

# SUNDAY OPINION

## *Part-time love*<sup>p.8</sup> *affair with pan*<sup>ML 1000</sup> <sup>Exp. 95.02.12.</sup>

THIS IS THE WEEKEND of Panorama. On Friday night the traditional "pan round the neck" leg of the competition was launched along Independence Square; and yesterday the conventional bands took to the stage to kick off their leg of the competition.

As ever, a large sector of the population will focus all its attention on steelband music, often with all the fickle enthusiasm and hypocrisy of — to use Black Stalin's phrase — a part time lover.

It is possible that out of the heat and the sweat might very well come some more long-lasting commitment. Over the years, however, the general pattern has been for the public's fierce partisanship and support for the steelband movement to evaporate on Ash Wednesday. Nevertheless, now is probably the best time to raise the question of what is being done about the steelband movement in Trinidad and Tobago.

Take Panorama itself, for instance. As grand and as glorious as it is, it also highlights the musical illiteracy of the majority of pannists who can only learn their Panorama tune by rote and as a result know nothing else.

There is no official Institute of Music in a country which has literally thousands of people playing in musical ensembles; there is not even a quota of musical scholarships for young gifted pannists such as the solo winners of the biennial Steelband Festival.

To be fair, the problem is not merely one of Government inaction. More importantly, it is the population of this country which must on the one hand be more musically discerning and on the other hand support the steelband beyond the

once-a-year Panorama bash. Discerning in the sense that it must demand more of steelband than a few nights of high-paced jam-and-wine music; and supportive in the sense of making it financially viable.

How is it that in a country which produces so much music every year, there is no avenue whereby a small steelband, or even a solo pannist, can make enough money to pay for their instruments? The Government and corporate sponsors have been very generous over the years, and it is time Trinidadians and Tobagonians take the national instrument seriously.

Although lip service is sometimes paid, both in government and private circles, to how the steelband could bring in foreign exchange, it must all start at home by developing the instrument and the skills of its players, and by encouraging Trinidadians and Tobagonians to appreciate what they have. The Jamaican reggae, after all, only became a worldwide phenomenon because Jamaicans demonstrated their hundred per cent endorsement of their art form.

That is not to belie the importance of creative marketing and administrative efficiency. Why, for instance, have the vast markets of South America not been tapped? Since the early 1960s steelbands have toured the Latin countries and met with enthusiastic receptions.

All of this raises the problem of the sheer unwieldiness of a steelband. A tenor pan is portable, but to carry a 9-bass to New York is difficult and expensive. Perhaps a network can be set up whereby travelling bands can rent pans where they are playing, as is done with pianos.