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PAN GREATS HONOURRED IN LONDON

THE Commonwealth Arts and Cultural Foundation in association with Garvin Nicholas, High Commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, held its Steelpan Awards 2011 at the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in London on July 26.

The event was held to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Steel Orchestra (TASPO) and the Golden Jubilee of the Dixieland Steel Orchestra. To recognise and commemorate these two historic events, the Year 2011 has been designated and declared the 'Year of the Steelpan'.

The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Steel Orchestra (TASPO) was the first steelband to perform in the United Kingdom – at the South Bank, London on July 26, 1951. Trinidad and Tobago was the only country in the British Empire to perform in the UK even though all the other British colonies, including India and other African and Caribbean countries, were invited. It was organised by the Steelband Association headed by Sidney Gollop, the first president of the Steelband Association.

In May 1961 the Dixieland Steel Orchestra came to the United Kingdom after winning the National Steelband Music Festival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Nicholas, in his welcome address, spoke about the significance of the pan and its contribution to the musical artform in the United Kingdom.

He acknowledged that the steelpan was making significant inroads into most countries on all continents but that persons must not forget that Trinidad and Tobago is the birthplace of "this fine instrument".

He commented on the contribution of Sonny Blacks, Artistic Director, Commonwealth Arts, who was instrumental in organising the evening's event.

The High Commissioner also informed the invitees that he was able to present a beautiful tenor pan as a gift to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge as their wedding gift. He read from the letter received from St James' Palace thanking him for the gifts:

"Your Excellency

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have asked me to convey how deeply moved they were that you should think to send such a generous gift in celebration of their marriage of the splendid steel drum and also the very nice crystal decanter full of Trinidadian rum. It was truly so kind of you to think of Their Royal Highnesses in this way, and no doubt they will have much pleasure in playing the drum whilst drinking the rum!"

The High Commissioner ended his welcome by wishing the honourees all the best for the future and thanked them for their contribution in making the pan the most versatile instrument ever invented and for helping to put Trinidad and Tobago on the world map together with other great musical geniuses.

A number of pan icons were present on the night. They included Keith Diaz, president of Pan Trinbago. Diaz, in his speech, spoke about the history of pan which he described as "a chronicle of extraordinary achievement and of extraordinary men and women who sacrificed life, limb and reputation in their at-

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tempts to place the instrument in its proper niche".

The List of Awardees include Sterling Betancourt – TASPO, who received an award from Her Majesty on behalf of TASPO. Betancourt has been acknowledged as the main pan player and tuner respon-

sible for keeping pan alive in the United Kingdom.

Other awardees included Miguel Barradas – Dixieland, Alfred Totesaut – Dixieland, Trevor Cumberbatch – Dixieland, Lennox Langton – Dixieland, Russell Valdez - Dixieland, Michael 'Natsi'

Contant – Tuner of Dixieland (RIP), Angela Christopher – dancer of Dixieland and Sonny Blacks – manager of Dixieland.

Two surprise awards were also given to Peter Joseph and Cyril Khamai for their contribution to the pan movement in the United Kingdom.