

# Special steel for pan

US

By TERRY JOSEPH

**WHEN PANNISTS finally determine what metal mix will make the best instruments, several American steel giants stand ready to mass-produce the alloy — with or without help from Trinidad and Tobago.**

Trinidadian Cliff Alexis, who lectures in music at Northern Illinois University and was instrumental in the staging of a recent symposium on the making of steel for pans, is also busy organising a convention of pan tuners to assist in supplying information on the components and tensile strength of new metals for making pans.

On June 4, the symposium was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, dedicated to finding a steel alloy ideal for making pans. The discussions turned up a number of positive initiatives, but stalled on a small point of chemistry.

The steel producers wondered why after coming up with the perfect alloy, the tuning process demanded that the metal be then heated afresh and pounded in order to tune the pans. Surely this process would change the chemical composition of the steel?

Alexis was among those tuners who presented papers at the symposium, which was held at the Calig Steel Drum Company in Pittsburgh. The event was co-hosted by Kaethe George and Ellie



OWEN SERRETTE

Mannette, the first person to use the 55-gallon drum for the manufacture of pans.

In a telephone interview from NIU last Tuesday, Alexis told the *Sunday Express* that "Since that innovation some 50 years ago, there has been a lot of reactionary debate but far too little pro-active work at establishing the raw material which would consistently produce a quality instrument."

The symposium was mounted to meet the challenge presented by the unpredictable quality of the 20/18 gauge steel barrels currently utilised to produce pans.

Several of Pittsburgh's well respected names in the steel industry attended the symposium, which was mounted at the conference facilities of the Calig Steel Company and attended by that company's president Lee Calig. Also present were Les Trilla, president of the Trilla Steel Drum Manufacturing Company, and a team from Panyard Incorporated, including tuner Roland Harrigin and owners Shelley Irvine and Ron Kerns.

Trilla, who only heard pan for the first time seven years ago, has since invested more than

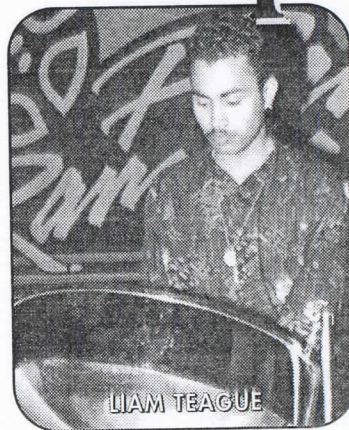
US\$100,000 in scholarships and other subventions to the furtherance of the instrument and its players. Seyon Gomez, who is currently into his second year at NIU and the Layne twins, who will join the college in 1997, are recipients of his generosity, as are Liam Teague and the university's steel orchestra.

"Mr Trilla has already organised for us to have another symposium in Chicago," said Alexis adding: "This time we're determined to have people from Trinidad, because we have been having trouble getting people from home to participate in this drive to create the perfect pan."

"This is something which should be shared with the whole community, but our attempts to get people from Trinidad have not been very successful."

Pan Trinbago, the body responsible for the steelband movement here, has meanwhile decided to appoint Alexis himself as their agent in the US to deal with the matter.

"He can seek our interests there," said Serrette, "to the point of participating in the follow-up symposium and on a continuing basis in matters that affect the steelband movement."



LIAM TEAGUE

There are indeed myriad matters involved in the preparation of the perfect pan.

"When we're talking about the right thickness of the steel, the debate goes down to thousandths of an inch and people start bringing out calipers," says Alexis.

"Other people are busy working out whether the steel has enough carbon or how they factor in the phosphorus, manganese or sulphur into the alloy. Each of the factors has an effect on tonality and ability to retain the tuning," he said.

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