

# ANOTHER STEELBAND TO FORM IN JAPAN NEXT YEAR

By SEAN NERO

**AFTER** four years in existence, the Sukiyakini Steel Orchestra (SSO), the national steel orchestra of Toyama, Fukuno, Japan, under the direction of ace tenor pan player Brian Brumant of the BP/Amoco Renegades Steel Orchestra, held its first paid concert in August.

The event was held at the Helios Cultural Centre, Toyama, Fukuno, Japan, where 600 patrons dished out 4,000 Japanese Yen a piece (US\$35) to witness the premiere event.

This hour-long production saw SSO share the stage with another group from the Congo.

Sukiyakini's musical presentation, as arranged by Brumant, included selections as: "Take Five", "La Bamba", and "End of the World". Also, a classical piece, "Serenade In C" which he (Brumant) conducted, much to the delight of the audience who were in rapture was performed.

The concert was said to be a 'frenzied one' as patrons were given bandannas bearing the TT national colours and the Japanese pan fanatic 'Shige', who wore a red jacket and a bandanna tied on his head, spurred on his fellow countrymen to 'get up and wave'.

The concert was another feat for this young Trinidadian pan musician, who returned to Japan this year primarily to prepare the band for this major event, as well as tutor new pan classes.

Following the concert, Brumant appeared live on a morning programme on NHK—the national television of Japan, where he gave his views on the bold step taken by Sukiyakini.

But while Sukiyakini was being hailed as pride of this Japanese town, the formation of this orchestra in August 1995 was not planned.

It was the introductory year for a pan apprenticeship programme in "The Land of the Rising Sun", and Conversation Company Limited (a Japanese music promotion outfit) together with Helios (or-

ganiser of the Sukiyakini Meets The World Festival), contracted Brumant to do summer pan classes. This job opportunity materialised for Brumant through his association with BP/Amoco Renegades which, at the time, was a commodity of Conversation Company Limited where the orchestra did regular tours to Japan.

During that summer, he successfully managed to whip Sukiyakini into tip-top shape after 20 weekend workshops; each lasted three hours.

The Sukiyakini Steel Orchestra (SSO) took centre stage that year as a guest artiste at the "Sukiyakini Meets the World Festival"—an annual world music presentation by Helios. And what a performance it was. The steelband comprised 46 members—23 junior members and 23 seniors who performed separately. With the help of Renegades pannists, Sukiyakini's members were taught some simple, but impressive dance moves which they effectively executed. The junior band delivered musical selections as "My Favourite Things", from the *Sound of Music* soundtrack, "Cherry Blossom" and a native folk song "Tabanta," while the senior band did the Beatles' hit "Hey Jude", "The Blue Danube Waltz" and Ronnie Mc Intosh's "On the Road".

In the years that followed, the Japanese continued the pan classes, as Brumant annually made the trip across the globe to keep SSO in musical condition, while teaching new students and persons who had developed a curiosity for the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago.

The ultimate challenge for Sukiyakini was to perform for the Trinidad and Tobago populace and this opportunity came during the post-Carnival season of 1997, at Pan Trinbago's after Carnival "Champs In Concert" programme.

Utilising instruments belonging to that season's national Panorama champion BP/Amoco Renegades Steel Orchestra, the 33-member Japanese contingent nervously took centre stage and was besieged by boos from the North Stand.

But from the first musical note struck



SUKIYAKI'S musical director Trinidadian Brian Brumant looks on attentively as the orchestra performs his arrangement.

PHOTOS COURTESY GERARD JACKSON.

by the foreign pannists, TT nationals knew they were in for a treat and at the end of the first song the Queen's Park Savannah, Port-of-Spain, erupted with applause; conforma-

tion of Sukiyakini's acceptance into the local pan community.

Desirous of making SSO the top steelband throughout Japan, Conversation Company Limited and

Helios this year expanded the content of the pan classes with inclusion of a percussion tutor, Andrew Brumant. He is the elder brother of Brian, and also resident drummer with Renegades.

Andrew (Brumant) directed a three-week workshop where he taught indigenous calypso and soca rhythms, as well as bossanova and samba.

Through the efforts of the two Trinidadian musicians, another steelband called the Fukuno Steeldrum Club for elementary school students, has been formed. The group comprises 40 members. Another steelband is expected to be formed next year.

SSO is scheduled, in the year 2000, to produce its first CD at the Helios Concert Hall, and the Brumant's (Brian and Andrew) are contracted for four months, to ready to band for this major event.