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**Second in a three-part series on the steelband**

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**3. Research and Development**

(i) Perhaps the most significant development in the steelband internationally is the fantastic pace at which scientific research and experimentation are progressing. Besides what is taking place at the Bern and Akron manufacturing, serious work has been going on at universities and technical institutes throughout the USA and in Japan, Germany and the UK.



**SULLIVAN**

This work includes investigation of the metal composition, the size and shape of the instrument, the optimum gauge requirements, the perfection of notes, the optimum arrangement of notes, the application of electronic amplification, the development of accessories, the process of the preparation and tuning of the instrument, the tools engaged in this process and the development of related industries, etc.

(ii) In June of this year (1996), in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the presidents of three major steel companies in the USA held a meeting with Ellie Mannette (recently awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of West Virginia), Roland Harrigan and Cliff Alexis (a T&T tuner based at the University of North Illinois). Also in attendance were the leading company technocrats.

The discussion was centred on the production of optimum grade steel for the steelband instrument! This discussion is to continue in Chicago later on this year. Also of note, is the very recent design and construction by a leading scientist at the NASA Space Centre of a state-of-the-art, sound-proof tuning room for the pan factory at Akron.

(iii) Reputable scientific journals have begun the discussion of some of these issues and books, pamphlets, articles and manuals have been appearing in response to these studies. One University Professor in Ohio, USA, some time ago, published a book devoted entirely to "The Bertie Marshall Tenor Pan" and has just completed

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# Rapid progress abroad in science of pan



another major work on the steelpan.

(iv) Internationally, the social science side of the investigation has not lagged behind. There have been countless little histories of the steelband and analyses of its development in pamphlets, newsletters, periodicals, the media, etc., on both sides of the Atlantic.

A new Japanese publication, "Pantasia", devoted to the steelband, entered the market in June 1996. Some of these of course and other so-called major works, are really little quick-buck hustles, saturated with misinformation, in response to a very large and diverse market, thirsting for knowledge on the steelband.

(v) Governments and International Agencies have already begun to get into the act of investigation of the steelband. The Canadian Government commissioned a recently completed film on the History of the Steelband. UNESCO has funded a similar project. The French Government partly sponsored a recent three-month programme on the steelband at the Conservatoire de Music in Paris. The BBC recently commissioned a Guyanese national to write the history of the steelband.

(vi) It is of note that by far the most commendable analytical work to date on the history and development of the steelband movement in Trinidad and Tobago has been the recent publication by Stephen Stuempfle, a young American anthropologist. One awaits the many derived publications from this major book, which are sure to flow, naturally from abroad.

#### 4. Other Important Developments

(i) With the growing global demand for the steelband, has come an intensification of the search for music specially composed for the steelband. Though there continues to be a market for the "Rum and Coca-Cola", "Yellow Bird", "where is the hidden tape", novelty steelband performances, as the world gets more serious about pan, the demand for more serious musical statements is rapidly replacing the traditional "Calypso shirts and alpagat" musical stuff.

Of note, is the fact that this modern taste for pan rejects the European classics as a legitimate medium through which the steelband voice could be accepted; the demand is clearly a clarion call for our talented steelband music composers.

(ii) The relatively new trend of the scoring of musical pieces for the steel orchestra has heralded another important revolution in the steelband movement internationally. With the availability of the written scores of the most complex and sophisticated Panorama arrangements of the T&T steelbands has come a meteoric rise in the skill development and musicianship of foreign pannists who now revel in the challenge to master the best that Jit Samaroo, Boogsie Sharpe or Godwin Bowen has to offer.

Clear proof of this phenomenon is the presence of the increasing number of non-Trinidadian pannists, whom one can observe performing at a Panorama final, some included in the line-ups of more than one finalist. The latest Compact Disc by the North Illinois State University Steel Orchestra is but one other example of the high, very competitive (with T&T) level of competence that has been attained by foreign pannists.

(iii) The entry of big name producers into the international steelband music industry is another important development. Rondor Music, the world-renowned music publishers in Paris, has already gotten into the act. The prestigious Time Warner giant has recently produced Othello Molineaux's state-of-the-art manual on "How to Play the Steeldrum", complete with life-size tenor pan diagram and instructional compact disc. In one week, this excellent teaching tool was distributed to 640 outlets worldwide.

(iv) Another significant development internationally is the number of gatherings of steelband technocrats that are regularly being organized. Conferences of tuners, tutors, pan scientists, etc. have been appearing regularly on both sides of the Atlantic. The importance of these for exchange of information/technology and the impact on steelband development internationally, cannot be overstated.

The opportunity to showcase and market the full range of steelband instruments and accessories, is never missed at such gatherings and at various International Trade Fairs and Conferences of Musicians. Of note, however, is the fact that the instruments on display or to be ordered, no longer come from Trinidad and Tobago, but from other foreign sources.

• TOMORROW:  
Pan in Education