

Steelband world mourns legend Bertie Marshall

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The steelband world was plunged into mourning yesterday with news of the passing of steelband legend Bertie Marshall.

The father of three children, Marshall, 74, fought a lengthy battle with diabetes, and succumbed at his home in La Cou Harpe, East Dry River, Port-of-Spain.

For well over half a century Marshall was revered as one of the world's premier technicians and one of the inventors of the national instrument. One of his most innovative inventions was the amplified high tenor, fondly referred to as "the Chinese pan," in the 1960s. This instrument, played by the late Franklyn Olliviera, was in the frontline of Marshall's Laventille steel orchestra—Highlanders—and was a much coveted acquisition.

Pan Trinbago president Keith Diaz said yesterday: "Bertie was the ultimate icon of pan invention in T&T. He would be missed for the excellent tonal quality he brought to the instrument. Bertie produced instruments of the high-

Bertie's peers, ran away from the pan, and went abroad, Bertie, like Anthony Williams, stayed in Trinidad and improved our national instrument.

"After his home in Laventille was destroyed by fire, Bertie, with the late Rudolph Charles, worked together and created a whole new range of instruments, like the quadrophonic, six pan, ying and yang, chariot and rocket pans. Their collaboration was extremely vital in giving Desperadoes its unique and much envied tonal quality."

Witco Desperadoes manager Dr Finbar Fletcher said: "I think Bertie came into the band in 1970, when the band's tuner, Bassman, migrated. That was the year the band won the Panorama competition, playing Margie.

"Despers won ten Panorama titles to date, and Bertie tuned pans for nine of them. He was arguably the main ingredient of the Despers sound, along with Charlo (Rudolph Charles), Wallace (Austin) and Lincoln (Noel). Bertie and Charlo were supposedly the main architects of that sound.

"Sadly, in the early part of the last decade Bertie fell ill and slowed down a bit. Most of the instruments we (Desperadoes) currently use, while now blended by others, were originally tuned by Bertie. Bertie's legacy will live on with band.

"Bertie was someone we could always call on for advice, especially in the area of tuning.

"His death is a tremendous loss to Desperadoes. Many of the young people in the band would not know him, but we, the older guys, know him and know that he is responsible for placing Desperadoes way ahead of all steelbands. The Despers sound is something other bands strive to attain."

Adding his condolences to Marshall's family yesterday, Robert Greenidge, Desperadoes arranger, now based in San Francisco, USA, said: "It's a very sad time for us of Desperadoes, and I can only hope that Pan Trinbago and the Government would do everything in their power to keep the legacy of Bertie Marshall alive, and give him a great send-off, one deserving of a professor and genius."

instruments of the highest quality.

“Bertie improved the steelpan by bringing the harmonics on the note. Also, when he created the high tenor pan, panmen of the day didn’t like it. People envious of the instrument’s tone and potential even tried to destroy the pans.

“Bertie was the first person to introduce electronics to pan. He later experimented with the Bert Fone and the double tenor. Up to now the double tenor is the only instrument between the single and the double second pans.

“On a personal note, Bertie was a very outspoken person, but he was a genuine human being from inside. To panmen, deep inside he was a loving, caring kind of person who was dedicated to the instrument. When other people,