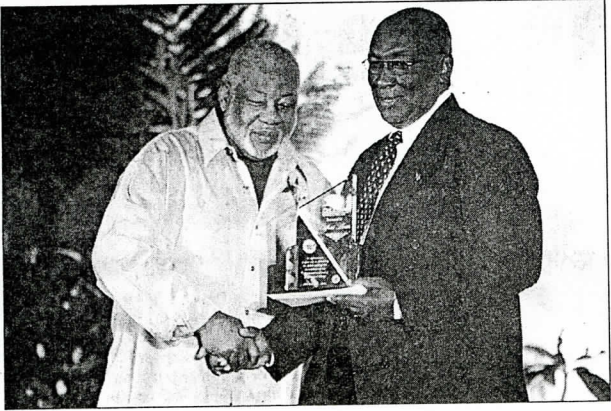


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At right: CLIFFORD ALEXIS, steelband educator at Northern Illinois University, USA, left, receives his award from PATRICK ARNOLD. Centre: STERLING BETANCOURT MBE, received his commemorative plaque along with a kiss from Culture Minister JOAN YUILLE-WILLIAMS.

PHOTOS: ANTHONY HARRIS



Pan legend CURTIS PIERRE, left, presents a special award to fellow steelband great and friend OSCAR "BOGART" PILE of Casablanca Steel Orchestra fame.

Panguard honoured

SEAN NERO

GOVERNMENT corrected a 55-year-old salary oversight on November 10 with payment to surviving members of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (Taspo) as well as the country's first National Steel Orchestra.

Honouring the Panguard was the title of the gala function hosted by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Genders Affairs, in partnership with Pan Trinbago.

Venue was Ballroom of the Crowne Plaza Hotel where these cultural ambassadors, who placed pan on the world stage five decades ago, received salaries and commemorative plaques for their respective voyages.

"You could not be national and not be funded by the government of T&T," said Culture Minister Joan Yuille-Williams during her feature address.

She continued: "And therefore, the envelopes you would take away is remuneration for the first trip only. Government is continuous and we have the pleasure of paying our debts."

Payment for two other groups of pannists, who formed National Steel Orchestras and represented this country overseas, are still outstanding. The maiden cultural voyage by a

T&T steelband took place in 1951, when Taspo travelled to Europe.

In 1964, it was the turn of those men that formed the National Steel Orchestra.

Honourees at the ceremony included Hugh Borde, Randolph St Louis, Errol Zephrine, Neville Muraldo, Edgar Pouchet Jr, Emmanuel "Kobo Jack" Riley, Lennox "Bobby" Mohammed, Sterling Betancourt, Oscar "Bogart" Pile, David Edwards and the late Sydney Gallop.

Yuille-Williams said the nation's panmen, through their presentation of music on the national instrument, have contributed to this country's economic well being.

She said: "Yes! Our economic well being. Because I'm sure you all will agree and appreciate the fact that the steelband music has become not only cultural, but also an economic asset to this country. This fact, has made the sacrifice, struggle and contribution of our panguard even more significant."

Then, the Minister directed the attention of the audience to the soon to be established 75-piece National Steel Symphony of T&T, which will employ skilled musicians and make playing of pan a career.

Newly re-elected president of Pan Trinbago Patrick Arnold lamented that "we kept losing members even though we were in

talks about honouring the panguard."

He declared that while the decision to honour the panguard may seem "strange to those whom we are indebted to in other ways, it was necessary. We felt a responsibility to salute the front runners in this particular thrust."

Arnold was full of praise for these pannists who he said had no idea of what reception awaited them after playing tuned oil drums for virgin audiences on the international scene.

Saying that Taspo's outing was an adventure, Arnold re-

lated that pannists back then took a major step, since they were for the first time reading music—though from a simplified score.

Commenting on the genius of local pan makers Anthony Williams and Dr Ellie Mannette, Arnold said: "The work done by Anthony Williams, remains a reference in the pan pantheon.

And as discovered from a number of physicists, who spoke at the inaugural Conference on the Science and Technology of the Steelpan in 2000, Mr Williams, who through a combination of na-

tive intelligence and music knowledge, had hit upon a number of scientific principles.

He remains a point of information concerning pan."

Dr Ellie Mannette, who made and tuned pans played by the first National Steel Orchestra, is equally important said Arnold, "and he remains a driving force in the instruments current growth, both technically and aesthetically."

The steelband boss continued: "He has demystified several aspects of the tuning process and now has native Americans turning out instruments of an enviable quality."