

PHASE II IS BOSS



A Night in the Panyard BY BC PIRES

IF YOU'RE going to lime at a panyard, try to go there with their imported drummer. You'll be treated like royalty. When Richard Bailey, the Whiz Kid, A-one, Ace drummer from Trinidad via London, arrived for Carnival, he didn't have a car, but he had my telephone number. So I took him to the Phase II panyard. Richard is the man behind those amazing extra beats and off-beats that you can't hear from the North Stand. Phase II has been bringing him down from London to play their drums for the last three years, and he fits in tightly (no pun intended) with the rest of the rhythm section, both musically and socially.

When we got to the panyard, Victor, the dreadlocked iron man with almost three fingers on his right hand, jumped into the air.

"Richard! Richard!" he shouted, both to Richard in greeting, and to the other musicians in the panyard, in a "Land Ahoy" manner. "Richard reach, allyuh-We Defending!"

There was a lot of handshaking and old talk, and everybody was so pleased that Richard was back that they even talked to me. (My only musical ability lies in turning the volume up).

"Y'hear the tune yet?" they asked. Richard said, "No, only little bits of it, but I suppose I will."

Well, there can be very few people who haven't heard "Woman is Boss" now. Queen Denyse Plummer sang it to win the NWAC Calypso Queen title, and, of course, it's Phase II's song for Panorama this year. Even Kalamo Kings played it, although they didn't make the semis.

I've been in the panyard the last few nights. Phase II is hot.

"You think y'all going to win?" I asked Victor, the iron man.

"We going to do it because of the song" he said. "That song, is not just the

AH LOOKIN
FOR FINGER
PRINTS



ANYTHING goes when the annual Ole Mas competition rolls around. Horace Guichard's Wednesday night presentation "Police Ah Comedy" at the Queen's Park Savannah, featured a policeman pawing a woman, entitled "Ah looking for finger prints." Photo: CARL NEWALLO.

melody — is the wisdom. Check it — you tell me that woman can't get you to do anything they want — Woman is Boss, watch — who is the Prime Minister of England? Well — what that prove? Woman is Boss. The song too sweet for us not to win."

The song, and the way it is being played, have been bringing the faithful out to the panyard every night.

The enemy is there too, says one shadowy panman, who refused to give his name, but, he says, he has them covered. He knows, he says, who has come to spy for Renegades and Invaders, and when he sees them, he plays wrong.

She was very, very pretty.

I decided to get the story.

I sat next to her. The pan started again, fast tempo. She leaned over to me. "My friend likes you," she said, nodding to my left. I looked left. Her friend was there. It would not be unfair to say that her friend was not as pretty. But perhaps I was put off by the checkered flag appearance of her smile. "Yes," her friend said, "I find you nice."

It dawned on me that this romance, if it ever got off the ground, would be based, not on mutual respect and admiration, but on cash.

"I think you should know," I said, "that I work for the *Express*."

They looked around them immediately, the friend's five or six teeth glinting in her smile. Then they looked back at me.

"Where the cameraman?" the friend asked. The girl looked at me with distrust in her eyes.

"I don't see any cameraman," she said. "And now that I look at you, you don't look like Dominic Kallipersad."

"I am," I said, "I am — look, I'm coming back with the camera now", and I walked away from them, hoping that Dominic is a Renegades fan.

As I was leaving, I pulled out my pack of cigarettes. Big mistake. Never pull out your cigarettes in a panyard. Shadows of hands flashed in front of me, and then Victor, the ironman, was crumpling the pack, and tossing it into the bin.

I lit his cigarette for him. We puffed together, and partly out of a superficial smokers' camaraderie, but mainly, I suspect, as a form of compensation for my cigarettes, Victor gave me a story.

"Last year," he said, "I went to Houston-Texas to visit my daughter, which is the Indian one. The man who stamping mih passport — he giving me a hard time, eyeing up mih passport, asking where is this Trinidad and Tobago. I trying to explain, but he watching the locks, and he only flicking, flicking at mih passport. Then mih daughter, which is the Indian, she have US passport and credit card, and thing — well she tell him I is a musician from Port of Spain, Trinidad... He smile and he give me 6 months in Houston-Texas... You know what that prove? Woman is Boss".

I listened and watched. Songs like "Respect the Calypsonian" and "Culture" will soon be anachronistic, thankfully. Pan is no longer the music of the unprivileged. Doctors were there, engineers were there, beauty queens were there unescorted — in fact, it's getting hard to spot a musician in the place.

In a lull in the pan, a young woman sitting on a barrel next to the soft drinks stand called me over to her. I didn't believe it was me she was calling, at

first, but she motioned her hand to me again, and mouthed the words, "Come here", and patted the barrel next to her.