

# World Steelband Music Festival Absence of 'big guns' will not affect quality of performances

By SEAN NERO

THE ABSENCE of some of this country's established steel orchestras in the local qualifying round of this year's World Steelband Music Festival would not affect the quality of performances expected in such a prestigious contest, leaders of participating steelbands told *Newsday* yesterday.

In fact, Michael Ding Chong, manager of the legendary Tragarete Road orchestra, BWIA Invaders, has boasted that his band has the wherewithal to deliver a performance that will surpass any previously delivered by WITCO Desperadoes or Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars at

the pan music contests.

The last appearance by Desperadoes was in 1992. All Stars last appeared in 1998, while bp Renegades and Petrotrin Phase II Pan Groove have not participated since 1988.

Ding Chong said: "Invaders placed second to All Stars by half a point in a festival. That was quite an achievement. When a band holds a position among the top three in a competition that is cause for people to take notice."

Renegades is said to be usually on tour during the festival period, while All Stars is still devastated from its experience in 1998, when the band was thrown out of the competition at

the preliminary stage of the contest.

Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, musical director and chairman of Phase II, has been otherwise occupied working with former World Steelband Music Festival champion TCL Group Skiffle Bunch and Desperadoes, which this year indicated a return to the contest, bowed out when the band could not contract a suitable musical director.

According to media releases issued by the Festival Secretariat, located at Pan Trinbago's Park Street headquarters, three orchestras will represent Trinidad and Tobago at the world finals of the festival advertised to take place in England, in October.