

Interviewer: Voices from our America. Today is Sunday, 6 July, 2008. Interviewing Professor Henry Augustus Trym from Panama. Let's hear from Mr. Trym immediately.

Trym: This is Henry Augustus Trym, resident of Colon, Republic of Panama. I'm being interviewed by Voices of Our America. It's a pleasure to be interviewed by friends we have known for many, many years, and it's a pleasure to be one of your respondee for the many questions that I'll be asked. I do hope they'll be satisfactory to you. As much as I can remember and I would like to get *it to you*. Once again, thank you for the opportunity for the interviewed.

Interviewer: Your name.

Trym: My name is Henry Augustus Trym, born in the city of Colon. May 18, 1915. I'm presently 93 years. The good Lord has helped me to celebrate an anniversary in the past month, and thank you to all those people who promoted me. The church, Methodist church, and the Eagle Lodge, they all honored me on my 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday, so I'll be very glad to now reach this age. Although I'm in pain, having been sick for over a month, I am trying to cooperate to the best of my ability through each and every one that you *ask me*.

Interviewer: What were your parents named?

Trym: My father's name is Bruce Trym. Bruce Trym. B-R-U-C-E Trym. My mother name was Frederica Chavez.

Interviewer: Can you tell us where they were from?

Trym: Both mother and father were from Antigua, West Indian Islands.

Interviewer: And what was the purpose of their appearance in Panama? What did they come to do?

Interviewee: As customary, most people at that time from the West Indies came to Panama because the Panama Canal was existing and worked for the United States government that was existing then.

Interviewer: So they came directly to Colon the first time to Panama.

Interviewee: Their first trip from the West Indies was to Panama.

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Interviewer: Tell us about yourself a little bit. Where did you go to school?

Interviewee: I was at school in the Canal Zone School – Canal Zone town called Gatón because the Canal Zone town. There I went to school for quite a few years. Over 15 years until I was graduated from the seventh grade at that time. From there, I went to school in Balboa. That was also mixed Americans and Panamanians all in that school. As a student, I worked my way diligently until I reach the first place in 94 students. There I was graduated as a teacher. But my father told me after waiting so many years as a teacher for someone to die to get a job.

I told him I preferred to take music. He said, “If you like it, you go ahead and take your music.” I stopped waiting for a teacher to be sick, but none got sick. And when they did, I was only called for one day, so [inaudible]. As a musician, living in a town, lot of young men around me had instruments. And none knew how to play. So a man by the name of Mr. Ocha asked me if I could get the boys together to form an orchestra. At that time, I didn’t have an instrument. And I needed an instrument, but my father bought me an organ.

On this organ, I practiced daily knowing that you cannot play an orchestra with an organ. So he invited me to his house, the gentleman who told me about it – there he has a piano. There, I got together with the young boys in the community.

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And they were all happy to know they could get together. None of us was better than the other, but having a better knowledge of most of them. We call it an orchestra, and we decide to form an orchestra composed of ten men. We practiced daily, daily, daily. To some people, it was a pleasure to have them teach here. And we were not organized. Each man went his own way until I got help from someone how to separate your instruments. So we decided to add saxophone, trumpet, drum, and bass. This went on for several weeks. Part of it seems a boy or neighbor, but the organ teacher was a pleasure to hear music played.

When he got into good standing, there was a place in Gatón called the Clubhouse. Its manager was Mr. Moore. JE Moore. He invited us to play in the YMCA, in the clubhouse. We practiced there at the end of the week because this was a place for sale of

business. When he thought we were finally – he asked us to let him make a presentation. So we did in the hall on one Saturday evening. I invited folks from the neighborhood to come and listen to us. Some people called it nice. Some people called it music, but gradually, the good Lord helped us to sing in the best way to please the public.

It was called *God's Stream and His Handsome Boys*. Why did he call it Handsome Boys? Some people say the music was very hot, and they danced it meanwhile. For ten years, I *carry* this orchestra, when I moved from Gatton to Colon, many, many, many folks in Colon invited me to their homes at that time, and we all played just for fun. But the time got to be so long, we began to play for people just for fun because we were not fully organized. But when we got to the stage where we could be hired, we decided to play. And we sounded better and better and better in many years. And we lasted for ten years as an orchestra by the name of God's Stream and His Handsome Boys.

But during this time, there were a lot of young men who want to have a chorus. And they got together singing what nobody could lead in. I was invited to participate. This group was known as the Rockwell Glee Club. I was the founder of the Rockwell Glee Club also for ten years. But *in lieu of* the fact that there was a demand for the orchestra, I had to leave them. And Mr. Percival Thomas, he uh took over and carried on the Rockwell Glee Club. The orchestra *God's Stream and His Handsome Boys* sounded good, was being hired by many, many, many folks.

