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Sci-tech pan talks open today

By TERRY JOSEPH

CONSIDER a steelpan without steel, one that tunes like the steel instrument, has all the sound effects but without any of the impact noise made by the sticks.

Imagine such a pan creating sounds indistinguishable from the instrument with which you are familiar and having the additional ability of being able to perform as a bass, a tenor or any other voice in the orchestra's musical range.

That is but one of the many marvels up for discussion during the First International Conference on Science and Technology of the Steelpan (ICSTS), which opens this morning at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Port of Spain.

And lest you begin to think that this marvel is pure science fiction, understand that "the steel-less pan" has already been created by Dr Anthony Achong of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Dr Achong will today premiere his electronic steelpan—a dynamic equivalent of the steel instrument with identical behaviour and sound during one of the sessions at the ICSTS.

He is by no means alone in his quest to bring scientific reasoning to the behaviour of pan as a musical instrument or investigate its possibilities.

He has successfully replicated the same mathematical equations that describe the steelpan, by using electronic circuits where electrical voltages replace the vibrational displacements of the steel surface.

Dr Achong's quiet research has been going on for more than 20 years, the results of which will be aired over the next three days, alongside similar cutting-edge work by a battery of science scholars from around the world.

Included on the list of speakers are: Thomas Rossing, Head of the Physics Department of Northern Illinois University (and several

other NIU physicists), Uwe J Hansen, Dept of Physics, Indiana State University, Felix Rohner of Panart in Switzerland.

Mounted by Dr Achong and profession-

al colleagues at UWI and co-sponsored by the National Institute for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (Niherst) and Pan Trinbago, the ISCTS will, for the first

time in the instrument's 60-year history, offer a single forum to members of the scientific, engineering, and panmaking communities to discuss recent developments in and

techniques of steelpan research.

The diversity of the conference is represented by presentations covering many areas of steelpan dynamics, acoustics,

metal treatment, instrument manufacture and preparation, stick properties, electronic and computer simulations, amplification, innovative instruments, and non-musi-

cal behaviour.

The conference is a parallel activity to the World Steelband Music Festival currently taking place at the Jean Pierre Complex in Port of Spain.