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TRINIDAD GUA

The panman's tune is here to stay

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STEELBANDSMEN have always been composing music for the instrument. In the early days when a panman tuned a pan he usually composed a song that could be played within the limited compass of the then primitive instrument. The symbiotic relationship between panmen and calypsonians relieved the panman from that burden and it was generally recognised that the calypsonians would compose and the steelbandmen arrange and play their music.

This did not mean that panmen stopped composing completely. From time to time we had songs like "Ray's Saga," composed by Ray Holman and "Pan on Fifth Avenue" by Anthony Williams, not forgetting Junior Pouchet's "Creole Callaloo" and Aldwyn Jordan's "At Noon," performed at music festivals.

Earl Rodney even began composing calypsoes for Sparrow while he was his musical director and bass player.

Ray Holman was at his peak at the end of the decade of the Sixties, winning the panorama competitions in 1969 and 1971 with CIBC-Starlift - he was generally accepted in the steelband fraternity as the leader in innovations at that time. Ray it was, who first decided to enter the panorama with his own tune.

This was no easy decision as there was great opposition to this move from the public, who thought it was an attempt by Holman to rock the boat and

interfere with the cordial relationship which panmen and calypsonians enjoyed.

Ray's horse racing friend, Lord Kitchener, was one of the most vocal critics and many Starlift supporters felt that Ray was putting the band's chances of staying on top in jeopardy.

The panmen supported their arranger and the records will show that the band placed third with Ray Holman's "Pan on the Move." Once established there was no turning back for Holman. His former Starlift protege, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, jumped into the fray with Phase II Pan Groove from 1974 with his composition "Las' Lap."

Boogsie eventually became the first arranger to win the competition with his own tune with "Feelin' Nice" in 1987 and he repeated with "Woman is Boss" in 1988. Both tunes were sung by Denise Plummer with lyrics by Reynold Howard - in fact Denise Plummer's international career was launched on these songs. In the early days, both Boogsie and Ray found it extremely difficult to get popular calypsonians to sing their songs.

The own composition was at a disadvantage when coming up against the produced record of the calypsonian and the exposure of the calypso tent and live performances. The steelbands usually made a pan yard recording of questionable quality which did not guarantee air play. Alvin Daniel was responsible for putting to-

gether the lyrics for Ray and Boogsie in the early years. These include gems such as "Pan on the Run," "Rags to Riches" and "Carnival is Bacchanal."

The panman's tune is here to stay. Robert Greenidge brought home the bacon for Desperadoes in 1990 with "Musical Volcano" and again last year with "Fire coming Down." The composer spends large sums of money for a quality produced record which is usually sung by the top names in the business. The arrangers are complaining this year that after spending all that money that are not receiving adequate air play as compared with certain favoured artistes.

Over the weekend there will be at least 10 songs played in the panorama competition which are composed by steelband arrangers. Crazy is singing "Crackshots" which Brian Griffith composed for Belmont Fifth Dimension and Mitch Warner's "The Final Warning" which is being played by at least six bands. Designer is doing Ray Holman's "Jam it with You" and Sydney Joseph's "Pan in Manhattan."

Other tunes include Godwin Bowen's "Ah talking mi Mind" sung by Johnny Douglas; Ken Philmore's "Shake it Up" done by Ajala Robbie Greenidge's "Pan Parang" sung by Ronnie McIntosh; Pelham Goddard's "Simple Ting" sung by Adrian Philbert and Dareem Sheppard's "Pan Rebellion" with vocals by Anslem Douglas.

(Selwyn Tarradath)