Panama and Colon. One of my best rec-, memories, I can say that Senor God's Stream was hired from year to year by a famous dancer one named **Pool**, and a famous dancer, another woman, named **Mamika Best**. This we hired for one year. The moment that the dance was over, the band was hired for the following year, and so on, so on. During the course of that time, we played for several dances going to Panama, Gambor all over the town. Finally, there were other orchestras who were competing with us. **Washboard** rating and Spanish orchestra, and also American orchestra.

And one day, we were told that we were going to have a demonstration of rather – we were going to have a contest with four orchestras. One an American orchestra, one a Latin orchestra, one from Rainbow City Orch- Ra-, Rainbow, Silver City at that

time it was called, and my orchestra. Knowing this contest was going to be drawing crowd in a theater called Colon Theatre at Ten and Millet and Central. It brought hundreds of people.

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The theatre could not hold more than were in the park that, after the, So before the contest started, we were told that the winner would be getting a trip to Jamaica, and my orchestra had three saxophone, two trumpets, one trombone, piano, bass, and drum. Within the saxophone, we had a Filipino by the name of Felipe Alvarez. He stole the show after we played our three numbers, and the judges decide that God's Stream's orchestra played the best. What was the prize? We went to Jamaica for one month. But at that time in Colon, we had a very good musician named *Kope Boyze*, or *Kito*.

He helped to make the orchestra songs very good. He accompanied us in Jamaica, and we toured the island. All the various provinces in Jamaica were privileged. Our time lasted for exactly one month. Upon our return, after years, the orchestra crumbled. I started to work as a dental assistant with Dr. Lima Young in Colon. And for five years, I worked with Dr. Lima Young at uh technical dentistry. And I was told that I should practice dentistry, but dentistry, my mother and father could not afford. So I stood as a *lay* boy. I was paid no more than bus fare, but I was still satisfied.

But from there, went to the Masonic temple. There I met with an American dentist who needed someone who could really work in dentistry. I was paid at that time \$10.00 a week and bus fare to Gatón, which is 25 cents going, 35 cents coming. My fare was being paid. After working so many years there, the doctor desired to resign, so I was left doing anything. One day, I was called by a young lady whose name I do not recall to go to the Pfizer Company. I worked at the Pfizer Company as a messenger carrying *back* and bottles of medicine until one lady asked me, "Would you like to work at *St. Joseph's School*, *San Vicente School*?"

I said, "Doing what?" She said, "You are a professor of English, and the nun would like to have you." I interviewed a nun, and she was so happy. She gave me a letter in English, and when I present it to her, she said, "You are the man I'm looking for." Being a

musician, she said, "Could you teach music, also?" I said, "It's a pleasure for me." So I started at San Vicente as a professor of English and a professor of music. Many, many parents did not want their children to speak English because most of colonies were Panamanians. But a few paid 25 cents a month for those who were interested in learning English.

But knowing of my ability, I went to the conservator in Panama. I there traveled to the conservator in Panama as soon as classes were over from San Vicente to the train station was the main located at Eighth and **Front** Street. Every day that I had to give class. Coming out, the conservator had two excellent professors. They said, "You are not going to play church music. You're going to play jazz music." I said, "But I had an allocation, and you value that." "Would you like to be a professor?" I said, "Most naturally."

One day after visiting the conservator, there was a contest for positions. I was lucky to be in the form of this position. My name came out first, and I was nominated to be a professor at **Walter Baker** College. When I reached Walter Baker College, they had no chorus. Only a professor, a musician, and a policeman in Santa Maria.

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But we got together, and we formed a chorus, and the chorus in Walter Baker became something of work. We formed and we played against, *Colegia Avebrado*, *Colegia*, in another college. And one day, they decided to have a contest between the three colleges.

Luckily, our orchestra won, and we were invited to take a trip. This trip took us to Peru. The choir with the director, and we enjoyed one week playing in the southern – in the country of Peru for just a short week, and we returned back to Colon. After having a contest with professors in Colon of music, I was invited to participate. Why participate in there? They said, "We are looking for one to get on a plane." I was very, very lucky that I won the prize also. I gave my talent, and I was recipient of a certificate from the college of the house of Walter Baker.

