

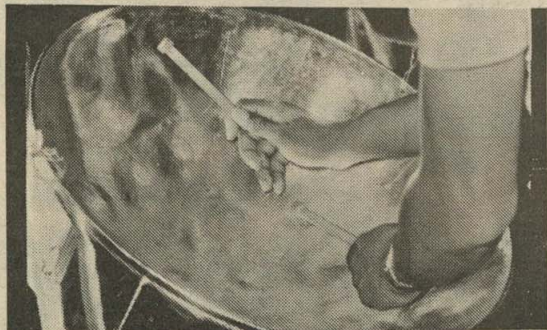
ML 1040

Pan is beautiful then and now

THE Steelband Music Festival started in the early 1950's as an effort to channel the fierce and often violent rivalries of the different Steelbands into the more sophisticated arena of musical competition.

The first competition held at Roxy Theatre was won by Boys Town Steelband of Point Cumana, led by Clem Bellerand. They played the tune *You Are My Heart's Desire*. These competition continued in a sporadic and spontaneous fashion throughout the fifties, but what attracted most attention was the rivalry between the soloists, for it was an era of fine pan musicians whose skills caused much debate and controversy. The names most bandied about were Kelvin Hart, Patsy Haynes, Theo Stephens, Sonny Roach, Belgrave Bonaparte, Emmanuel "Cobo Jack" Riley and Chic "McGroo" Springer.

The Festival began to gain public acclaim and attention and the steelband, through the polished



execution of classical pieces, gradually won recognition as a musical ensemble.

The competition was brought starkly into the limelight during the 1959 Festival, the finals of which actually took place in 1960. Dixieland, led by Curtis

Pierre and playing *Agnus Dei* just narrowly edged out Ellie Mennette's Invaders with Jocelyn Pierre's arrangement of *In a Monastery Garden*.

The sixties saw the advent of Pan Am North Stars and the legendary Anthony Williams was the acknowledged genius of pan. The lighter classics of Bach, Handel, Mozart and Tchaikovsky, along with the Strauss Waltzes became favourite tunes of choice and the steelband became recognised as one of the most important musical discoveries of the Twentieth Century. The soloist category continued to throw the spotlight on the virtuoso performer and Ray Holman, Jules Cazabon, Herman "Rock" Johnson, Harold Headley, Jit Samaroo, Earl La Pierre and Cordell Barbour became household names in the steelband fraternity.

The Festival was brought to its zenith in 1966 when both North Stars and Syncopators played Von Suppe's *Poets and Peasants* with such accuracy and skill, that only Tony Williams' creative and artistic treatment of the *Test Piece, Intermezzo in E* by Superintendent Anthony Prospect, could break the deadlock between these two bands.

The golden days of Pan were at an end and steelbands went into a decline. The Panorama Syndrome — a concentration of the total pan effort towards preparation for Panorama, the main Pan event for Carnival, engrossed and strangled most of the development of the art form. Pan Am North Stars, City Syncopators and Guinness Cavaliers were but a few of the great steelbands that went out of existence and were lost to the Festival stage.

There was a Festival in 1968 which was won by Catelli Trinidad All Stars and another in 1973 at the Queen's Park Savannah, which catered for three categories of bands. Nutones won the Large Band Category from Cassablanca, while Blue Diamonds and Samaroo Jets were among the top bands in the medium and small band classes.

There was a lapse between the years 1973 to 1980, when Pan Trinbago found a willing partner in the Kirpalani Group of companies to re-establish the Steelband Music Festival, which although failing to realise a profit, was an enormous success. Kirpalani again subsidised and assisted in the production of "Pan Is Beautiful II" in 1982.

Pan Trinbago found itself without a sponsor for the 1984 Festival, although Kirpalani gave a generous donation. Several commercial firms chipped in to assist the Festival and at the end, a profit of \$40,000 was realised, a first for the Steelband Festival.

The revived Festival also saw the re-emergence of two of the oldest steelbands, Trinidad All Stars and Casablanca. These bands now became the great rivals of the Festival and the steelband world marvelled at their resilience, as both were all but written-off at some point in time. In fact, Casablanca had been dormant for a few years before the re-establishment of the Festival.

The Festival has al-



ways utilised the resources of foreign adjudicators, who come to judge the conventional Music Festivals. A great contribution was made by British-based musicians Alan Tongue, John Russel, Havelock Nelson and Sydney Northcote. Pan Trinbago has continued this trend and we have been served by top international musicians, among them Roger Nichols, Nathan Davis, David Del Tredec, John Corligiano, Easley Blackwood and Wynton Marsalis.

The 1986 Festival was partially sponsored by Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, which also provided resource services. This Festival saw WITCO Desperadoes Steel Orchestra of Laventille making a reappearance at the Festival, after an absence of 19 years and winning the title in a close finish with the favourites, Trinidad All Stars and the innovative band, Phase II Pan Groove.

The stage is now set for the First World Festival "Pan Is Beautiful/World Steelband Festival" and, once again, Royal Bank will be assisting Pan Trinbago in hosting this unique musical experience. The bank will not only provide financial support, but will also assist in the management of the Festival, having several of their key management personnel serving on the various planning committees.

This year's Festival will see several steel orchestras and soloists from as far away as Sweden, match their skills and talent against our local musicians in eight nights of musical excellence.

The Jean Pierre Complex comes alive on October 20 with the staging of four nights of the event's preliminaries. The semi-finals will take place on October 28 and 29 and the grand final comes off on November 5.

The soloist preliminary round will be held at the Spectacular Forum on October 27.

Patrons attending the Festival are assured of a musical experience they will never forget, and Trinidad and Tobago is indeed proud, as the birthplace of the steelpan, to host the Festival and provide that lasting memory.