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SUNDAY NEWSDAY SPECIAL REPORT

After Bradley...

Despers' up hill climb to victory

By MARK LAWRENCE

IN THE 1940s amid numerous manifestations of African-urban anti-colonial resistance, the steelband known then as the "Laventille Band," became an axis upon which the East Port-of-Spain population hinged many a hope.

By 1963, led by steelpan virtuoso (originator) Anthony Williams, Pan Am North Stars won the first Panorama competi-

tion with the Laventille Band, then named Coca Cola Desperadoes, coming in third. It took Desperadoes only three close defeats to emerge triumphant in 1966 performing the Mighty Sparrow's "Obeah Wedding" under arranger Beverly Griffith.

The victory was the "coming-out" party for the band which holds the coveted position of being the most successful entity in steelband history.

The band's ten Panorama victories are etched on the memories of pan enthusiasts and passive listeners alike. Added to these successes is the band's domination of classical steelband competitions including the Steelband Music Festival, Pan in the 21st Century and the Republic Day Pan Fiesta.

Accompanying this unparalleled success is the affable persona of the late Clive Bradley who took West Indian Tobacco

Company (WITCO) sponsored Desperadoes to six Panorama victories and two runner-up placings.

Many will recall the diminutive steel pan giant passionately waving his arms and stamping his feet on the soon to be demolished Queen's Park Savannah stage while conducting the band.

Bradley began his professional career as a math teacher at the Teachers Training College with the panyard taking second place to the classroom setting. His passion for music however could not be bridled as he made several appearances with Fitz Vaughn Bryan's Orchestra, Choy Aming and Clarence Curvan. Few at the time would have known that although the young pannist was trained in the field of music he was largely self-taught.

His enviable skill was imposed on the arranging world in 1968 when Roy Cape suggested that Bradley replace then arranger Beverly Griffith.

Any doubts regarding Bradley's ability to replace the famed Griffith were dashed when in 1970 his arrangement of Lord Kitchener's "Margie" earned Desperadoes the national Panorama title. Bradley never looked back and after a 14-year absence from the band Bradley snatched the Panorama crown to punctuate his fairytale return to his beloved Desperadoes.

Beyond pan, Kitchener, the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Nelson, among



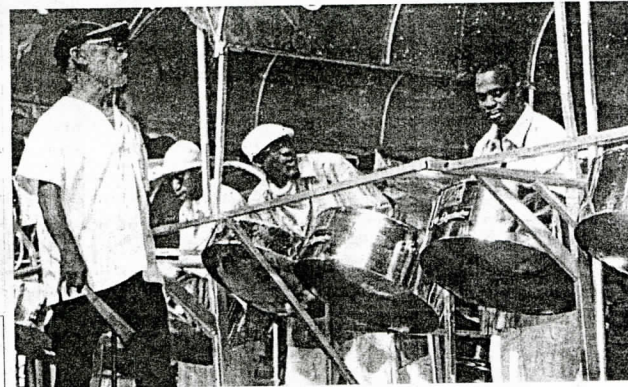
THE MASTER: Clive Bradley's death in 2005 left the band in limbo after the master arranger guided WITCO Desperadoes to six Panorama victories and two runner-up placings. PHOTO COURTESY PANTRINBAGO.CO.TT

others, have benefited from Bradley's arrangement. Bradley's unfortunate death on November 26, 2005 rocked the pan world and left the band in limbo as an ironic twist of fate saw a tribute to Bradley played by Phase II Pan Groove entitled "This One's for you Bradley" taking first position in 2006 while Desperadoes placed fifth.

However, likened to the return of a prodigal son the arrival of master pan arranger Robert Greenidge at the

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WITCO Desperadoes arranger Robert Greenidge at work. Greenidge has taken Desperadoes to Panorama titles in 1991 and 1994 with his own compositions.



LITTLE GIANT: Arranger Clive Bradley as he led his troops in 2004.

