

GENIUSES IN THE HOMELESS KINGDOM OF PAN

By LAURIE ANDALL

POST 1970, with the windfall of consciousness, many of us began to re-examine the colonial education passed down to us by men like J.O. Cutteridge about whom our calypso poet, Sparrow, had cautioned us since the early sixties with the lyrical gem "Dan is de man in de van". Then talk went around that the great German-born musical composer Ludwig Van Beethoven was a black man! Before that decade was over, however, with our own richness of musical talent inspired by the Steelband, we had out-grown the need to claim Beethoven in the struggle for our own psychological liberation.

At the time of writing, musical maestro, the late Clive Bradley is still uneasily perched at the head of the class if only for his versatility and perhaps his greatest achievement, as he was told it was when he led a band of school children and a blind man on a bass to the Panorama Peak with Nutones Steel Orchestra, playing Poet David Rudder's 'High Mas' and hypnotizing judges and masses with a celestial melody that came from the depths of our colonial consciousness where the Latin Pope was not just king but The Emperor of Souls.

To bring 'High Mas' into the calypso coliseum was blasphemy but to deny its triumph would have been spiritual treason. Bradley had stolen our heads and we gave him the panorama prize on a platter.

And even before Nutones had stopped celebrating their victory, that ingrate, suffering over a decade of steelband tabanca, returned to his rocky marriage on the Hill with Despers and at once vindicated the reconciliation with back-to-back victories with Oba Sinnette's 'In my House' and 'Picture on The Wall', completing the elusive hat-trick, achieved up to that point only by Jit and Renegades a few years earlier and thus equalling this feat in his own unique way. Bradley, who had cut his musical teeth as an organist with Kalyan in the days of the Combo, used to boast that he once won the Panorama with Despers playing with forty-five pannists. He bequeathed to us a musical portfolio that enriches the Panorama legacy in a special way. Our tragedy is that this genius has moved on and we are still to consecrate a space where we can sit, in this computer age, and at the touch of a key and the click of a mouse, command a Clive Bradley performance for posterity.

If only for sheer consistency, Jit Samaroo who had come to the public glare with his family band and their long running contract with the Hillton Hotel, a record in itself, must share that musical podium with his distinguished peers. The Renegades first arrived at the Panorama mountaintop in 1982, playing Jit's arrangement of Lord Kitchener's 'Pan Explosion', almost a decade after The Boys from The Harp gave the unassuming country lad from

Lopinot his break. Credit must be given to Renegades for the patience they showed with this genius-in-waiting, a trait which few steelbands could afford without vindication of The Big Prize.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Renegades' virtue had been adequately rewarded with nine Panorama victories and the only hat-trick by a single steelband to this date, thanks to the musical tenacity of Jit Samaroo. Six of these victories came with calypsos composed by Lord Kitchener, King of The Road and The Panorama, with one each for Baron, Merchant and De Fosto.

Most of Kitchener's Panorama championships had come in the sixties and seventies with arrangers like Tony Williams, Bobby Mohammed, Earl Rodney, Ray Holman, Clive Bradley, Rudy Wells, Rupert 'Priest' Mark and Steve Achaiba interpreting his music. But in the eighties and nineties it was Jit Samaroo who most successfully represented the Arima Bard in the steelband arena. It was perhaps most fitting that the final victory of a Kitchener tune, 'Guitar Pan' in 1997, was also Jit's final Panorama triumph.

Today we may turn on the radio and hear a Jit Samaroo arrangement or attend a lime up Charlotte Street by Renegades Pan Theatre where we would certainly hear calypsos arranged by the Lopinot maestro but our steelband heroes are still lacking a national space of acclamation where student, tourist or fan could visit and, with the scroll of an arrow, open up a window to the amazing musical world of men like Jit Samaroo.

Ray Holman had two Panorama victories with Starlift, the first of which, 'The Bull', is still ranked by some connoisseurs on the top shelf of best Panorama winners. His other victory with Sparrow's 'Queen of The Bands' was a tie with Harmonites playing Kitchener's 'Play Mas' arranged by Earl Rodney. Ray, a musical protégé of Jazz enthusiast and Latin master Scofield Pilgrim at the College under the Tower clock at the corner of Maraval Road and St. Clair Avenue, went on to challenge the Panorama status quo with his own compositions, specifically minted for Pan.

In the conservative world of musi-

cal badjohnism with calypsonians, steelband officials and even some arrangers taking offence, Ray Holman and Starlift paid a musical price but others have reaped the benefit of his sacrifice and the Panorama has benefitted and Trinbagonians no longer need a German mulatto to hold our musical heads high. Since the vintage 'Pan on the Run' to which Alvin Daniel fashioned the lyrics, own compositions by panmen for their bands have grown from strength to strength with Lennox 'Boogsie' Sharpe taking the art to another level.

Boogsie, too, paid a price because it was a long lonely road between tunes like 'Rags to Riches', 'I-Music' and the victorious 'This Feeling Nice'.

Calypsonians even profited as the popularity of Denyse Plummer skyrocketed with 'Woman is Boss' which gave Sharpe his second victory. But like Brian Lara who perhaps also has the record of most disputed dismissals - among others - in Test

cricket, Sharpe also holds the dubious record of most second places in the Panorama stakes. He has suffered the agony of perhaps the most one-point defeats but has also enjoyed the sweetness of these narrowest of triumphs as well as the widest margin among victories.

