

Standardisation of pitch recommended

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A 12-MAN committee appointed to study standardisation of pan tuning, has recommended a standardisation of pitch for the steelband instrument.

It said this was desirable technically possible, and should be attempted.

The committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Kenneth Julien, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, UWI, also considered the question of material, note placement and range.

In its report released at yesterday's closing session of the three day Government-sponsored National Consultation on the Steelband, the committee recommended the summoning of a conference of all pan tuners, leading arrangers, representatives of band leaders or managers to exchange information and ideas on note placement and range of the pan.

On the basis of discussions the committee suggested that they agree to one or more acceptable pan designs to meet the requirements dictated by historical influence, acoustical qualities, ease of playing, and popularity with players.

Very early in its deliberations on Tuesday, the Committee agreed that it was not possible nor desirable to standardise in either the method of tuning of the instrument, or the complete musical sounds of an instrument in a band.

However, it found that certain aspects of the making of the instrument could be considered suitable and desirable for standardisation. It then went on to discuss the degree to which standardisation could be implemented.

PAN FACTORY

It agreed that if a decision could be arrived at on standardisation in the making of the steelband instrument, then meaningful consideration could then be given to the factory aspects.

According to the committee's report, the advantages of standardising on pitch were elaborated and discussed.

Among the more striking were:

- (a) Facilitating the arrangement of music for the steelband
- (b) Allowing easier relationship and accompanying of conventional instruments.
- (c) Providing an international link

The Committee was convinced by these arguments and agreed that standardisation of pitch was desirable technically possible and should be attempted.

The Committee noted that if such an attempt was made, tuners should have access to the various electronic and mechanical devices that could assist in this process.

The Committee came to a

unanimous view that there were serious disadvantages in attempting to standardise on tone and in any case, this appeared an impossible technical task at this moment.

The Committee therefore agreed that it was both impractical and undesirable to attempt any standardisation of tone and accordingly, makes no recommendation on this aspect.

The Committee recognised that, over the years, a wide variety of drums had been used with varying results. A large pool of information and experience now exists from which valuable information about desirable qualities of the material is available.

The Committee noted that a local factory was now producing a standard type of drum which had received some acceptance and certainly in size of drum, the 45 gallon drum was effectively the standard.

The Committee further noted that:

- (i) One or two tuners had successfully experimented with a larger type of drums.
- (ii) The Faculty of Engineering had developed a different approach to the making of the instrument which appeared more suitable for factory production.
- (iii) Tobago had a special problem related to the cost and availability of drums.
- (iv) Cheaper prices for drums may be obtained through wholesale buying and distribution.
- (v) There were dangers in relying on a source of material subject to changes imposed by buyers of drums, other than tuners and bands.

The Committee agreed that further research into the type and sources of material should be continued and that tuners should be encouraged to continue with their various experiments.

The Committee noted that in any event, if a factory was contemplated, possible alternatives of manufacture will have to be closely studied.

Note placement and range are so closely related that they could be considered under one head.

The Committee heard the interesting historical development of note placement and surface design of the instrument.

It recognised that in addition to the influence of the pioneer tuners and leading players, the following factors played a major part in the evolution of the presently-accepted designs:—

- (i) Acoustical characteristics.
- (ii) Ease of playing.
- (iii) General acceptance and popularity of a particular tuner.

CONCERTED EFFORT

It further recognised that a substantial degree of standardisation had taken place and that three or four design styles had become widely acceptable. On this basis, the Committee felt that standardisation of note placement and range was desirable, was, in fact, taking place and no serious obstacles stood in the way of standardising on two or three different styles.

It, however, recognised that acceleration of this process required a co-operative and concerted effort among all tuners, leading arrangers and representatives of band leaders or managers to exchange information, ideas and on that basis, agree on one or more acceptable designs which would meet the requirements as directed by:

- (i) Historical influence.
- (ii) Acoustical qualities.
- (iii) Ease of playing.
- (iv) Popularity with players.

To this end, the Committee

agreed that Pan Trinidad with the assistance of Sponsors, Government Agencies and other interested parties initiate moves towards calling a conference centred on the tuners but with participation by leading arrangers and representatives of band leaders and managers.

The Committee considered at length the desirability of attempting to establish factory production of steelband instruments.

The Committee agreed that there were strong enough indications of an attractive market to justify additional efforts in this project.

The Committee agreed that in any such further considerations, the following factors should be included in addition to those that are purely technical and economic facts:

- (i) As many recognised tuners who wish to be involved should be given an adequate opportunity to be involved.
- (ii) The existing income of tuners should be balanced against the cost of factory produced instruments.
- (iii) The professional life of the tuners.
- (iv) Provisions for developmental work and experimental facilities.

The Committee, therefore, agreed that the Industrial Development Corporation or some such agency be asked to undertake immediately a feasibility study on the establishment of a factory which will have as its major products steelband instruments and associated equipment.

The Committee further agreed that such a study should be carried out on a full-time professional basis, utilising assistance from the Faculty of Engineering, University of the

West Indies, and employing where considered desirable, tuners in a consultant capacity. The Committee was of the view that this was the only way in which the study could be completed with the urgency that is desirable.

Although not specifically within its Terms of Reference, the Committee discussed:

(a) Further improvement and development of the pan as a musical instrument.

(b) The question of recording of the steelband music as well as the production of records on a commercial basis.

(c) The question of having tuners specialise in particular pans as distinct from extending their ability over the entire range of pans.

(d) The question of establishing a body of Professional Tuners.

These are matters not strictly within the Terms of Reference but are brought to attention of the Committee because they are discussed on the Reference and need attention.