

Who will take the Skinner Park crown?

Fonclaire or Deltones?

ALTHOUGH new Pan Trinidad president Owen Serrette should be congratulated for changes and innovations in Panorama 1989, I was still disappointed with the handling of last weekend's South/Central zone Panorama preliminaries staged at Skinner Park, San Fernando.

The advent of score sheets (courtesy Royal Bank) was welcome but the inevitable late start and the use of the cycle track detracted from the praises I would have liked to shower on Serrette and his new committee.

I can rile over the late start, but of greater importance is the continuous use by Panorama organisers of the cycle track as the focal point of the competition. The programme flowed smoothly for almost three hours but, by the time Vat 19 Fonclaire played and the crowd flowed in, the chaos started, with bands taking up to 30 minutes to set up. So much for the Carib's incentive award this year!

Although the size of bands may have caused some slowing down, there were signs that bad planning was also responsible. If the large stage standing idly behind the judges was used instead of the cycle track, things might have been different.

Which brings me to ask, since it appeared to be a completed and sturdy structure, why was this stage not used? Maybe the City Council should intervene to ensure that San Fernandians are not treated with such scorn in the future by the north-based organisation that controls Panorama.

Apart from this, there was no lighting on the cycle track causing bands which performed after dusk to perform literally in the dark. This lack of proper lighting is a perennial one which has provided Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) with the easiest excuse to prematurely pack up and return to Port of Spain for yet another year.

Without these all-important elements which go into making a good show, there was also a paucity of performances, many of which left a bit to be desired.

Most of the participants seemed to be unprepared and I will not be surprised if only two south bands make it to the national semi-final. It would really be a shame if only two bands from the South/Central Zone in fact qualify for the national semi-final, especially when one looks back in time to 1980 when a record number of 10 bands from this zone made the grade.

Another area of concern was the positioning of the judges. I felt they were too close to the stage (or track) to get the best sound from each band, since most of them stretched more than 100 metres down the track. A wider stage would have created better acoustics.

But, in spite of all these factors against the south pannist, we still



By
**SHANE
BICKRAM**

saw musical heights of excellence from Fonclaire and Deltones.

On the down side, for the second year, West Stars was sadly missed. Also missing were Pan Soca from Siparia, Free French which seems unable to get its act together, and former South/Central champions Dunlop Tornadoes. There was also a notable shrink in Hillside Symphony.

Also making this year's Panorama that less interesting was that six bands played Baron's *Somebody* and three played Boogie's *Fire Down Below*. Variety was a scarce commodity this year.

Celebrated arrangers Len "Boogie" Sharpe and Ken "Professor" Philmore each had two bands competing.

The first band to appear before the judges was Mt Moriah Pan Movement, one of the new bands around, but one which is gradually growing in size, sound and stature. This band hails from Mt Moriah Hill, under the leadership of Selwyn Alexander, and its tune of choice was Johnny King's *Doh Rub Meh*. Although placing 11th with 216 points, it was a creditable performance.

T&TEC Motown played second and chose Ronnie McIntosh's *Shaking It*, a rather unlikely choice but one which was performed with lots of colour and a strong soca flavour. This Navet Road band has had a chequered

life span in this competition and secured 236 points to place sixth. Though not large, the band had a full sound, with perhaps a bit too much tempo for listeners to fully appreciate its arrangement. Basically a band comprising several youths, Motown gave a mature performance.

Next came Hillside Symphony, looking smaller than usual. Hillside took on a blue and yellow look this year, with a new arranger as well. An overplayed minor key on Baron's *Somebody* made parts of the tune somewhat monotonous, while the instruments seemed not tuned for the various keys. It is a pity that a band with as impressive a track record as this one could not manage a more dynamic performance.

Appearing back to back with Hillside was Antilean All Stars, also playing *Somebody*. This was not the most original of Boogie's works but the band was awarded 240 points and placed fifth. Under Boogie's magical wand, this Carib Street band may very well return to the limelight after being in the doldrums for some time.

