Cottonwood tree and into the circle
of brothers, mother and daughter. "Disi na a nju Srana, a ben
gebori in wan sari ten, ma a sa libi in wan swietie ten; in a nen
foe gadoe so a moeso de. Ibri de wie moesoe for wroko foe meki
Sranan kondre tranga nanga gezontoe."

("Good God, this child will have the knowledge of all Suriname."

This is the new Suriname; it was born of a sorry time, but it will

live and flourish in a better time; God wants it that way.

Everyday we must work to make Suriname strong and healthy.")

The national anthem plays, incorporating the different instrumentation, in harmony.

Play ends.