

OUR OPINION

Rally 'round the Steelband Festival

A WORLD Steelband Festival

Trinidadians, who are blase about these things, will take this in their stride, but only 50 years have passed since the steelband was scorned by sections of the society in the land of its birth and regarded in the wider world as a quaint, if not exotic, island instrument.

Today, the steelband movement is the institution of which Trinidadians are most proud and the instrument, itself, has won wide acceptance among the family of instruments that bring music to the world.

It is true there have been steelband festivals before, but *Pan is Beautiful V* is special. Seven foreign steelbands will take part, most of them from the Caribbean, which is an indication of the tremendous contribution Trinidad and Tobago has made to regional culture.

Insecure Trinidadians have long fretted about Caribbean involvement with the instrument, believing that it put at risk their claim to ownership. The truth, of course, is quite the opposite. Paradoxically enough, the one sure way to secure our claims to the music is by sharing it, by actively inviting the world to take part in every aspect of this thing we have made.

It would be foolish for us to continue attempting to hide behind a fire and steel curtain, dropping a veil of secrecy around the way pans are made and played. The technology is well known and people who have never even been to Trinidad, are taking to the instrument with the same alacrity that non-Italians take to pianos. They are selling "Made in Germany" pans in West Germany! There is a Chinese steelband orchestra and steelbandmen have reached Australia, way on

the other side of the world.

The steelpan has long since ceased to be a Trinidadian instrument, restricted to Trinidad and Trinidadians. Trinidadians who yearn for those days do themselves and their beloved instrument a disservice not unlike that done by people who preach in every speech and every article, that it is the 20th century's only new instrument.

We no longer have to prove anything to anybody about pan. It has long proven itself, and Pan Trinbago, by throwing open the Festival to all-comers has shown itself to be conscious of that truth.

The truth is, Pan Trinbago has always been, ideologically, among the most broad-minded and generous of all our national cultural organisations.

When for example, the then Carnival Development Committee (CDC) banned Caribbean calypsonians from participation in Trinidad and Tobago's Road March competitions, Pan Trinbago allowed its member-steelbands to play non-Trinidadian calypsoes in the spirit of Caribbean fraternity.

The upshot of those differing attitudes is that Pan Trinbago has a warm relationship with calypsonians and steelbandmen in the Caribbean while Trinidadian calypsoes are rarely played on the streets of Grenada, Barbados and Antigua during their Carnivals.

The World Steelband Festival, then, is a natural development of that Caribbean consciousness and we hope that West Indians, including the regional business community, and promoters of other regional art forms, will rally around the representative steelband organisation to make this inaugural competition the auspicious occasion it should be.