

# STEELBAND



*Only musical instrument developed in 20th century*



ANOTHER YOUNGSTER this time with his pan around his neck



CHAMPION pan-around-the-neck steelband Skiffle Bunch defending their crown this year

**T**HE STEELPAN is the only musical instrument to be developed in the 20th century. And it was made right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

The actual origin of the pan is still a mystery in the minds of the larger majority of people. But for sure it goes back to the pre World War II days.

Musical instruments were beyond the pockets of almost anybody and regardless of whether or not you had musical talents, acquisition of an instrument was truly a dream.

This situation forced young and not so young people to look for alternative instruments to supply musical rhythm during the Carnival celebrations.

## True Innovator

There are many claims as to who really was the first person or group to introduce the pan. But it was never a matter of, who since the birth of the pan as a musical instrument is in fact an accident.

After many primitive experiments at produc-

ing music from a drum or tin by various people, a Laventille man, Winston "Spree" Simon, who up to today is still regarded as the true innovator of pan, was trying to repair his instrument using a stone when he discovered that he could get several notes from the crude drum-instrument.

It was after this discovery that panmen began creating a multitude of notes on a single pan. In 1940 Simon, after a year of experimentation produced his "Melody Pan" which had eight different notes and which was capable of playing simple tunes.

This was the forerunner to today's chrome-plated tenor pan.

The experimentation continued on a much larger scale and soon there were several bands all over Port-of-Spain "beating pan." Naturally there was the pan business and several other pans were born. There was the Grumbler Pan; the Grundig and the Chu Fak. But always the tuners were determined to produce newer, louder and more musical sounds.

The driving force behind all these developments in the steelband was of course the annual national Carnival celebrations, but when the Second World War actually began Carnival was banned. This gave the panmen more time for individual experimentation.

The war dragged on and as the various types of pan were discovered and manufactured, the entire country was just waiting for the war to end so they could try out all the new instruments on the streets.

This happened on May 6, 1945, when an Allied Victory was announced. And that was the turning point of the nation's musical history. The new pans were out in full force and had taken over from the now outdated Tamboo Bamboo.

It was during these celebrations too, that the spontaneity of pan manifested itself, for masqueraders, eager to be part of the action hijacked dustbins, old oil drums, pots and biscuit tins to beat out any kind of melody and so the first steelband was born.

## Steelband Clashes

Further development took place when Spree Simon took an old biscuit tin and created a base instrument or "du-doop." And so it continued every band striving to produce a better pan than the other one. With this type of rivalry it wasn't long before the bands became bigger and of course producing better music.

In 1946 Spree Simon was asked to give a recital during Carnival with his "Melody Pan." Simon won his audience with renditions of

hymns, classical pieces, calypsos and even "God Save the King." From that time until today, there has been no stopping in the development of pan both as a musical instrument and as an artform in itself.

In addition the populace began looking at the steelband differently. They were prepared to forgive the regularity of steelband clashes and give the talent some respectability and acceptance.

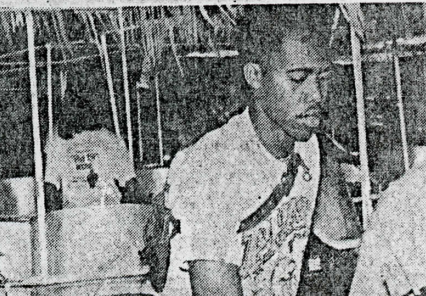
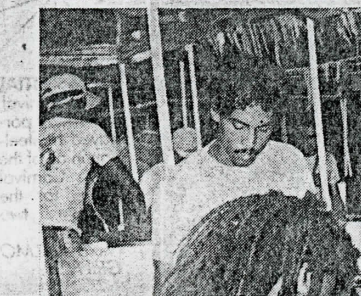
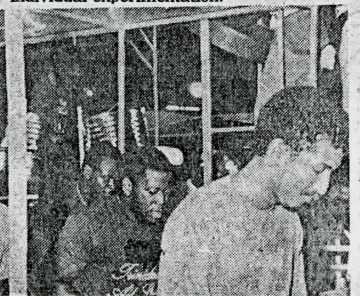
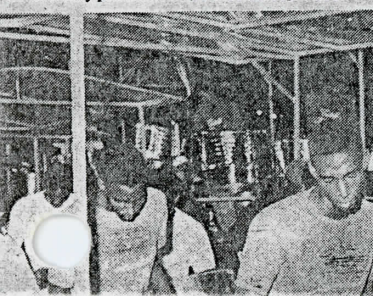
Later in 1946 Simon developed his "Melody Pan" and was now able to create 14 notes.

Today one only has to look at a complete steelband in action. The music is superb and the pans comparable to any world-renowned orchestra and with the chrome pans, the onstage steelband looks the epitome of musical sophistication.

And it has not stopped.

The world is now rapidly recognising the versatility of the steelband and has accepted it and is now moving to use it to the benefit of the peoples of the world.

Trinidad and Tobago has a role to play in making this recognition a huge plus for Trinidad and Tobago, where it all began a mere 50 years ago.



WWII 1938-45