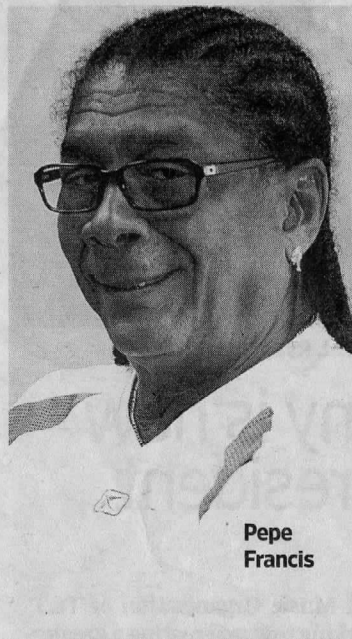


Panman extraordinaire...

# Pepe leads London-based steelbands



Pepe  
Francis

**Pepe Francis is an extraordinary panman. He's been through the mill. He's been there, done that.**

Now he's making a name for himself in steelband administration way over in foggy London, England.

From the Morvant Ebonites, Pepe has climbed the top rung. He is now chairman of the British Association of Steelbands (BAS). This is an organisation he has led for 30 years. Wow!

Pepe is like cooked food, he's darn good. Some 52 bands, come under his control.

Under his stewardship, the BAS has overseen a number of projects, pan explosion, a showcasing of youth talent and development in composing and

arranging. This has been going on for 12 years.

A feather in his cap is the honouring of veteran pan composer/arranger Earl "Barney" Rodney of Solo Harmonites fame.

Pepe is also credited with introducing J'Ouvert into Nothinghill Carnival. There was apprehension by the security authorities, but their fears soon gave way to good vibes.

Pepe, who is associated with Ebony Steel, is contemplating giving up the chairmanship of the British Association of Steelbands.

"I want to move on," he said, "I want a successor but no one is taking up the challenge. Thirty years is a long time."

The energetic Pepe is also on the advisory board of the Nothinghill Carnival, which generates 97 million pounds annually. However, the London Panorama has been struggling for funding over the years, and this year it is in doubt.

"It might, as well as it might not,

take place. It's always a battle with the authorities to stage Panorama," Pepe said.

For his 30 years of service Pepe was honoured by the association in a glittering ceremony last December. He is deeply thrilled that his performance has been recognised.

## **Pepe's message to tuners... Look to Europe for pans**

"Scrap the G Pan!"

This is the feeling of Pepe Francis, chairman of the British Association of Steelbands (BAS).

The Genesis pan, which is the brainchild of Professor Brain Copeland and his team, was launched a few years ago. The concept behind the pan, instigated by former prime minister Patrick Manning, was to brand T&T as the "home of the steelpan" when dubious claims were made.

The pan, launched in 2008 with much fanfare at Queen's Hall, Port-of-Spain, was played by the National Steel Symphony Orchestra (NSSO). So far not much has been heard about the G-Pan, although some steelbands, Phase Two Pan Groove and Skiffle Bunch, have them.

Pan tuners find the metal is too hard, and the pan too difficult to carry.

Pepe thinks it's too "bulky."

"It's not practical," he said.

About pan tuners gripe that pans are difficult to obtain and the quality is not good, Pepe said: "Pans are available in Europe. Van Leer sells the best drums. If you want drums, you can make them to order."

He said bands in Europe get their drums from Holland and Denmark. There are drums available. There's a place in Coventry that makes drums to order."

Pepe will be extremely happy when the pan headquarters at Orange Groove, Trincity, is built.

One of his goals in the re-establishment of Steel Pan European (now defunct) to guide the fortunes of steelbands in Europe. He also hopes to serve at the executive level of Pan Trinbago.

## **Who is Earl Rodney?**

The British Association of Steelbands (BAS), led by Pepe Francis, recognised the contribution to pan of Earl "Barney" Rodney in 2007.

Rodney, a Point Fortin son-of-the-soil, blazed a trail in the seventies with Solo Harmonites. An accomplished arranger musician, pannist and composer, long before Len "Boogsie" Sharpe and Ray Homan, Rodney led the Solo Harmonites to four wins: The Wrecker (1968); Queen of the Band (1971); St Thomas Girl (1972); and Jericho (1974).

He has also distinguished himself as a musician of note,

arranging music for several calypsonians, among them Arrow, Sparrow, Kitchener, Melody and Short Shirt of Antigua.

A defining moment in Rodney's career, was the formation of the band Friends and Countrymen.

The band comprised stellar musicians in all departments, the likes of which Trinbago has not seen since the early 1970s.

Rodney's skill as a pannist is also phenomenal. This musical troubadour has enriched the lives of his friends and countrymen. In 2007, Pan Trinbago dedicated the National Panorama to this brilliant Trinbagonian.



**Earl Rodney**