



SCRUNTERS PAN GROOVE, one of the more entertaining pan-round-neck steelbands

How ^{ML1040} great thine art

By **TERRY JOSEPH**

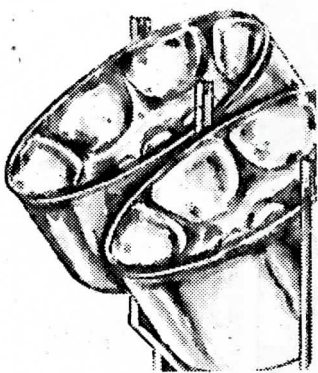
THERE IS SOMETHING morbid about the ease with which pan-round-the-neck groups are steadily increasing their share of the dwindling steelband money pie, while research geared toward development of the conventional instrument is stymied by a lack of funding.

Last week Sunday, of the ten bands participating in the St Peter's Day Pan Jam in Carenage, at least five were guilty of aggravated assault on the aesthetic and two others played what is fast becoming the test piece for this annual event "How Great Thou Art?"

But exactly how great is this art? It seems that any ten novices can now sling pans around their necks and get two conspirators to hold up a banner

claiming that they are representative of this great music form. That, simply put, comprises a traditional steelband, which has to play simple songs like "How Great Thou Art", because the self-imposed limitations of the band debars it from doing even a Fifth of Beethoven.

Full chords are not attainable on any of the support instruments and no one wants to carry even one bass drum on his shoulders in this day and time, so



the doo-doop returns to provide the basic low frequency noise at the bottom end of the band, instead of anchoring the already incomplete chords.

Surely, this is a kick in the tired shins of those who ran that first lap in the race to develop this novel instrument. Instead of taking the baton and continuing the race, pan round the neck continues to regurgitate the celebration of that inaugural leg.

Pan Trinbago President Owen Serrette, in his address at the Panorama prize giving function at City Hall Port of Spain on March 27, lamented the rise in the number of pan round the neck groups, but stopped just shy of telling the progenitors of this retrogressive form that they were holding up progress, all for the quick bucks, so encouragingly disbursed by Mr Serrette's own organisation.

"One of the more striking (sic) features of Panorama", says Serrette. "has been the phenomenal growth of the pan round the neck category. It must be admitted that while there are many legitimate bands of this kind who play throughout the year, far too many are pick-up sides, using the opportunity to make a quick dollar but not providing any serious or lasting contribution to pan music on the whole.



OWEN SERRETTE

Playing pan for St

that we are here making only derisive comment about the form should know that there are bands which sound very good and are indeed entertaining. The St Peter's Day Pan Champs, Spree Simon

Harmonics, Scrunters Pan Groove (the Panorama Champs) and former champions of both contests, La Creole Pan Groove. Carib Pan Jammers has also put in quite lively and sweet perfor-

mances. But to suggest that of the other 45 which took part in this year's Panorama that we could get ten more good ones, is to lie to oneself and the very instrument itself. And those who think

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"Far too many splinters of large bands suffer greatly for players and instruments when small sides are formed, just so, for opportunistic reasons", he said, mentioning betimes that the Skiffle Bunch had made the ascendancy from this level to conventional band (as has Spellbound).

This year, the demand of splinter groups was so intense that one conventional band could not even fulfil a lucrative contract, because several members of its frontline had aligned with various pan round the neck bands.

Pan lovers will remember that what began as a novelty act to precede the Panorama finals in one year, grew into a contest five Carnivals hence and has trundled on ever since, getting bigger and not better with each passing year. Pan lovers will remember too that this section of the Panorama competition began at 7.10 p.m. one Friday night and the last band played at 5.15 on Saturday morning. Surely, this is rubbish.

The quality of the music is largely sub standard and the blatant attempts to get money by any means, devalues the efforts of other legitimate bands who have to rely on the same corporate citizens for sponsorship.

Nothing is being achieved here, except a double deception. The pan authorities find this dinosaur burdensome but pretend to like it and the players are up to little else but getting appearance fees and free T shirts.

The embarrassment is largely local, since none of these fly-by-night aggregations ever get to go anywhere and foreigners really couldn't care less about the improvement of pan and its music.

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that we are here making derisive comment about a form that brings joy of nostalgia and the maintenance of cultural traditions; please understand that the proliferation of pan round the neck bands

has little to do with these concepts. The lure of easy money has displaced such noble motives.

In this year alone, the feeding of this retrogressive musical dinosaur has cost tax-

payers more than \$600,000; a figure well in excess of that which is needed to research the history of the instrument.

It really is a case of taking back-in-times just a bit too far.

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