

# Thoughts about Panorama

By JERRY JEMMOTT

JUDGING steelband music, especially at the Panorama Festival, is by no means as easy as it may at first seem. A major problem is created by the absence of a set test piece to be played by all bands consequently judges are compelled to pass judgement on a variety of tunes varying considerably in style and arrangement.

The several arrangements themselves being good or bad in equilibrium with the degree of musical competence or otherwise of the arrangers or musical directors attached to the several bands.

The problem may be greatly minimised through early submission of Road March material for familiarisation and scrutiny of judges, thus providing an opportunity for a more accurate assessment of the efforts of arrangers, provided of course, that the judges themselves are sufficiently qualified in these aspects of the musical art which are pertinent to the task at hand.

For example, a judge should be knowledgeable in harmony and the art of orchestration and to be in a position to relate this knowledge to the steelband, a working knowledge of the instruments of which the orchestra is comprised is an indispensable pre-requisite.

The reason is obvious when it is understood that the degree of skill required to produce certain musical effects on the steeldrums could best be appreciated by one who knows in a practical sense about the instruments, and the various tech-

niques employed when they are played.

This is not to say that judges must be concerned solely with techniques or harmony etc.

For no single aspect should be the basis of a decision since, finally, it is the entire performance which needs to be judged but as the general performance constitutes a number of vital details it would be plain stupid to overlook them especially when the contest is keen.

Judges should never be swayed by the emotionalism displayed by large sections of the crowd who cheer wildly in support of a particular band or jeer at another.

## PRIMARY FUNCTION

It must be remembered that the majority of people do not know enough about music.

At any rate the primary function of any judge should be to take the type of decision which points to improved standards.

In this regard the criteria used generally extend beyond the comprehension of the average person or even the average musician.

The reaction of crowds to the different performances could be very misleading and dangerous. For very often crowds respond more favourably to the more familiar tunes made popular by the radio.

This is understandable as it is easier in every case to become personally involved in what is known

than the unknown.

The result is that many tunes which are better suited and readily adaptable to pan are passed over, or when played receive poor response from the audience.

Here the onus rests squarely on the judges, who having considered the piece on the musical merit and that alone, should then take the right decision unpopular though it may seem, for after all judges are not merely "crowd pleasers."

A weak judge who lacks the musical knowledge, experience and imagination may be easily influenced by crowd reaction. It is worth noting that in relation to steelband music especially at carnival, crowds react favourably in three specific instances, namely:

Punctuation, the use of terraced dynamics, and a quick tempo. Judges should however, be also concerned about the other musical components which constitute a generally good performance such as tone, colour, balance, tunefulness, harmony, orchestration etc.

A simple fact which needs to be emphasised is that the choice of tune as long as it is calypso, should never be considered by judges when arriving at a decision, especially at Panorama Festivals.

Far more important is the kind of treatment which is given to a tune, the many imaginative devices and variations, the dexterity and skill of the players, precision in execution etc.

As already mentioned



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judges being in early possession of the music would be better able to discriminate more accurately and give sound and better judgement.

It is beyond debate that the standard of steelband music has risen tremendously over the years with competitions growing steadily keener.

This makes the task of judging more demanding so that judges need to examine the performances of various bands more critically and in greater detail.

In this connection I would strongly suggest all tunes be played accurately, in the first instance as the composer intended.

This should be compulsory for all bands but this restriction should be relaxed and greater freedom and liberty allowed in the repetitions, improvisations, variations etc.