

ML10440 045A

Steelband in the education system

THIRD and final part in a series on the steelband by NESTOR SULLIVAN and TEDDY IAN BELGRAVE

(i) **THE foundation of the steelband movement internationally lies in the steelband programmes in the school systems in many parts of the USA, Canada, the UK, Europe and Japan. All levels of Education are exposed to the steelband, whether it be pre-school, special school, primary or secondary school, college or university.**

(ii) A number of Trinidadian pannists have been pioneers in this field, employed with the respective Education Authorities of either the State, Province or Borough. They are salaried and have pensions and other benefits like all other members of staff. A few of the better known names in the business are Gerald Forsythe (London), Earl La Pierre (Canada), Pat McNeilly (Canada), Rudy Wells (Virgin Islands), Dudley Nesbitt (Leeds), Arddin Herbert (New York) and Pectoras Llewellyn (St Vincent).

(iii) As was mentioned earlier, London has as many as 160 steelbands in the school system.

Washington D.C. and New York are not far behind.

Even in St Vincent, at the Bishop's High School, all students are exposed to steelband playing in school. There are annual competitions for supremacy in the art of steelband performance among classes at the school. This system produces hundreds of pan-players annually. The current Panorama champion in St Vincent is a band of ex-Bishop's players.

The Freeport Anglican High School in the Bahamas embarked on a similar programme last year. Tortola in the British Virgin Islands started its programme this year. Rudy Wells' Steel Unlimited Steel Orchestra of St John in the US Virgin Islands was the catalyst for the formation of the St John School of the Arts. This orchestra has toured annually the USA and Europe. It is funded by the Council of the Arts and the Virgin Islands legislature.

(iv) The question to be asked is: Why have foreigners seen the wisdom in introducing the steelband instrument/orchestra in education systems throughout the world, whereas we here in the land of its birth, continue to approach this issue with indifference or hostility? The answer, really, is rather simple: they have discovered certain features about the steelband instrument/orchestra, that we have difficulty in recognizing.

These features are: One widely accepted, modern school of thought on music education argues that the introduction to music of the very young is most successful with the use of percussion instruments. The steelpan is the most appropriate of the family of percussion instruments for this task. This has resulted in a relatively new ancillary steelpan industry of toy steelpan production of accelerated growth potential.

Music educators throughout the developed world have also long ago discovered that the understanding of basic concepts of music theory can be simplified for the average student by the use of the steelpan, particularly the tenor pan, because of the positioning or placement of notes, e.g. the cycle of fifths — C, G, D, A, E, B...going anti-clockwise on the tenor pan. This assists in understanding key signatures: C- no accidentals, G- 1 accidental, D- 2, A-3, E-4, B-5, etc.

There are some other features of the impact of the steelband on music education, which have been discovered abroad. Perhaps it is best to quote Barbara Porter, a US music educator in her most revealing article on the introduction of steelband in schools in Vol. 1, Number 5, of "PAN-U-SCRIPTS", the official newsletter of the North American Steel Band Association (NASBA). Mrs Porter writes (after her school received a set of steelband instruments):

"We got right to work. Gradually the mysteries of students and instruments were revealed. After time it became apparent that the drums offered wonderful experiences to elementary students. More than that, steel drums did not interfere with the rest of the students' music education.

"The drums enhanced the learning process. The drums motivate students. Steel-drumming requires a multi-sensory process that leads to more secure learning. Students often discover abilities. Steel-drumming also helps the teacher. Because most of us are untrained (in the steelband art form), we must really pay attention to what works. Teaching drumming challenges us to stretch to meet the needs of the students.

"...In the classroom, the drums allow students to work through discovery processes in many areas: melodic harmony, harmonic progressions, ensemble.

ML1040 045B

Discoveries made through pan in the classroom

tunities through their school years.

"Multi-cultural needs and responsibilities are being met, in part, through the study of steel drums.

"Classroom teachers comment about the level of achievement reached by their students.

"...the art form continues to grow and flourish. More and more people are aware of the value and validity of the art form."

Maybe every music teacher and

supervisor in Trinidad and Tobago should read Mrs Porter's article. Just maybe, we may begin to appreciate why the steelpan instrument/orchestra is finding its way into the education systems throughout the civilized world, except Trinidad and Tobago.

Pan as a Therapeutic & Correctional Tool

(i) In St Thomas, US Virgin Islands, the steelband is at the centre of a correctional programme for juvenile

delinquents, initiated by a Territorial Court Judge. This programme is funded by Federal agencies and is considered prestigious for the participating youths who are exposed to real opportunities for individual development in music theory and practice and other skills.

(ii) A most unique development has taken place in Maine, USA, where in a community of retirees, ages 50 to 85, the steelband has taken hold. There are

more than twenty-five (25) ensembles amongst the citizens of this community and every Monday, weather permitting, the streets are blocked and several bands perform in an environment not unlike our Blockorama. They also perform at activities (concerts, fairs, etc.) in other states, with a varied repertoire of music, including calypsoes.

rhythmic accompaniment. The drums act as a reinforcement to other learnings. Form, for instance, takes on real meaning, when the student realises he only has to learn a few phrases to know a whole piece...every student deserves the opportunity to experience the wonder of what steel drums can do.

"...It has been years since steel-drumming began in Washington State. The implications of the value of steel drums are many:

"One school programme has led to nine.

"Students fight to get into rehearsals, not out.

"Students are insisting that they have continued steelband oppor-

