

Pushing pan

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A NEW vision and, hopefully, a new era seem to be opening up for our steelband. The objective is nothing less than the dynamic and fruitful realisation of steelband music's global potential.

An indication of that potential is seen in the widening of the annual steelband music festival, Pan is Beautiful, into an international event this year. Indeed, how fitting it is that the country which gave sweet steelband music to the world should now be staging the world's first steelband festival!

And if the ambition expressed for this historic musical event is fulfilled, then the perverse claim of Caribbean pretenders would be put to shame and the world would have no doubt about the true home of the steelband and the genius of the people who produced and developed this unique musical phenomenon.

World Audience

We are certain that every TT citizen would endorse Senator Ken Gordon's suggestion that efforts be made to transmit at least the finals of Pan Is Beautiful 5 via satellite to North America and, if possible, Europe and other parts of the world.

Imagine, a world steelband festival with a world audience taking place in Trinidad and Tobago! What a glorious high note for pan!

The festivals of the past have done us proud. They have earned overwhelming ovations from pan lovers for the exquisite quality of their performances. They produce, in fact, the zenith of steelband virtuosity and we feel sure that, with the added competition of steelbands from abroad, this year's contest will be a musical event that we would want to cherish and long remember.

How nice it would be if we could share it with the rest of the world!

We sincerely hope that the efforts of the sponsors, Royal Bank, the organisers Pan Trinbago, the assistance of the Government and the diplomatic initiatives already announced by Minister Gordon will achieve the common objective of arranging for the Pan Is Beautiful finals to be transmitted live via satellite to as many countries as possible.

In any event, Pan Trinbago is to be complimented for taking

advantage of requests from foreign-based steelbands to give this year's festival an international scope. Let us welcome these overseas players as fellow devotees of pan music; their desire to participate in the TT competition is evidence that they recognise our country as the mecca of the steelband movement and the place to meet and hear the best.

The steelband, like our celebrated Carnival, is a feature of TT culture that has taken root in other parts of the world; wherever Trinians went they took their taste for mas' and pan with them. And because of their infectious and all-embracing nature, these cultural forms have also won, over the years, a large following among the people of other lands.

But that process of internationalisation has been largely a natural one, although we owe some recognition to a band of hardy pioneers who actively propagated the love for pan and mas' in countries to which they migrated or exploited as early entrepreneurs.

Now, as the Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism has suggested, the time has come for Trinidad and Tobago to take up this process as a matter of practical and determined policy.

For one thing, it should provide excellent accompaniment for the projected thrust into tourism and, as a more diversified economic asset, we "must now aggressively plan on marketing pan to the world and, as we do so, review the once loudly proclaimed plans to make it a thriving industry."

Pan For Export

Senator Gordon's vision is not new, but his enthusiasm is refreshing. It gives us reason to hope that at long last the only new musical instrument of the 20th century will begin to realise its full potential on the world stage.

"The objective," he says, "should be not only to captivate music lovers but to produce pan for export to the capitals of the world."

But we have still not yet determined whether pan for export is a truly feasible proposition. Can we set up a pan factory to turn out high-quality instruments for sale to enthusiasts abroad?

Let us find out from the experts once and for all. Musically speaking, pan is winning for us a measure of world acclaim. If, economically speaking, it can also drum up for us a measure of foreign exchange, then all the better.