

ML 1040

commentary

By SELWYN TARRADATH

The privatisation of Panorama

TWENTY-SIX years after being founded, Pan Trinbago is still faced with a number of challenges that affect the steelband movement.

Since the first official Panorama, this annual steelband competition has had its ups and downs. Perhaps the most significant item on the Carnival calendar,

Panorama remains one of the most formidable challenges facing Pan Trinbago and the steelband movement.

Panorama is a big issue in the steelband fraternity at the present time. In fact, a general

meeting was recently called by Pan Trinbago, the sole aim being to discuss the 1998 edition of Panorama. One of the main items on the agenda was a proposal to lower the number of players in participating

bands from 120 to 80 players.

The urgency with which the steelband body has to deal with Panorama stems from the fact that the Minister of Culture has thrown the ball directly

into the courts of the Carnival impact groups, giving them the responsibility for running their own shows at the 1998 Carnival celebrations.

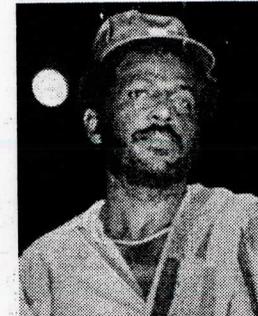
Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organisation (TUCO), the

National Carnival Bands Association (NCBA) and Pan Trinbago will now be allocated grants to run their shows, thus leaving the National Carnival Commission (NCC) with almost observer status.

The NCC and its predecessor, the CDC, were statutory boards set up by government to administrate and produce the national Carnival. All infrastructural and financial arrangements were taken care of by the Board, while the executive of the various groups (representing Calypsonians, pannists and masqueraders) acted as advisers and negotiators on behalf of their members. In some cases, they also provided auxiliary labour.

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little of this filters down to the main players in the scenario.

The thinking is that if these bodies were given the responsibility to manage their own finances, ways and means would be arrived at to make them work profitably. This then is the challenge thrown out to the steelband movement.

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receipts in millions of dollars.

Pan Trinbago must also work more closely with the Copyright Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (COTT), and other similar organisations, to ensure that the intellectual property of the Panorama participants are not being exploited.

Extensive corporate sponsorship must also be extracted from the business community in

spend all their effort, energy and resources for the whole year into preparation for the next year's competition.

Panorama has become the main focus of the steelband movement. It is the only time that the spotlight is really placed on us, the pannists. We strive for 10 minutes of glory, the ultimate prize being king or queen for a night.

Is it worth it? The waste of resources on recurrent expenditure; the sacrifices of the players and band to satisfy the craving of the masses for an orgy of music and spectacle which is soon forgotten?

The Panorama competition began in 1963 and gained immediate approval and popularity. In the beginning, it also signalled a great leap forward in steelband innovation, but we have paid the price for this.

The high standard of the competition demanded excellence; only the best would come out on top. Pan Am North Stars was the leading band in the land at the time and promptly ran away with the competition in 1963 and '64.

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Each year, the infrastructural arrangements consist of erecting a main stage, the North Stand and annexes, changing cubicles, providing lighting and seating, ticket facilities and the handling of merchandising, marketing and advertisement.

Some of these chores will still be undertaken by the NCC, but the various Carnival bodies will be in charge of their own finances, assisted by the grant from the NCC.

The thinking behind this is to make the shows profitable, since, despite their enormous potential for bringing in revenue, the books have always been in the red after Carnival. The subsidising of Carnival is an undertaking that any government can justify, even in the face of criticism from different sections of our society.

The Central Statistical Office has just released figures showing some \$64M in foreign revenue is generated by our national festival, yet



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Panorama is the biggest event of the Carnival season. The preliminaries at the Savannah often see over 25,000 patrons crowded into the enclosed areas where an admission price is supposed to be paid on entry. The gate receipts never reflect a profit. There is a culture of the steelband, where members of the fraternity feel that they must gain entry to any pan show, free of charge.

This extends to pan lovers who can afford to pay, but believe that it enhances their status quo by being in possession of a pass or complimentary ticket for all steelband shows.

Pan Trinbago must deal ruthlessly with this situation, even if it means turning over the running of the event to professional promoters, such as the Martineau brothers or Chinese Laundry, where even with a percentage for the promoters, we can still look forward to gate

receipts in millions of dollars.

