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Prospects for Pan

RECENT developments should help remove much of the disappointment over the development of the steelband movement in the country which gave it birth.

Pan is no longer confined to Trinidad and Tobago or by extension to the Caribbean. Pan sides exist all over the world, in Japan and China, in Switzerland and France, in Scandinavia, in English-speaking Britain, Canada and the United States with their thousands of Caribbean migrants.

It is not that the instruments are easy to master, but the sheer novelty of the process that makes it possible to produce music in the categories of the classics, popular music and jazz from the tops of steeldrums and the fascination with the sounds emerging from the pans have intrigued musicians everywhere.

Foreign Group

For these reasons, the Steelbands Association ought not feel upset that only one foreign group responded to the invitation to participate in the World Steelband Festival now underway at the Jean Pierre Complex.

Nor should it be disturbed that the number of home pansides taking part has fallen not because of declining interest but as a result of economic circumstances keeping out many who would wish to be involved.

Pan is always beautiful, and this emphasis on quality following the successes of the Panorama exercises at Carnival time and the Pan Ramajay contest should encourage supporters of the competing bands and the music to come out to hear them play at the festival.

The movement will have been given a fillip also with the launching last weekend of Panvesco, the Steelband Investment Corporation, which is aimed at making

pan a viable financial proposition.

There is so much to be done in the further development of this indigenous instrument, such as taking it to the schools, establishing firmly the culture of the music, propelling it more and more beyond the confines of Carnival and Panorama, boosting the composition of music specifically for pan, and giving it its rightful status in the society as a whole.

These are ambitious goals. But if pan is not to stagnate and if it is really to establish itself as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago it must win the unstinting support of government, of the private sector and it must be made an important part of education in music and society.

The international recognition accorded the steelband will be in evidence next month with the staging at Queen's Hall of the sixth Pan Jazz Festival.

This event has drawn in the past some of the leading jazz musicians of the United States and Britain playing with some of this country's most distinguished percussionists.

Unique Nature

More big names have been drawn to the festival this year and its sponsors and organisers should feel a large measure of satisfaction that an occasion of such a unique nature continues to attract the best there are in jazz and pan.

No doubt steelbandsmen will continue to complain that this society has failed to appreciate their true value and that the people who say they love pan could do much more to support them.

But the tide has turned. Pan is no longer a musical novelty and its practitioners outcasts. It is a living part of the society which created it and which will continue to nurture it in good and bad times.