

Carnival '96

ML104D

Boogsie's mom's birthday wish:

Victory for my son

By GREGORY TRUJILLO

JAZZ and pop riffs, lots of jam and a little classic touch, will flow through "Mind Yuh Business" when band No 1, Phase II Pan Groove, is called upon to perform tomorrow at the National Panorama semi-finals on the stage at the Queen's Park Savannah.

Sheer power and energy will rise from the pans of Phase II, under the directorship of the incomparable Len "Boogsie" Sharpe — acclaimed in many circles to be the most talented steelband arranger to grace these shores.

Phase II finished a creditable 20 points behind the ... and defending champions, Amoco Renegades, in the preliminaries, playing a masterful arrangement by Anese "Haffers" Hadeed.

But tomorrow, ace arranger Boogsie takes complete control of matters with a composition that has been ripped apart and reconstructed the way that only Boogsie can do.

Curiously, for the past year "Mind Yuh Business" has played an integral part in the life of Boogsie.

"I was prompted to do the music for 'Mind Yuh Business' because people were giving their own verdict when I got into trouble with US authorities," Boogsie related.

"I will show them that they should not meddle in other people's business. I have tried to put my problems aside and concentrate on this tune. Did you notice I chose to use it as a slang?"

Boogsie returned home on Saturday on "compassionate leave" from the United States where he resides and makes his livelihood.

He almost did not make it home to arrange his band's music, but as fate had it, because of the fragile health of his adoring and adored 82-year-old mother, he was given leave to visit Trinidad at this 11th Panorama hour.

Boogsie has missed the

last two Panorama competitions and he is eagerly looking forward to make up lost ground.

He started work on the tune on Monday night and since then members of the band have been practising up to 5 am every day.

Boogsie would, once again, like to establish himself as the "king of steelband arrangers" — a title he surrendered to Amoco Renegades' Jit Samaroo and probably WITCO Desperadoes' Robbie Greenidge without raising the pan stick.

Boogsie has never had the benefit of formal training but he learnt most of what he knows in the panyard. He cannot read or write music.

"It is a gift from God... I have a good ear," he insisted "There are people who could read and write and cannot improvise. I could take a flat tune and make it sound good. Music is feelings.

"In my case, when I hear music I learn it in a quick space of time. It sticks. My brain is like a computer. I get a picture of how the music would sound in my head and then I would teach it to the players."

Boogsie's mother will be celebrating her 83rd birthday on Carnival Saturday and the one thing she says that would please her most is for Boogsie to win the Panorama.

"I am looking forward to that birthday gift," she joked, although she could hardly move because of the aches and pains from the arthritis in her waist.

A British adjudicator once remarked that Boogsie "suffers from musical diarrhoea, but whatever discipline his music lacks is made up for in sheer richness and energy."

Tomorrow he will seek prove to his supporters his awesome and adventuresome ability to arrange a tune in less than five days to beat the likes of Samaroo's "Pan In A Rage", Greenidge's "Blast-Off" and Pelham Goddard's "The Disappearing Pan Yard" or anybody or any-



A PROUD mother is kissed warmly by her talented son, Boogsie

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From boy wonder to pan master

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thing that comes in his way. For the first time in her life, Grace, Boogsie's mother, said she dared to speak to a reporter, or have her picture taken to be put in the newspapers.

At first she was very skeptical about talking to the Press and she stayed out of sight, making audible comments behind closed doors. But eventually, after the interview with Boogsie, she was coaxed to talk about whatever she liked.

Although a bit shy, she began hesitantly but the words started to flow as she went along.

"I am calling on God to watch over him. Boogsie is a very nice... nice person. I feel bad when I hear people bad-talking him. They don't know him.

"I was feeling very down-spirited before he came home but from the moment he reached Trinidad I started to feel better." Mrs Sharpe, whose husband died last June, recalled loving memories of how her son got the name Boogsie and his involvement in pan almost from birth.

"He got the name Boogsie as a babe in my arms. While sitting reading my



BOOGSIE as a baby.

bible one day I was holding him in my and I started to dose off to sleep.

"Between sleep and wake I heard somebody shouting 'Boogsie,' 'Boogsie,' 'Boogsie,' and I jumped up. There and then I decided I would call him Boogsie."

She recalled that Boogsie was born in the Port-of-Spain General Hospital although she wanted to give birth to him at their home in St James — a stone's throw from Phase II panyard on



AS A YOUNG MAN showing his talents to the kids.

Hamilton Holder Street.

"The doctors told me I must go to the hospital to have him because there could be complications as I was in my 40s," she related. "When I came home from hospital there was this band in the yard — Symphonettes. Boogsie's bed was on the same side of the house with the pan tent.

"Several neighbours came to see the baby and some of them said that I should get somewhere to carry the child because the beating of the pan would send him crazy.

"They claimed that the noise would be too much for him and that it would damage his brain.

"I wondered where I could carry him. Is here I am living.

"I used to put him on my shoulders and sit on the bed by the window and listen to the pan.

"As he progressed and was able to sit up and then stand by himself, he would lean on the window ledge and listen to the music. He just loved to hear the pan beating all the time.

"He started to make one step, one step when he was one-year-old. And one day I left him inside and was in the kitchen. Then I heard a noise — pong, pong, pong outside.

"I looked inside and did not see him. I ran around the side of the house and to my surprise there was Boogsie with a piece of stick in his hand beating a pan.

"I took him up and carried him back inside and he started to cry. Boogsie was very fat and had a big head of hair when he was a baby. He moved and grew fast. He grew accustomed to going outside and beating the pans, until one day they decided to lock up the tent. That particular day he leaned on the ledge and cried long tears.

"Boogsie couldn't reach the pans to beat them from on top so he used to hit them from underneath.

"When he was two to three years old his father was working in the Police Hospital and brought home two big grapefruit tins and made pans for him.

"We had a mango tree in the yard and his father took cocoyea and stuck young mangoes at the top and made pan sticks. He would sit down and amuse himself all the time.

"Any kind of pan he could get his hands he would beat... even my cake pans... he would pound them up. The amazing thing about Boogsie was that when he was about five years old he was so advanced that he had his own little section that he taught the tunes to.

"What happened was the pan beaters used to separate themselves in fours to learn the tunes. Boogsie would be by that window all night listening and when they were through he would come outside and teach the boys the tune... note for note on the bass right down to the tenor.

"He was so small that they had to turn the pan sideways on the ground so he could stand on it to reach the top of the pan he was beating.

"In those days everybody wanted to see this little boy beat pan because children weren't allowed to play pan. Panmen were often referred to as vagabonds."

As a pan soloist and arranger, Boogsie has explored the instrument's potential and has helped to expand the frontiers of the steelband repertoire.

His creative force from then to now (he is 42 years old) has allowed him to master the instrument by harmonising his own melodies.

Boogsie has described "Mind Yuh Business" as "awesome."

He made an appeal to pan lovers to come early to listen to Phase II and "you will hear something you never heard before."

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