Couva Joylanders has been a regular in this zone of Panorama without much success. This year, the band, with new arrangers, brought an ultra laid-back version of *Somebody* to the Park. The piece required some more imagination to become more competitive and exciting.

Next came the big guns of the south, Fonclaire, a band which any San Fernandian should feel proud of. It has been 13 years since a south band has won the national Panorama title and Fonclaire can very well be the band to break the jinx of the '80s. During the '60s, it was Guinness Cavaliers which kept the flag flying, and

during the '70s, it was Hatters. Arranger Philmore has the goods to pull it off this year with his fiery arrangement of Boogie's *Fire*. Fonclaire can only get better as the band goes through the remaining rounds of competition towards the ultimate prize on Carnival Saturday night. Fonclaire placed first with 258 points.

Following Fonclaire down the track was Trintoc Deltones with a Boogie arrangement of Tambu's *Free Up*. Tuners Ellis Knights and Roland Hargrin seem to be working towards achieving a unique sound with this band's instruments. Once more, the haunting basses were beautifully balanced and Boogie masterfully crafted some stunning bass runs with the tenors answering. Theirs was a truly exciting performance. Deltones scored 250 points and placed second. In the final, it would be safe to expect a Fonclaire/Deltones "shoot-out," a scenario which has been played out for the last three years.

Point Fortin's Silver Harps seemed to have gone through some changes and came up with Jason Baptiste as its arranger. The band played Panorama's "test piece," Baron's *Somebody*. Given that the Harps is a band which has treated the Park to some brilliant performances over the years, theirs was a disappointing performance and was justifiably awarded 206 points. In the past, this band has played gems like *Pan Here to Stay* and *No Pan*, arranged by Dudley Nesbitt, while possessing some well tuned pans crafted by Kenrick Parmel.

Trintoc Sun Valley was next, also playing the Baron clypsop. Giving a brilliant rendition of the popular piece, Sun Valley's interpretation was not overly complicated and relied heavily on a number of cleanly executed, dramatic stops. Sun Valley has been in and out of the South/Central final and the band's eighth placing has guaranteed its participation for another year.

Kalomo Kings really lived up to English derivative of its name — "the unexpected." This band's association with London-based pannist Anise "Hatters" Hadeed seems poised to finally place the Kings on the steel-band map. Hatters opted for *Fire Down Below* and, although he is developing his own unique style, it's clear that he has been influenced by Boogie's music. The band has grown in size and sound under leader Kenneth Placide and Pleasantville ought to be proud of its resident steelband. Kalomo Kings have qualified for both the South/Central final and the national semi-final.

Hatters also played *Somebody* and, without Earl Brooks (now with Birdsong), seemed to be lacking an important ingredient. Unfortunately, Hatters secured only 223 points and placed ninth, out of contention for further participation in any future aspect of Panorama '89.

After Hatters, there was Tropical Angel Harps of Chaguanas. Under arranger Clarence Morris, this band caused a lot of concern among the big guns at last year's Pan is Beautiful Five steelband festival. Known for its slow, even tempo, laid-back style, the band stepped up its tempo this year and paid a dear price.

Angel Harps was followed by another Chaguanas band, Claytones. With just 30 players under the leadership of 1986 Rudolph Charles Pan Innovation winner Jimi Phillips, this small band had the entire Park singing and jumping with Bally's *Maxi Dub*. While they gave the Panorama new life, tastefully marrying dub with pan, the judges were not impressed and Claytones were placed 14th with 186 points.

The final band, Panasonic Connection, came from Victoria Village. A band which has been around for some time, the Connection seems to have grown up overnight as it presented a new sound, no doubt achieved through the band's new affiliation with Philmore. They played Denyse Plummer's *The Champ* and, what a rendition it was!

The final of the South/Central Zone takes place tonight at Skinner Park and the competition promises to be quite a keen one. The bands which have not made the national semi-final may attempt to deny Fonclaire and Deltones the zonal title.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Four South/Central Zone bands qualified for the national semi-final which will be contested next Thursday at the Queen's Park Savannah.

The sound of steel reigns tonight