Pan Trinbago must also work more closely with the Copyright Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (COTT), and other similar organisations, to ensure that the intellectual property of the Panorama participants are not being exploited.

Extensive corporate sponsorship must also be extracted from the business community in a manner that reflects the magnitude of the show and the profits made by the businessmen.

Panorama, the show, is a monster created by the steelband movement that threatens to devour us. We are literally riding the proverbial tiger's back. We cannot hop off and we cannot control it. The 'Panorama Syndrome' has been discussed by the brains of the steelband movement for many years without any tangible solutions being arriving at.

I love Panorama as a panman, as well as an administrator for the past 25 years. But, I hate it, because I realise how much it has retarded the progress of the steelband movement and limited the movement's potential to become a viable economic entity.

The 'Panorama Syndrome' is the phenomenon whereby steelbands

spend all their effort, energy and resources for the whole year into preparation for the next year's competition.

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The music started to get more intricate as the leading arrangers began to experiment with various musical devices to gain an edge over their competitors. Deliberate modulations began to appear in the hitherto simple music of the steelband. The genius, Anthony Williams, introduced the change key and, with his superior orchestration and tone of pan, took off in front.

Others were paying close attention, however, and the brilliant pan tactician, Rudolph Charles, was the person to take Panorama to the height of competitiveness. He realised that to have the edge, a band must obtain the exclusive services of the best tuners, arranger and players, together with a sponsor who was willing to put out the money to acquire them.

The age of the specialist was born; quality tuners and arrangers were only available to the bands that could afford them.

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Quality and survival

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A very important turn of events in 1965 also added a new dimension to the Panorama.

Anthony Williams, Beverly Griffith, Albert "Philo" James, Ray Holman and Junior Pouchet were busy experimenting with the simple calypso and extending it to much greater proportions, so that it soon obtained the accepted modern formula of introduction, verse and chorus, tenor solos, change key with a 'jam' part, optional minor, additional keys, back to first key and ending.

Guinness Cavaliers came to town that year with close to 200 players, with pans tuned by Allan Gervais, Errol Moore and Bertram Kellman. Their rendition of "Melody Mas" was jumpy with a lot of stops and rhythm breaks; but it was simple music with no change key. The key element was power and arranger Lennox "Bobby" Mohammed's ability to jam.

They took town 'by storm' and duly won, thus forcing all the other bands

to look for more fire power to compete with them. This was taken to the extreme by Solo Harmonies, who employed Gervais as their tuner and another southern arranger, Earl Rodney, to blow the other bands off stage in 1968 with the "Wrecker".

Times have changed and bands are now demanding a levelling of the playing field, thus the suggestion to implement a ceiling of 80 players to each band. Others are also calling for players to perform with only one band, and for arrangers to work for one band as well.

Much as I hate the effect that Panorama has on the steelband movement, I endorse none of these suggestions. The only thing that Panorama has going for it right now is its creativity; by setting limits we would destroy that.

It was Abraham Lincoln who stated, "You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong." My own addendum to that is, "You cannot make a midget stand tall by forcing a giant to lie down."

Many of the less successful bands have been

complaining about the unfair advantages that the "big bands" have in the competition, but that is the very essence of competition. You have to seek every advantage that you can gain over your opponent in order to win. Only the strong survive.

The bands are saying that there are only about eight bands nationwide that are capable of fielding over 100 players. But these are the bands that, by proper administration, have the resources to finance their effort, have the tuners, players and arrangers to be successful, as well as generate the necessary crowd support to make the show a success.

Many of the bands that are complaining are either dormant or lethargic during the course of the year. They raise no funds, and depend entirely on the appearance fees and grants from the ministry

to see them through the season.

Self-sufficiency isn't one of the watchwords that guide their destiny and survival. Many of these bands do nothing for the status of the Panorama. The competition will be successful without them if the ceiling is removed and bands play with as many players as they wish.

There will be about 12 bands with a dozen excellent pieces of music. In that way the steelband will be able to speak for once with a loud roar, not the squeak of one hundred 80-member bands, boring everyone to death with monotonous attempts at making music.

Of course, I am just playing devil's advocate here, as this would not be in the best interest of the larger movement. On the other hand, however, we would have one hell of a steelband show.