

THE SLUMS
AT JOHN JOHN,
BIRTHPLACE
OF THE
STEELPAN,
HOME OF
SPREE.



ML 1040
(1975)

SPREE AND FRIEND UNDER THE TREE
WHERE HE DISCOVERED
THE STEELPAN.



Will the first panman please stand?

By ANDREW PITMAN

WAS HISTORY CREATED BY WINSTON 'SPREE' SIMON UNDER A MANGO TREE?

THE aged controversy over the inventor of the steelband may have finally come to a quiet ending.

But according to latest revelations, renowned panmen like Ellie Mannette, Neville Jules, Patsy Haynes, "Fisheye" and others who are often said to have hit the first note on a steelpan, really have no valid claim to the title of inventor.

In a book published here, entitled "Authentic Facts on the origin of the Steelband," all these men are said to have played an important part in bringing the steelband as it is today, "but the real inventor, the author boldly states, is a man called Winston "Spree" Simon.

During the last few decades, no one was really sure about the origin of pan. Apart from the more far-fetched stories, many of the recognised players gave more or less the same account of how they happened" to invent the thing. And almost all of them claimed that the first tune they played was "Mary Had A Little Lamb." "Spree" was mentioned as the first one to beat a recognised tune.

Achievement

However, the author of the book, Anthony E. Rouff, who says that Spree and other panmen made his home "their home" in the John John area, gives a vivid account of the invention and also tells of many panmen who seem to want to rob him of his achievement.

Mr. Rouff, who once worked with the Trinidad Mirror, expresses a kind of vicarious regret throughout, because, he says, "Spree is responsible for more than what he is known for."

But Mr. Rouff isn't the only one who is



SPREE TUNING PANS AT HOME IN JOHN JOHN.

disappointed. His "hero", Spree, still exists in the same slums where events in the book are said to have taken place almost four decades ago.

There, in the squalid section of John John, the 45-year-old pan inventor has a tiny, wooden "bacchy", furnished with a bed, chair, some kitchen utensils, a partly busted pair of tenor pans, and a Certificate of Merit which he received last year from the Carnival Development Committee.

In his home, Spree burns with pride and triumph, and pain. Everyone in the area gives him the credit he deserves, but yet something is very wrong, he says. But

in his poverty, the calm, well-built panman maintains an air of authority and affluence.

When he talks of the gang-war days of the past, he omits the violence. He deals strictly with musical achievements. When curious tourists visit him, he would take them to the place where he created history - a small hill with a large mango tree, where he carried out his experiments.

Spree's story of how he came across his invention isn't far from a folk tale. Here is his account of the accidental discovery, which is also narrated in the book "Authentic" Facts on the origin of the Steelband:

During the Carnival before the last war it all happened. Spree had loaned his "kettle pan" to a friend called Wilson Bartholomew, nicknamed "Thick Lip". Incidentally, the kettle was one of several "instruments" used by the bands in those days, merely to provide rhythm.

Research

Thick Lip was known for his unusual strength as a youth. When he returned the kettle pan, Spree discovered that the face of the pan was beaten in and the original tone gone. In those days, the face of the pans were pounded outwards instead of the present system.

Spree then tried to punch back out the face of the pan with a stone, but as he struck in different areas, he heard different notes ringing out. He decided not to punch

it out again. And so the new-convex or "Spree" fashion of sinking the pan came about.

This convex style, says author Rouff, "is evidence of Spree's achievement as the first to place notes on pan."

Spree who, among other things, was the founder of Carib Tokyo Steelband, now tunes pans for a little band in Chaguanas, Tokyo Stars.

Says the author: "I did not do any research to find out anything. I was there from the start to the present. All these are the real facts about the origin of the steelband. If research were to be done properly by the Steelband Research Project or by anybody else, they will find that the first man to put notes on pan and the first ever steelband belong to John John."

Spree says: "I don't want personal glory, but after all I did, should this historic place remain like the slums?"



SPREE IS PROUD OF HIS CERTIFICATE OF MERIT

Photos by INDAR SHARMA