

ML1040

Play one for panman 'Chick McGrooo'

By PETER RAY BLOOD

ULRIC "Chick McGrooo" Springer is no more. The 1958 steel-band "ping pong" (solo) champion died in Holland last weekend, victim of an asthma attack.

Born in 1923, Springer, playing for the Charlie Chan steel-band, became the fist

pannist using two sticks to cop the "ping pong" title, playing "Now is the Hour" and "All Through the Night."

Writing about Springer's two-stick achievement in his book, *The Trinidad & Tobago Steel Pan: History and Evolution*, Dr Fedo Blake stated: "Thus did Chick

Springer steal a march on his fellow competitors achieving, some say, twice the dexterity and musicality of the nearest rival, to ride off with the highly desirable prize of a gleaming new Humber bicycle."

Charlie Chan steel-band subsequently changed its name to Hells-a-Popping, and was later known as

Katzenjammer Kids.

Remembering her brother fondly, Springer's sister, Beryl, recalls that Springer played with a number of famed musicians, including Ralph Davies, Felix Roach, Martin Albino and the late Scofield Pilgrim.

Beryl Springer claims that her brother, while a member of Katzen-

jammers, created two pan instruments, the "Boodoo" and "Foule."

Asked how Springer got his nickname, Beryl explained: "Rolly Blackman named him 'Chicken' as a child. As he grew older, friends started calling him 'Chick' for short."

She adds: "A Mr Barnett, an American who was married to a Trinidadian and lived on Gatacre Street, was responsible for the rest of the nickname. Chick used to tune pans at home, using the piano as a guide, rather than doing the tuning randomly like the other guys were doing at that time."

"In 1945, Mr Barnett offered to paint a 22-inch pan for Chick. He painted the pan in red, white and blue, with the inside painted royal blue. Barnette then printed 'Chick McGroooooo', with a lot of o's, on the surface of the pan."

"When Chick performed publicly with the instrument, the audience saw the name printed on it, and he was known by that name ever since."



ULRIC SPRINGER 1923—2001

Reminiscing about the ping pong final Springer won, his sister said: "Chick beat some good guys that night, like Ellie (Mannette) and Spree (Simon) in that '45 competition, at the Boxing Stadium in the Savannah, east of Mucurapo Cemetery."

"I could still remember that the bicycle he won was painted green, with gold stripes. Chick's friends from the

neighbourhood knew he would win the competition so they brought down their pans and we jumped from Mucurapo to home that night."

Prior to going to Britain to perform with Ralph Davies at the 1965 Commonwealth Arts Festival, Springer played drums at the Hilton Hotel. He never returned home, opting to remain in London to perform there and tour Europe extensively.

Springer's sister said

her brother was an asthmatic and recently started complaining about his breathing.

She said: "He spent a week in hospital and was discharged. On Sunday night, I had a heavy feeling. I just couldn't sleep, so I said my prayers and went to sleep. Then I was awakened by a dream of Chick. I asked God, that despite His will being done, that Chick and I could see each other before either one of us died."

"Chick wasn't married but had children. He lived alone in Holland."

One of Springer's offspring is popular Phase II Pan Groove pannist Selwyn "Mini Eyes" Springer.

Ulric "Chick McGrooo" Springer will be buried in Amsterdam on Monday. His sister said: "I have been promised that the music from home will be played at the funeral, and that he will have plenty flowers as Chick loved flowers."

A memorial service is also scheduled for Monday afternoon, at the Holy Trinity Cathedral, Port-of-Spain at 4 pm.