

CODRINGTON FAMILY TAKES FCB STEEL PAN CHALLENGE TITLE—PAGE A38



Robbie Greenidge leads the New York Stars on stage. In background is bass player Muhammad Hussain.

Boogsie, Robbie create PURE MAGIC

PETER RAY BLOOD

Apparently Boogsie (Len Sharpe) didn't get the memo, the one which instructs that pannists do not retire—they just play on and on.

Sitting on the steps in front Central Bank, on St Vincent Street, Port-of-Spain, hours before headlining the Pure Magic show with his Desperadoes counterpart Robbie Greenidge last weekend, he was telling me, "Boy, ah heading for 60 and ah getting too old for this thing. Ah tired. Is time for me to retire."

Interestingly, the annals of pan, and calypso indeed, are replete with virtuosi who played, tuned, arranged and performed until the Master called them home, geniuses like the late Spree Simon, Rudolph Charles, Bertie Marshall, Clive Bradley, Pretender and Grandmaster Kitchener.

And so, Sharpe in fact opened Pure Magic to a musically astute and enlightened audience, many a jazz connoisseur easily identifiable in the semi-darkened auditorium.

Sharpe opened his set accompanied by Moyenne musical director Chantal Esdelle on keyboards, her Divine Echoes counterpart Tamba Gwinde playing percussion; bassist Dougie Redon, guitarist Clifford Charles; drummer Richard Joseph; and a quintet of Phase II Pan Grove pannists, including band manager Errol "Skerry" Skerritt.

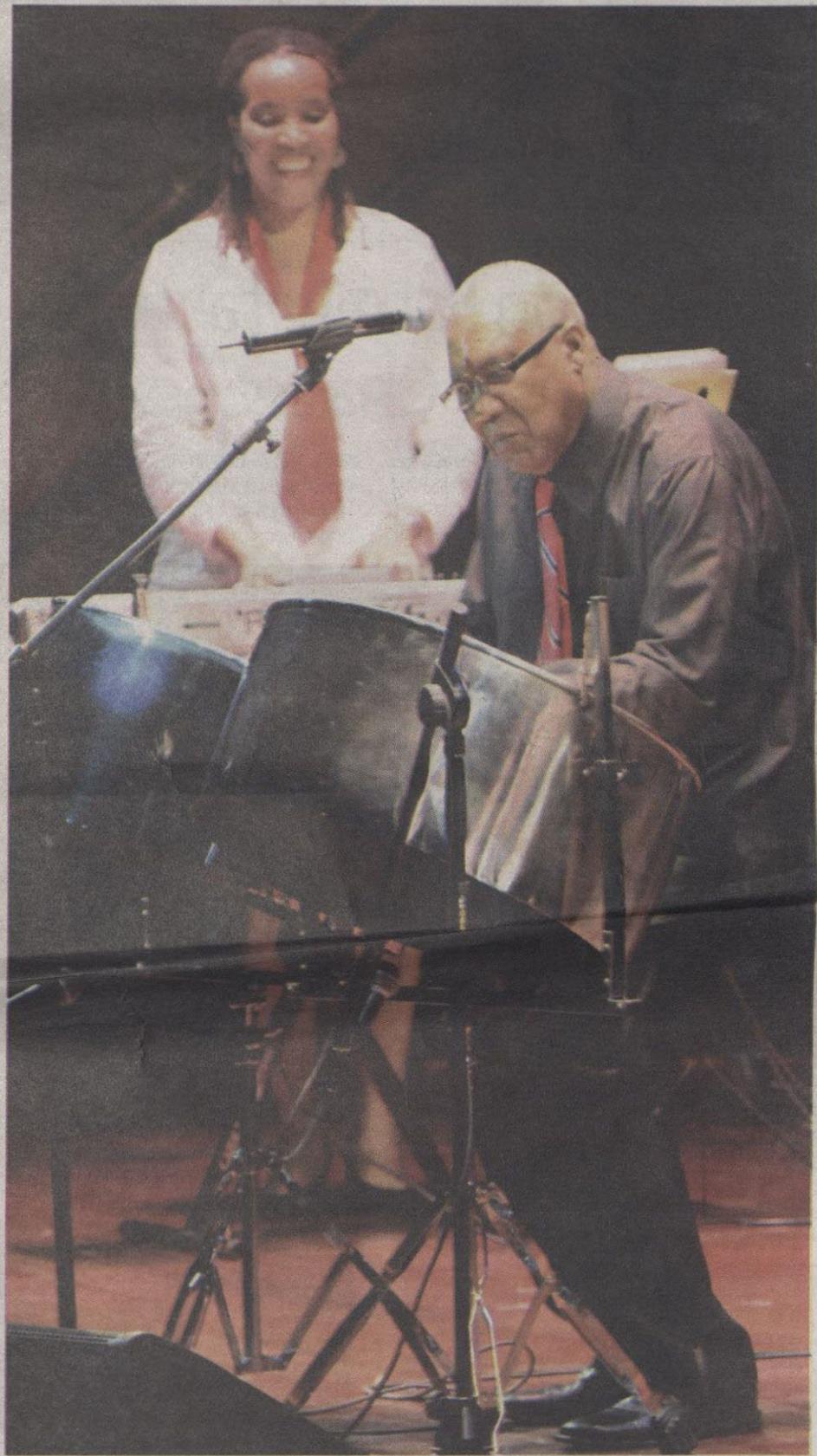
Sharpe surprised all by performing a repertoire which included just one of his numerous original compositions—I See Aysha. Commenting last Monday, the gifted pannist said: "I wanted to treat the audience to a varied

