

Too-simple ceremony marks Tony Williams' 70th

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Sept. 2
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By TERRY JOSEPH

PAN historian Oscar Pile was among a pitifully small crowd of pan enthusiasts who turned up at the Nepaul Street, St James home of the legendary Anthony "Tony" Williams, to help him celebrate his 70th birthday on Sunday last.

Williams, who lives in a sturdy but unfinished house he built with his own hands back in the 70s, was coherent but dispassionate about the event, chatting casually as if it were just another day.

Among the larger excitements was the shenanigans of a colourful and verbose drunkard, who kept up a commentary from the front yard, even as Scrunters Pan Groove, a single pan band, played its repertoire nearby.

There was a sumptuous meal and beer to be had, but the evening never looked anything like a tribute to one who, most pan aficionados agree, was among the greatest contributors to the development of pan.

Williams was presented with the promise of birthday gifts, as the plaque organised for him had not been retrieved from its manufacturers on time and an enlarged picture of him as a member of the historical Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) of 1951 was yet to be framed.

Williams, who took no more than six months of formal music lessons, went on to become a composer from as early as 1956, writing exclusively for the steel orchestra. In 1974, he penned the famous "Pan Down Fifth Avenue" as a memorial of a tour to New York by the prize-winning Pan Am North Stars, which he led to victory at both the annual Panorama and biennial music festivals held here.

His work with North Stars on "Voices of Spring" and "Poet and Peasant" are still part of local pan chat, as are his achievements in presenting the steel orchestra itself.

Williams is credited with the invention of the Spiderweb pan, the first attempt to locate the notes in the fourths and fifths sequence. He also introduced the double-cello and put pans on wheels and arranged them in clusters on pan stands he designed.

He performed with celebrated Trinidad-born pianist Winnifred Atwell, delivering the *Ivory and*

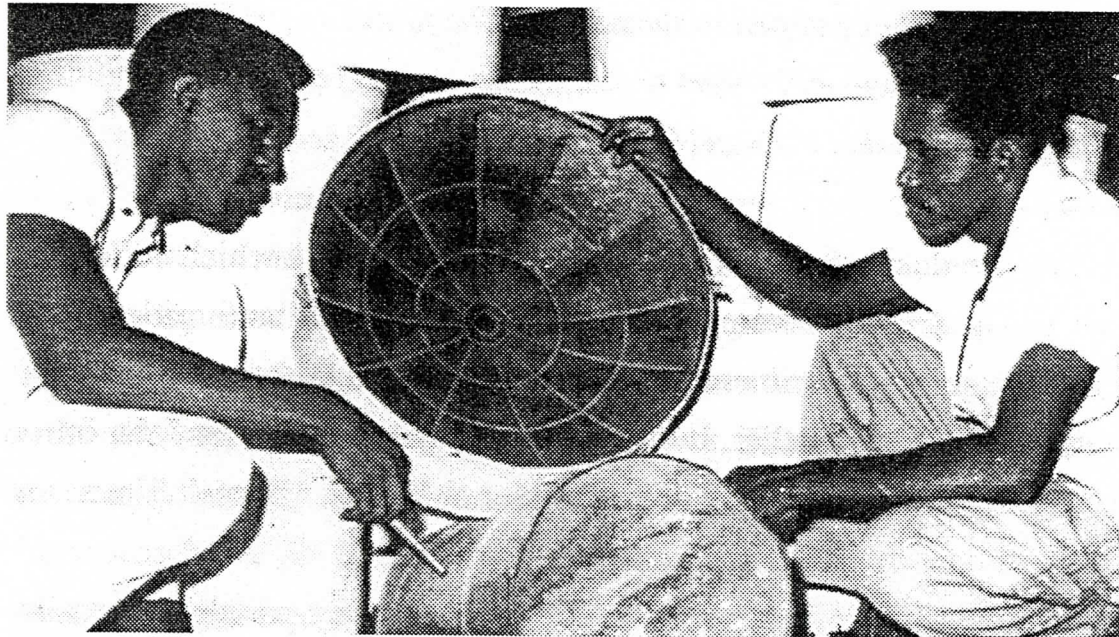
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Spotlight



TONY WILLIAMS (right) displays his Spiderweb invention to Herman "Rock" Johnson.

Steel album that remains a collectors' item.

Last month, Williams was honoured by the St James Community Improvement Committee with a plaque and a \$5,000 cheque, a sum immediately matched by Pan Trinbago, the umbrella body for the instrument and its players.

At Sunday's party, it would have been nice to see some more of the pan legends coming out to share the moment with Williams who, throughout his life, remained a humble man.

It would have been appropriate too, to have an orchestral pan sound, rather than a single-pan band, given Williams' discovery that pan-round-the-neck could not deliver sophisticated chords, hence his determination to change that style.

All the same, Williams looked all set to celebrate quite a few more birthdays, as he took a bow to the cheer that arose when he came into the yard for the simple ceremony.