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Pleasurable pan from Samaroos

By TERRY JOSEPH

IT IS not often that at one sitting we get to witness the premiere of 11 works written primarily for pan, but at Queen's Hall on Saturday night, that rarity was presented with such class that

the very venue seemed unequal to the task.

Aptly titled *Original Notes*, the concert by the Samaroo Jets Steel Orchestra played to a full house, offering pleasurable pan in a well-structured pre-

sentation and against a striking backdrop that added value to the already precious programme.

Among the notables attending were Culture Minister Daphne Phillips and Pan Trinbago president, Patrick Arnold.

For the two-hour concert, three guest players were added to the hardcore six-member Samaroo Jets, bringing a feeling of fullness to the orchestration, without sacrificing the integrity of any of the band's individual musical voices.

Led by champion pan music arranger, Jit Samaroo, the Jets offered variety in both the music and approaches to it, by highlighting different instruments for selected songs, instead of following the hackneyed route of having the soprano pans do all of the lead work.

Even so, there was variety.

Lisa Durieux, one of the guest players, joined Sonalal Samaroo as the featured players for "Serenade in D Minor," a piece written for the cello pans. The two also teamed for "Pan Tass," a work influenced by the tassa, where the melodic line was played on the bass pans.

Nor did the adventure limit itself to mere inversion of the lead role.

In "Canary's Call," a composition originally commissioned in 1980 as a test for aspirants to the title of champion pan soloist of that year's steel-band music festival, Lalchan and Amrit Samaroo played their tenor pans in unison, adding a fresh visual dimension to the work.

In fact, for the



JIT SAMAROO



PAT BISHOP

entire evening, watching the band work was reminiscent of synchronised swimming, with the arms of the tenor players moving together and none among them seeking to upstage his peers. There was also clear evidence of extensive rehearsal, resulting in exemplary tidiness of even the most commanding crescendoes and a sense of discipline and restraint when the quiet passages were being executed.

Fittingly, the programme opened with "Song of Lopinot," a piece written in tribute to the village from which the Samaroo family comes and commissioned as the test-piece for the 1987 Schools Pan Festival.

A third test-piece, "La Trinity," combined the major indigenous rhythm influences. It was first used for the National Pan Festival of 1994.

Jit's allegiance to his hometown continued in "Encanto," a Castilian piece writ-

ten especially for the concert, to celebrate the Spanish influences on the culture of Lopinot, while "Chaconia Waltz" paid tribute to the village's rich and diverse flora.

Other tributes were paid in the flesh. Jit himself presented Pat Bishop with a bouquet and plaque for her contribution to steel-band music, while Patrick Worrel was cited for his pan tuning and Henry Ash and John Ralph were recognised for community service in the Arouca area.

Hollick Rajkumar, who chaired the concert's organising committee and is one of the Jets' stoutest supporters, was commended for his contribution.

Several of the new works featured guest performers. The title song, "Original Notes," highlighted the saxophone interpretation of Pedro Lezama, who also worked on the liting "Hearts of Love".

Stanley Ruiz did well in his attempt to

match the styling of the guitar virtuoso in whose honour "Coleman's Jam" was written. And Jit's first attempt at composing an Indian music ballad, "Maa Baap Ki Nasihat," was beautifully presented by vocalist Ruby Gupta, who very kindly explained the song's Hindi lyrics beforehand.

Denyse Plummer was in her soft and tender mode for "My Heart's Forever Yours," then switched to a fullscale calypso jam in the second half of the show, for "Disillusioned". Lyrics for both songs were written by Michael Marcano. "Miss Supporter," another calypso for which he wrote the words, was however rendered as an instrumental on Saturday night.

The most powerful interpretation of Marcano's lyrics came from Pat Bishop's Lydian Singers, who rendered the two closing pieces, "For the Love of Pan" and Jit's first attempt at gospel music, "In Thy Name, O Lord," which brought a fitting close to a tremendous evening of pan music.

The *Original Notes* concert may not have intended to do so, but its presentation could easily become the model for pan shows, coupling as it did excellent work with a level of sophistication and finesse not often enough associated with the music of steel orchestras.