

I am my religion says 'Halfers'!

panmist tells
of work
'up North'

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ANNISE "Halfers" Hadeed (left) in concert with panist Robert Greenidge during a recent concert in the city.

By VALENTINO SINGH

MEMORIES OF a "force ripe," light-skinned boy with a pair of sticks jutting out the back pocket of his short khaki pants, striking down an improvised cricket wicket and then speeding off, scaling the barbaric-looking fence at Queen's Royal College, still linger in my mind.

Always wondered where a panitized lad who was in a few forms than we were, got to "serve to 'interfere' with the boys in a higher class.

Like the pan sticks, always elegantly tucked out the back pocket, somehow revealed that there was someone not merely miserable, but rebellious, who was not only with boys at college but with men, twice, three times and maybe four times his age, and who, even if we caught up with him before he headed on St Clair Avenue, was not one that would take kindly to being "served up."

Quite Evident

"Halfers" couldn't have been more than 20 years old at the time, and I am not sure that we knew his real name — Annise Hadeed — but it was quite evident even then, that whatever he made of himself in life, the pronounced pan sticks effectively fitted in his back pocket would be part of it.

That he is now one of the country's most travelled and respected panists, who has worked on the shores of the world's top artists including Billy Ocean, and rubbed shoulders with the late US singer Prince, is not only a tribute to his ability to scale the picket fences of the music scene at high speed, but to the confidence in himself and a dream which he nurtured from a little boy which he exercised in the strength he exercised in adulthood that it came true.

That it is over yet, he is quick to point out. "Pan still has a long way to go and you can bet your last dollar that it goes, I'll be there to help it on its way."

Eight Children

He was born on Park Street, Port of Spain 29 years ago, the sixth of eight boys and smiles as he recalls the first ten years of his life on Park Street, next to Globe Cinema, standing on the steps in the yard and listening to the sweet rhythm of the street music as the bands moved through the city on Carnival Mondays and Tuesdays.

"Boy I don't think there was anything I looked forward to more than those two days. For most of the year, it was Christmas, not so with the Carnival was always my thing."

Even then, the "big man" mentality which was to earn him his famous nickname "Halfers" ("A little boy like you playing a 'big man' the Chinese man has him one day. 'Boy you is only half'") was not in it struck — "Halfers" was evident, leaving his home to roam in the Caribbean panmist.

hell to keep me home. I always felt that the action was outside. I loved to roam and was always with the big boys and men, but this pan thing, it was inside me. You know how much of my mother chairs mash up because I was looking to make pan sticks?"

When his family moved to Bramble Street, Woodbrook, Annise found himself in the middle of two bands — Starlift and Invaders — a ready-made excuse to be absent from home more regularly than in the past, often providing his parents with some uneasy moments.

But nothing it seem could stop "Halfers." He limed in the panyards of both bands, his pan sticks stuck into his waist, and when he was lucky enough to have pockets, they would be utilised.

"I would look on and listen and when no one was playing I would take my 'I' thing on the pan. Everyone knew me, so they would all try to show me how to play."

Direct Influence

It was around this time too that he came face-to-face with another panmist who was to have a direct influence on pan and on his life. That man's name: Len "Boogie" Sharpe! There were days when people would come into the panyard and meet Boogie and Len, and when they left in the night, we would still be there.

In 1969 he passed the Common Entrance Examination and moved into Queen's Royal College.

"I think that very early the teachers there understood what I was all about. They knew of my involvement in pan and accepted that when Carnival was in the air, I wouldn't be around."

It was around that time that he realised that pan was where he wanted to be. In 1974 I decided that I would make it my future. It was never done before, but I dreamt of taking this instrument to the world.

By the time 1979 had arrived, and he boarded the BWIA plane for New York. "Halfers" had already toured many countries with Phase II Pan Groove and played on their first album.

In addition, he had opportunities to play at several gigs throughout the country with some of the leading entertainers. "I had some work but it wasn't enough and I decided that it was time to go outside."

The rest is somewhat of a fairy tale as Annise Hadeed moved from "bushings" on the streets of New York and Washington, some nights earning as much as US \$65, to being what he is today.

He has travelled the length and breadth of Europe, and played at some of the most highly-acclaimed music halls.

His association with another top

English group, the Breakfast Band is well known and they have done several records at the Riverside Studio in London.

"But it hasn't been as easy as it sounds," he is quick to point out. "Some nights I slept on a different floor with my shoulder bags."

Biggest Change

Annise is a regular attraction at most of the European Jazz festivals. "People call me to be part of the festival and I see it as an ideal chance to market pan."

He says that the biggest single change, as far as pan music is

concerned has been that people outside had preconceived ideas as to what it was. "Once they saw a pan, they thought it was island music and Calypso, but I was able to change that by giving them some of everything."

Annise said that he tried not to limit his music, but that jazz played an important part in what he was doing.

Pointing out that he was not rich but contented with the rewards which pan had brought him, he felt that not enough was being done in Trinidad and Tobago to better what is the only musical instrument to be invented this century.

"I am very disappointed that pan is

not yet on the school curriculum," says this bachelor, "and given that the evidence is there for people to play pan professionally, it is a great pity."

"Halfers" says that playing pan was like a religion to him. "It's my means of communicating with the Master. I pan get my strength from holding my pan sticks, and there are many things which I would like to say, but it only comes out in my music. "It is like a gift from the Master and every time I does so for a reason, so I am convinced that my dream is not yet over, and I will still have a lot to do with pan before the saga finally ends."

Why
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