This gifted citizen, through the art of Pan, has given us as a nation a beautiful body of work. And yet, the home of his Band, Phase 11, is under threat of the Mayor's hammer and his musical portfolio lacks archival space where, like the encounter between Mozart and Beethoven almost two hundred years ago, young composers may interact

with his work and out of this muddied pond of our twin-island republic, create fertile ground for one thousand flowers to bloom, specially minted for Pan

Internationally-renowned pannist Robbie Greenidge has also won two Panoramas with Desperadoes playing his own compositions with reference to 'Musical Volcano' sung by Bernadette Noel and 'Fire Coming Down' sung by Blue Boy. Desperadoes, which has the most Panorama victories, has graced winners' enclosure under three different arrangers, the first being with Beverly Griffith and has done so, apart from Robbie's own tunes, playing renditions from Sparrow, Kitchener, Blue Boy and Oba.

Exodus too has won with their own tune 'A Happy Song' sung by Roger George and composed by Pelham and Alvin Goddard. Like Bradley, Pelham developed his skill with mainstream music with his breakthrough band being Charlie's Roots to which David Rudder was also affiliated. It was with Maestro's 'Gold', celebrating Crawford's Olympic victory with Third World Steel Orchestra that Pelham Goddard announced himself as a formidable steelband arranger.

Leon 'Smooth' Edwards' 'Woman on the Bass' is right up there with the most scintillating of Panorama victories running head to head with Bradley's rendition of Blue Boy's 'Rebecca', Starlift's 'Du Du Yemi', a Sparrow gem arranged by Hershell Puckerin and Sharpe's 'Dis one is for U Bradley'. It is worth noting that every time the authorities up the prize money 'Smooth' comes up with a winner.

In 2011, he stopped Edwin Pouchet, arranger of a re-invented Silver Stars, from beating Boogsie to the revered hat-trick. These gifted sons have done us proud in the World of Pan and young lions like Liam Teague, Duvonne Stewart, Andre White, Seon Gomes, B.J. Marcelle and his sibling Tyrelle, Ardin Herbert, Yohan Popwell, Bean Griffith, and women like Valley Harps' Michelle Watts -Huggins, Dr Jeanette Remy and Shenelle Abraham, have arrived at the Savannah Party ready to topple the old guard whom we cannot easily dismiss, if only because they also include musical soldiers like Ken 'Professor' Philmore, who perhaps has

the most hard luck story when with 'Pan by Storm' he and Fonclair lost to Boogsie and Phase 11 by one point.

Other prominent veterans include Carlton 'Zanda' Alexander, Raf Robertson, Clarence Morris, Earl Brooks and Douglas Redon.

The contribution of these Pan artistes, along with the calypso and mas legacy, have made Carnival king in this Republic but while the king has costume and regalia he has no castle. So while year in year out the throngs march up to the Savannah and line the streets of the nation to pay tribute to Royalty, King Carnival has no home. We have demolished the Grand Stand with the promise of a Phoenix rising from the ashes and like the Children of Sisyphus we roll the rock of the North Stand up the Economic Hill each year only to roll it back down again at a conservative cost of three million a year.

We have gotten NAPA and accept it gracefully as a faculty of UTT for our students of the Performing Arts because we know that our politicians often get their priorities wrong and play headstrong because they know better than public opinion.

We applaud the visit to Bihar because history has denied many of us the opportunity to bow and cry with our long lost cousins and we were all vicariously represented by this spiritually nostalgic journey even without The Pan.

But King Carnival is coming and The Robber talk is that a tunnel is taking precedence over an Institute for our Carnival Arts and we wonder who winning on who as we explore a revisit with our architects to complement the new NAPA skyline with an appropriate design, easy on the eyes from the Lady Young lookout, which with its carnival museum and stage dedicated to Mas, Kaiso and Pan would certainly earn its keep, honouring our histories and Carnival, not as welfare ward but as industry created by our own hands and our collective imagination. Where Tan Tan, Saga Boy, Bachac Toting Ganja and our myriad Carnival royalty can rival Madame Tussauds.

Our fiftieth anniversary of nationhood is upon us and future generations shall soon judge us by the systems or lack thereof which we apply to maintain and highlight our cultural treasures. In this computer age should we still depend on the griot to respond to the questions of our progeny at our one hundredth anniversary? Can we not dedicate a space of reverence to the Bailey Brothers,

Velasquez, Saldenah, Berkely, Mc Williams, Minshall, Executor, Atilla, Roaring Lion, Blakie, Melody, Sparrow, Kitchener, Rudder, Maestro with the archives of Ray Funk, Rocky McColin, Kim Johnson and others? A space with a corridor dedicated to the music of our Black Beethovens?

We may even call it The House of Lady Bishop.

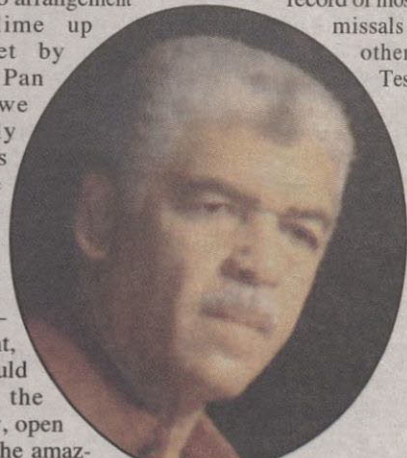
The eyes of Banwarie are watching us!



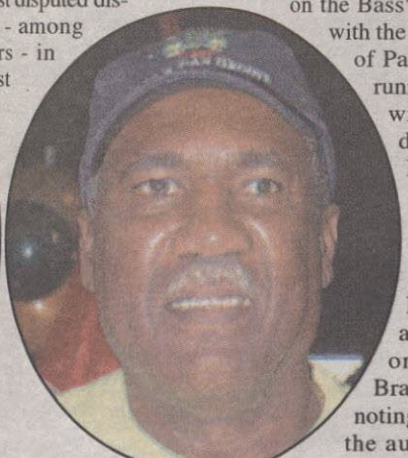
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