



Leyla McCalla has done a cover version of Growing Tiger's Money is King.

Life

Money is King returns

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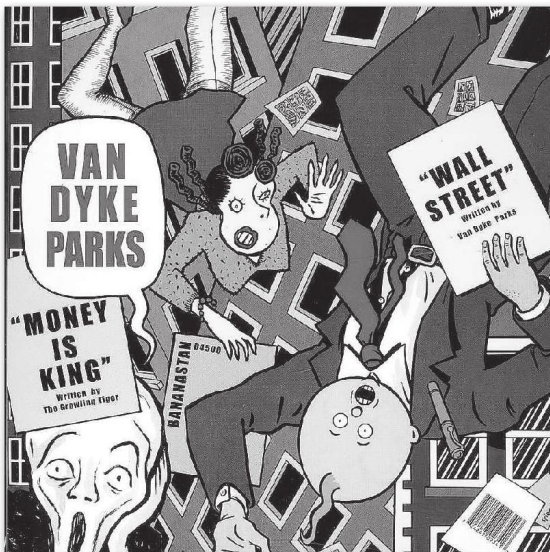
Growing Tiger (Neville Marcano)'s classic calypso, Money is King was recently released on the new album titled Capitalist Blues by Haitian American folksinger Leyla McCalla. There is even released a music video of it.

Based in New Orleans, McCalla's star has been rising internationally. She is the cover artist on a recent issue of the world music magazine Songlines and is back from a European tour. Formerly, a member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, she is part of a new super group of four Black banjo playing folksingers who just released an album on Smithsonian Folkways that focus on slave narratives and the history of struggles of African American women in Songs of Our Native Daughters.

Leyla McCalla, regularly features Money is King in her concerts the last few years including yearly appearances at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Her first album, Vari-Coloured Songs, set Langston Hughes's poetry to song. An acclaimed second album in 2016, A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey which had everything from Haitian to Cajun material.

In her brief note for Capitalist Blues, McCalla notes: "These songs are my reflection on motherhood, womanhood, activism and spirit. They are me seeing more clearly the cost to humanity in placing value in capital over human life."

Certain calypsoes strike a chord and live on. Certainly Money is King is one. Growing Tiger recorded it in a March 1935 recording session on his first trip to New York with Atilla the Hun



Growing Tiger's Money is King is highlighted on this poster.

and King Radio. It was issued as a single on Decca records. It was featured in one of the first calypso reissue albums on Folkways Records, The Real Calypso in 1966 and on Where Was Butler in 1987 on Chris Strachwitz's Folklyric label and later on an expanded CD in 1993, Calypsos From Trinidad: Politics, Intrigue and Violence in the 1930's.

Tiger recorded it twice more. Folklorist Alan Lomax recorded him performing when he came on a Rockefeller grant doing extensive field recordings through the Caribbean in 1962. Lomax was impressed with Tiger and he helped get Tiger an appearance at the 1966 Newport Folk Festival in 1966 where he featured Money is King at workshops.

The 1962 Lomax recording

was issued on an album in 1998, Neville Marcano-The Growing Tiger Of Calypso when Rounder Records started issuing a number of collections from the 1962 Lomax trip. It was last recorded in 1979 for the album Knockdown Calypsos recorded by Steve Shapiro. Shapiro interviewed Tiger about the origins of the song and he said: "I was looking at the economic situation. I used to see cocoa proprietors come into the shop on Fridays and Saturdays, sit on the counter, and order anything they wanted from the shelf. I said, these fellows are like kings. I saw people arrested as 'habitual beggars' while dogs could easily take up bones and bread."

McCalla is far from the first American folksinger to perform and record Money is King. Pete Seeger recorded it on his album,



The cover of the Capitalist Blues album.

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A Pete Seeger Concert: Folk Songs And Ballads (1953). Seeger would continue to sing it and featured it in his television show Rainbow Quest in 1966. Folk singer Bob Gilson who travelled to the Caribbean in the mid-Fifties recorded Money is King on an album I Come for to Sing in 1957. Other folk singers have recorded it since and there is even a recent piano instrumental version created to accompany ballet dancers. The lyrics and music for Money is King was published in Sing Out magazine and in various song anthologies by first Pete Seeger and later by Jerry Silverman including most recently Songs That Made History Around the World (2011).

Van Dyke Parks who has had a career long love of calypso and pan issued a recent recording of it on a single with his own song on capitalism, Wall Street. He talked about Tiger's Money is King, "It

talks about materialism, about the difference between the rich and the poor, and that concerns the widening between those that have and those that have not...I believe we live in times that are emblematic of great greed."

Leyla McCalla heard one of Tiger's recordings of it and was immediately taken by this calypso. As she told National Public Radio, "The first thought that I had upon hearing Money Is King was, 'I want to sing this song'..."

"I had been exploring secular Haitian folk music that used metaphor and powerful poetic imagery to address social and political issues; I immediately felt a connection...As I started to put together the songs for Capitalist Blues, Money Is King felt like such a natural fit."

To see the Leyla McCalla video, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bnBGFFDY6DC>