And at the time when my expired, I was honored by the government of Panama with a s-, with a very good credential, a

*standard*. From there, I went to San Jose on my own, not working for the government, and I was asked to play there. I decided to go to the YMCA, and the YMCA wanted a piano teacher. I played at the YMCA for many, many, many, many years. Many students have come through me. I taught quite a lot of students. At present, one of my students is playing here with me. And this went on until the YMCA closed, and I decide now to be a freelancer. Until then, I have been practicing and teaching students for many, many years at the college, at church rather, of San Jose, where I'm presently teaching.

This I can give you a part of my life as a musician.

Interviewer: Mr. Trym, the intention of the voice of our America is to find out what has happened after the West Indian people came to Panama. They are descendants. You mentioned the *Hatchaboy*s and you mentioned the Filipino. Can you tell us in general, what was the cultural background of the people that were in your Hacha group? What where they descendants from? West Indians?

Trym: Most Filipinos *on the violins* but he stole the show.

Interviewer: And the rest of the people –

Interviewee: They were all very good. They came because and most of them came to Panama to look for work because at that time, the United States government had the opportunity let everyone who want a job participate. Most of their parents were from the West Indies. These young men became Panamanians while they came here, and so they got, got the respected jobs.

Interviewer: Let's go back to your childhood. Do you - I know it's a lot of years, 93. Can you remember friends, like very good friends that you uh shared moments with? Not necessarily music, just friendship. Can you remember any of them?

Interviewee: Well, I will tell you I started with my music teacher, Mr. Joseph Miller, as a musician. But he got in ...with me and asked me to play the organ for the Sunday School Christian Mission. That's where I got my start as an organist at that time, so I started at the Christian Mission Sunday School. He had two daughters, but he preferred to be my organist because I practiced. So I was always a pianist for the Christian Mission Choir Travel. As a boy, I didn't

have much play because my father was very strict. The boys in Gatton, we all played football, cricket, baseball.

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My love was cricket at that time because most West Indians at that time played cricket. But recently, the young boys began to play baseball, and I tried to get in, but I was never successful at playing baseball. I always played cricket along with my friends. One of my best friends is by the name of William Brown. William Brown, you know William Brown. He was playing tenor sax in the orchestra, but he was my No. 1 friend. He really got going places. So after a while, he became sick, so he had to depart from the orchestra, but we still continued with another *tenor player*.

I was a member of the Eagle Lodge. I was invited to become a member of the Eagle Lodge. And for 56 years, I was a member of the Eagle Lodge. I served several offices, and I became the district deputy of Elk's communication, the Elk's Lodge in Colon. At first, I was a special deputy, but afterward, I became the deputy to be boss over all Elk's Lodges in the city of Colon. This lasted until I replaced myself by another brother. We had several anniversaries. We replaced some lodges that were defunct, so we were the only prominent lodge in Colon, along with a very large Elk Lodge.

One Latin Lodge existed, but it had *defunct* because they did not have any system.

Interviewer: You speak about the Latin Lodge. Then are you saying that your lodge and the **arrolla** lodge were all or mostly people of West Indian descendents?

Interviewee: The **Libertine** Lodge, I call it, were all Latin. They had no West Indian then.

Interviewer: Then what was your lodge?

Interviewee: All West Indian, but we accepted Panamanians also. The **Eerie** Lodge.

Interviewer: You also talk about playing music in different churches, in different religious groups. And I think you have mentioned the Methodist, you mentioned Catholic. The question is not

necessarily to be answered, but what religion are you, and what role does religion play and has played in your life?

Interviewee:

When I was a young man, my mother and father travelled from Gatón to attend the Methodist church. And when I became a young man, I continued my service as a Methodist. In the days gone by, we had cabaret in Colon. That was a pleasure to participate in a cabaret. I always played party and some cabarets, and some of the best musicians gave me the opportunity. One of them, Ray Cox, one of the best musicians we had in Colon. I played many nights in the cabaret. They had three cabarets in Colon. All of them, I can't remember.

One of the best cabaret was Modern Roots. That was a famous cabaret, and we had Atlantico. That was a ten street, over the top, one of the best cabaret we had in Colon. [Inaudible], and mine came from Panama and told the director it was a nun – that he's going to get a job to open a cabaret. **Sister Tyona, Club 61**. That's the name of it. But in view of the fact that his fiancé is blind, he cannot take the job. The director asked him, "What do you mean blind?" He said, "Blind men you can't read the music."

So en lieu of the fact that I could read the music, she gave me permission to play in the cabaret as the organist. This Club 61 was opened the same year, 1961, with musicians from Panama. And the only [inaudible] was Henry **Gustrim**, who helped make this cabaret something worthwhile.

