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entertainment

By PETER RAY BLOOD

A league of his own

CURRENTLY a sophomore at Northern Illinois University, Liam Teague continues to astound his teachers, classmates and fans through his virtuosity and knowledge of pan. Last month, Teague created history by becoming the first pannist to be accompanied by a full symphony orchestra when he performed with the Chicago Sinfonietta at Orchestra Hall.

Teague's performance received raves in the Chicago newspapers, with *Chicago Tribune* music critic John Von Rhein describing Teague's music as "exhilarating." Wynne Delacoma, Von Rhein's counterpart with the *Chicago Sun Times* wrote that Teague's "expressive steelpan won" the duel amongst the percussive instruments in the orchestra.

Clifford Alexis is one of the people responsible for Teague being in the United States, to pursue a BSc degree in Fine Arts, with pan as his major instrument. Teague and Alexis

were featured in the widely read *Percussive Notes* magazine earlier this year, following their participation in the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Atlanta, Georgia.

In an interview with *Percussive Notes'* Rich Holly, Teague expressed the view that pan composers and arrangers could do more to extend the range of players ability. He said: "I think with regard to composition that not very much has changed in Trinidad."

The 1993 national solo champion added: "I believe this is partly the arrangers' fault and partly because of the judging in Panorama. Most of the pieces that win use a set format ... theme and variations. If a composition strays from that, the band knows they'll have to settle for sec-

ond-place at best."

Teague also said that the structure of steel orchestras at present need to be streamlined, especially bands participating in Panorama. "I don't understand why we're starting to use nine basses and even 12 basses for one player," said Teague.

"It continues to be the tradition in Trinidad that the more pans you play, the better you must be. I'm actually surprised that the better musicians in Trinidad have not spoken up saying that these added drums are actually useless.

"In an orchestra, you have many different timbres, and we cannot get this with pan. These extra notes don't do anything to help differentiate one pan from the next."

Lamenting that competition at home lessens the pan

arranger's/pannist's time and inclination to experiment, Teague said that the format of the Panorama competition has reached a level beyond which it probably can't progress. He added: "I think the Panorama boundaries that have been created are stifling. For instance, you never hear asymmetrical rhythms, everything is based on a solid 1-2-3-4 feel."

Noting the improvement made by North American pannists, Teague cited music literacy as one of the advantages they have over their local counterparts. "One advantage the American (steel)bands have is that virtually all of the members can read music, which is not the case in Trinidad," said Teague.

"When I first came to the United States I expected all

of the bands to be playing simple traditional calypso tunes, which is obviously not always the case. I had a certain perspective on what it would be like here, and I've seen and heard.

"In Trinidad, the main advantage is that steel drums are from there, and consequently there are many years of history and tradition for the players to follow."

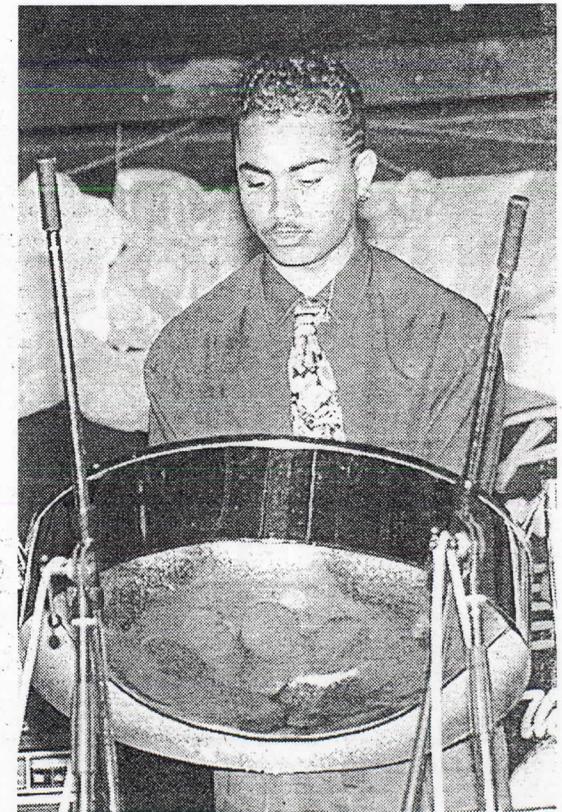
Teague said that American students of pan need to be more observant when learning the instrument. He also said that the student's need to have some form of hands-on experience of actually hearing pan in its native environment.

"I would introduce the student to Trinidad," said Teague. "Even though many American university steelbands are now playing top compositions from Panorama,

they're just playing notes and they really don't know what the notes mean.

"Also, in many of these university bands, the student is just thrown in and very quickly has to learn the notes to any number of tunes. They don't have enough time to actually become comfortable with the pan itself. That is like putting me in a marimba ensemble and expecting me to learn all these notes on an instrument with which I'm not familiar."

A son of San Fernando soil, Teague played with T&TEC Motown and Hillside Symphony prior to his enrollment at NIU in 1993. When he performed with the symphony orchestra, Teague played "Concerto for Steelpan Orchestra," a two-movement concerto composed last year by NIU professor Jan Bach for Teague.



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