

Success Stars captain: Hard work and prayer earned us Festival victory

By SEAN NERO

CANDY RODRIGUEZ, 15, captain of the Success Stars Pan Sounds said a lot of hard work, and hard prayer, helped the band to capture the 1999 School Steelband Music Festival champion title.

Those were also the words of comfort which the lady leader offered to her band's nine other musical rivals, following their defeat at the close of the event last Friday, (November 19) at the Jean Pierre Complex, Port-of-Spain.

"These are not words they haven't heard before," explained Rodriguez, "as hard work brings victory."

She added that all participating bands knew what they had to do to win. "Success Stars knew what it had to do to win, but probably we did it better than the other bands," she continued.

The Laventille-based school steel orchestra scored 553 points playing the best tune of choice Kitchener's "Rainorama" conducted by musical director of the band "Lord" Ben Jackson. The selection which also earned Success Stars a 12 point lead over second place band and defending champion Arima Senior Comprehensive was arranged by young-up-and-coming musician Cary Codrington, who is also a member of the National Steel Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago (NSOTT).

The young pannist, however, disclosed she may not be able to perform at the 2001 junior festival, due to a suggested rule which may debar non-pupils from participating. The rule governing pannists at the 1999 staging of the event stated only players under the age of 21 were eligible to participate.

Nevertheless, Rodriguez vowed that the band which has presented her with a world of experience, will always have her support.

Rodriguez's experience in the sphere of pan spans a mere five years, and she is best known for her successful attempt at playing the Xylopan invented by Jomo Wahatuse with Success Stars at the 1997 School Steelband Music Festival which at that time was produced by Pan Trinbago.

She is also a grade one honour student in the Trinity School of Music Examinations.

"It felt extremely wonderful to have this victory for a second time," she said in a relieved tone, "and not being tied with another band which would give people the impression that they are just as excellent as we are."

She continued: "It shows we are capable of doing anything, once we put our minds to it."

Rodriguez recounted that during the orchestra's preparation for the festival, there were some hard times and good, woes and praises, "but we were told to reflect on the good things that happened".

She took up the challenge to respond to the band's detractors, who in recent times have charged Success Stars with playing the same style arrangement

over the years. "There's always a winning combination — there's always something every band uses to win," she said unhesitatingly.

Being captain of this accomplished School Steelband was no walk in the park said Rodriguez, who seemed quite exhausted, yet elated, when *Sunday Newday* caught up with her immediately following the results.

"Not all the members were experienced. There were a lot of players who were first-timers at the festival — apart from performing at the junior Panorama competition — as well as those who were playing pan for the first time. It was hard trying to get these members ready for the festival - something as big as the festival.

But we had a lot of help from ex-pupils of the band who shared their experience, which made the job easier.

Rodriguez, a principal tenor pan pannist with the band, said even though Success Stars Pan Sounds, did not enter the festival as the defending champion, the emphasis by the competing bands seemed solely focused on them.

"This did put pressure on us," she said, "however, the pressure only made us work harder."