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CALLING THE BAND TO ORDER

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Desperadoes panyard in late January was seen by many as the beacon of light needed to guide the band towards Panorama success.

The well travelled Laventille-born arranger was recruited by Desperadoes in 1965 at age 15 and as band arranger in 1991 he earned the Panorama crown with his own composition "Musical Volcano". With "Fire Coming Down", another of his compositions, Greenidge won in 1994 silencing his detractors.

Desperadoes proudly boasts of Griffith having executed contracts with such notables as Earth Wind and Fire, John Lennon and Ringo Star of the Beatles, Ralph MacDonald, Grover Washington, Barry Manilow and Jimmy Buffet and the "Coral Reefers" band, performing and recording with the latter since 1985.

Information given to *Sunday Newsday* by a source preferring anonymity indicated that veteran arranger, Eddie Quarless, who arranged for the band in 2006 and Keith Salsedo were both candidates for the band's vacant arranger spot but were waiting for the decision of Greenidge on whether or not he would be the band's arranger.

Both opted to arrange for other bands leaving many anxious over the band's prospects. Attempts to reach Quarless to determine exactly why he left the band were unsuccessful. Premature predictions regarding Greenidge's impact within a matter of days led to disappointment when Desperadoes placed eighth in the Panorama semi-final, scraping into the finals just six points ahead of ninth placed TCL Skiffle Bunch.

Lopinot resident and pan enthusiast Bruce Williams met *Sunday Newsday* at the Sagcor Exodus Panyard and discussed his views on pan over the last few years.

"I living Lopinot all my life and used to leave the East to go up on the hill. But since Bradley dead I doubting Desperadoes bad bad. I hear Greenidge come back so they might jump from...I think they come seventh or eighth. That was my band," lamented Williams.

An acquaintance of the man echoed his faith in Greenidge although he vowed to support Exodus in the final. Following the eighth place showing Greenidge left the country and could not be reached for comment. The arranger was carded to return to the Desperadoes panyard on Friday and is expected to remain with the band until Saturday's Panorama final.

Sunday Newsday visited the Desperadoes Upper Laventille Road East Dry River panyard on Tuesday night during an intense post-mortem session which was conducted by Desperadoes veteran bass-pan player and present captain, Bertram Glasgow.

Glasgow explained that the session was, "just fellas expressing their views on what they think happened in the Savannah and we decided what we going to do so we don't have problems again."

Glasgow said that Greenidge has been working with the band in preparation for the Panorama Final on January 17 and the captain expects a much better showing at the recently relocated event.

"Don't worry we working hard at the thing," assured Glasgow.

"What people saying is that the way the band was set up was out of order. We had some bad arrangement on stage...the way the stage was built people got a bit confused," said Glasgow.

The veteran members of the band have played at the Grand Stand stage for decades and when *Sunday Newsday* visited the panyard many players complained about the relative size of the recently erected Queen's Park Savannah stage at which the semi-

final was held. A confident sounding Glasgow interjected, "Don't worry, it won't happen next round."

After speaking with *Sunday Newsday* Glasgow called the band to order by quickly striking one of the pans several times with his pan sticks. The ensuing silence was broken by the introduction to the band's rendition of Edwin "Crazy" Ayoung's "Band from Space".

After a few seconds the captain struck the pan to stop the band and by 10.50 pm was running the song in parts with the tenors, cellos, guitar and bass pan players playing the song at different times. With an attentive human and canine audience on hand, the session went well beyond midnight.

In less than a week the "band from the hill" will engage in musical battle once again with the hopes of many riding on their every note.



PANMAN: Desperadoes Captain Bertram Glasgow as he plays with the band after discussing last Sunday's eighth place showing.



INTENSE: This front-line WITCO Desperadoes player passionately delivers the band's rendition of Crazy's "Band from Space" during last Sunday's Panorama Semi-final. PHOTO BY RATTAN JADOO