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Because flooded night and day, the soldiers who were there in the Canal Zone, and [inaudible], but after ten months, I practically got blind working in the night, working in day. So I decide to buy a pair of glasses that's from then, I've been wearing my eyeglasses. But the cabaret, it's the one after ten months, pulled it out because these men had to be driven from Colon to Panama, Panama to Colon, Panama to Colon, and it became boring to some of them, costly also. That's why Club 61 terminated the **glasses**, for example. In one year, Club 61 [inaudible]. Then I turned up to my school, teaching as a professor of music.

Interviewer:

Have you ever heard of Louise Bennett?

Interviewee:

I really can not recall that I've heard about her definitely.

Interviewer: When she was here, seemingly, she was Jamaican, and they're making a survey of how many people heard of her. Seemingly, she was famous. Have you ever heard of the Mighty Sparrow? What thoughts, if any, come to your mind when you hear the name Mighty Sparrow? Have you ever seen him perform?

Interviewee: Yes, I've seen him before, but to see him, you'd have to go to a cabaret or dance hall. In those days, Colon had dance halls. Today, we have none.

Interviewer: Tell us more about the dance halls in Colon.

Interviewee: Club Tropical was the first and best. Sorry. The best dance hall they had was in **Turkian** Street and Melendez. That operated every week, and as most of our folks who were dancing would go there. A man by the name of Sterling was the owner there. But after it failed, he opened a club named Tropical that was located at Calle Catorce and Central, and Melendez. I was lucky to be the one to open that cabaret, that dance hall, and I played there every week. A public dance hall. It was hired out to many people. People dance as club, society, and all of that.

Interviewer: Mr. Trym, many, many students have passed through your hands. I guess thousands of students have gone through your hand. At this moment, can you give a word of advice to the future generation of kids coming up? Not only on music, but life in general. Can you give a word of advice to these children? What would be your suggestion on living in Colon, especially?

Interviewee: My best advice to the young people coming today should be to study. It is their duty that they should study. To be successful in any profession, one has to study, and therefore many of them lack that. So many of them become very, very dormant and could not get a job when they got bigger because they knew no profession. When my father came here, he was a mason. My mother, she never did anything. She was a house until we died. In those days, anyone who worked for the Canal Zone, and then he died, they would have to move from the Canal Zone.

My father lost his life and had to move the Colon. And while moving to Colon, we could not find a place, but the lady gave us a place called Charity to live because my mother never worked. She was a housewife all the time, and we lived in Colon, at *Catliva*, at

no cost at all. She gave us the place free. But while there in **Catliva**, I found a place on account of being able to play with my orchestra in Colon.

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So we both lived there for many years until my mother died. Why she died – there was nothing for me to do but just stay there, but I was called to work. Again came another cabaret. Working in cabaret, not having anybody to pray for you, you have to do anything for yourself. It became monotonous and I didn't last long at that. Those are the things that I recounted. I love very much the article of being a musician. Well known, look for it, and embrace the opportunity. But it's difficult to live alone.

Interviewer: Since you've mentioned family and living alone, you were married. Can you tell us the name of your wife, how you met her if you remember that, and what kind of life you've had for all these years. Where is she from?

Interviewee: My wife – I seen my wife in a dance hall. Her name is **Ines** Simmons. While playing the orchestra, I was looking at the dancers, and they all would like to have me at the end of the dance, but this one insisted that no one could get me but she. So music clip or something the girls used to try to carry out at the end of the dance, but she was very successful. And by doing that – she lived in Silver City in those days. She told me where she lived, and I visited her. Made my mind, and say, "Are you working?" "Yes." So she was not dependent upon me. She worked at the commissary until she retired.

I said, "What are you going to do? Would you like us to get married?" She said, "If you can help me." She wasn't working. I said, "Yes, I'd be glad to." So we got married, and we lived happy. Unfortunately, we never had any children because our age was advanced, so but to live happily. Until now, she's in United States and accordingly, she's my best friend. Her name is **Eling** Simmons.

Interviewer: I was going to ask if you've ever been abroad or lived overseas outside of Panama.

Interviewee: I have traveled to United States ten times. Coming to the large convention in various states. I never lived in the United States

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longer than one week after the convention is over, but I visited a convention in many states. Too many states to remember. Ten times I visited the United States in different states under the heading of district deputy **head of Austrian from the various [inaudible] of the isthmus.**

Interviewer: Do you have any family living in the United States or abroad?