repertoire. I wanted to show them the vast range of our national instrument." One selection which distinctly demonstrated the versatility of Sharpe's double tenors was his solo treatise of Kitchener's Pan, Night & Day. Other selections performed by Sharpe were Moon River, The Hammer (Rudder), Memories (Sparrow), Come Back Home (Andre Tanker), God Bless Our Nation (Marjorie Padmore) and Green Dolphin Street—one of Sharpe's favourites and an evergreen classic composed 65 years ago by Bronislau Kaper.

With intermission taken after Sharpe's performance, patrons settled for the show's second stanza, filled with anticipation of Greenidge's turn on stage. The Laventille pan icon, now domiciled on the US West Coast, was backed by The New York Stars, a quintet comprising three American musicians (saxophonist Larry Klimas; keyboardist Junior Crawford, drummer Chris Parker); Sri Lankan bassist Muhammad Hussain; and, acclaimed T&T percussionist Kenneth Clarke.

From the opening item—Front the Heart—it was obvious that these musicians were not just stars but were extremely accomplished and professional. In short, everyone held his own throughout. The affable Hussain, who told me after the show he was eager to eat his first roti, stole everyone's heart with his command of his six-string acoustic bass guitar, and the broad smile he maintained.

Earlier on, Sharpe revealed that Crawford assisted him in writing I See Aysha several years ago. In contrast to energetic Hussain, Crawford was a cool, laid-back musician, but packing immense power in his playing. Also



Len "Boogsie" Sharpe gets animated as he performs at the Central Bank auditorium. Keyboardist Chantal Esdelle, musical director of Moyenne is all smiles PHOTOS: KEARRA GOPEE

causing all to sit up, take notice, and cheer spontaneously was Klimas, on his second visit to Trinidad since 1979. When Greenidge played Kiss Kiss Kiss, a composition of his protege the late Ralph Mac Donald, widow Grace Mac Donald stood and applauded in appreciation.

Through the years, many people have tried to compare Robbie and Boogsie—two of the world's best and most revered pannists. If an analogy can be made, I'd say they are akin two exquisitely honed pistols; both beautiful, both deadly, and both perfectly precisioned. If I can suggest a comparison, Robbie plays with a silencer.

At the risk of sounding redundant and somewhat superfluous, the appropriately billed Pure Magic was an excellent and mesmerising production, the performers being graced with a flawless sound system in the Central Bank auditorium, with superb engineering.

Pure Magic was staged as part of the ongoing series by the Ministry of Planning & Sustainable Development to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Independence, executive production inputs were made by the QRC Foundation, NGC, Pan Trinbago, PKF Chartered Accountants, A Campbell & Associates and ERCTA Products Limited.