Interviewee: I had my uncle in the United States. I was told he was my mother's brother. And we used to communicate until he passed away. We used to communicate in United States. But when I went to the states, I could never stay with him because he was in different states than where the conventions are held. So I had a good friend whom I stayed. Now he's in Panama. Tito Johnson. I stayed at his mother's house any time I go to the United States. Even when the convention is not in his state, his mother will be taking care of us.

And I had a very good friend, a local called **Elsie Bryan**. Do you know Bryan? Elsie Bryan. Was one of my best friends in Colon, and when he went to the United States, he became my second home. He would meet me coming from any state after the convention, so we continually give it to them.

Interviewer: Finally, you're a musician. What type of music do you really let's say go for? What's your favorite?

Interviewee: My favorite is jazz. I love – I like a little Spanish music, but at the time when I have my orchestra, jazz is my favorite. Not that I despise a lot of music, but jazz is my favorite.

Interviewer: So what were the **Gotcha** Boys playing?

Interviewee: Pure jazz. We didn't know anything about Spanish in those days. We had more English music. Mostly the clubs, the lodges, the churches, the anniversaries, where Latins and Americans, *negros*. West Indian, West Indians, and they would only like to play English music.

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Interviewer: So you mentioned a contest in Colon of bands that your band, the Gotcha Boys, another Latin that group you mentioned, an American group. So it was very acceptable in Colon, all this jazz

music and American music in those days. What years are we talking about, more or less?

Interviewee: Those years are 19 – the year when 1950, 1950. Foxtrot, that was English music. It was imported from the United States. That's what we do **[Inaudible]**. He used a special arrangement for us.

Interviewer: Can you mention the name of – you say Reggie Prescott. You are a person that has gone through almost your entire Republic of Panama's existence at your age. Can you mention a few names of local musicians that maybe have already died, but have excelled at music in our community?

Interviewee: To be truthful, I remember the names seem to get away one in Panama. We had a very good musician in Panama. Had an orchestra, and he got away from that. I'm trying to remember his name, but there were several in Panama.

Interviewer: You mentioned Reginald Prescott.

Interviewee: Yes, that's one because he was my co-worker. In Colon, we had **washboard written**. We had Gene Marie and his orchestra. Then we had a Spanish singer who had a Spanish orchestra. He was very good, but I couldn't remember any more. Ivan Lashley had an orchestra. Ivan Lashley. Those are all – Edgar Kaye, who was very good. He was in charge of the washboard written. Henry Barlow one of the best orchestras, had one in the basement of his church. **[Inaudible]** one of the best trumpet players we had in Colon, and as I mentioned, Kito was one of the best trumpet players in those days.

These are all musicians I knew. Can't deny that. I knew all of them.

Interviewer: We are thanking you, Voices from America. We have been pleased in interviewing you. Can you say one last word, one last of advice maybe of information that you may have forgotten that comes to your mind right now? Just to end your story, which has been very interesting.

Interviewee: Very much, I should say. During my lifetime, I have many, many opportunities to become a member of ... organizations, but I decided against that, and going to clubs, social clubs. I had a social club that met every week, and the purpose of it was to save

our nickels and dimes. That became famous, and I became treasurer, but after people divided themselves from the club, the money was returned back honestly. No one ever faked the loss of their money because they were honestly paid back. Those are the things that I impart.

My best friends in Colon, as I mentioned, was William Brown, and when he died, it hurt my heart. There's another good one who died. His name is – recently, he died. Ivan Top. Ivan Top was a very, very good musician. He used to teach folks in Rainbow **City** when I was in the city, which is now Aquarius. He helped the Baptist church to decide and form their group, and he was a tennis **[inaudible]** player. They have an instrument, his daughter, and would like me to be the owner of it right now at present. So I plan to go and see what can be done.

There was a good musician who used to play the Catholic Church, and when he died, there was no musician left. We heard God's Stream, you're a jazz musician, but could you play at a church? I said, "Music is music," so I decided to go and play the Methodist church. And I play for the United States Army. At that time, 34 years, I was the recipient of a beautiful, beautiful **street**.

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Appreciation for the American recognized, the United States Government gave me a beautiful present lasting 34 years services organist. Everything that I did, the organist was there. I would be in the cabaret tonight, and in the morning, I have to catch the bus at 9:00. And Sundays, almost **[inaudible]** would go because I had to pay for **co-chairman**, and they appreciate it very much. So I'm very glad that I could serve United States Army to the best of my ability for 34 years as organist. Fort Davis, Fort ... and Fort Sherman. Three logical places.

Interviewer: And we are also glad to listen to this interesting story of Mr. Henry Augustus Trym. Voices from our America, signing off.

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 41 minutes**