

OUR OPINION

Does T&T deserve pan?

PAT BISHOP, the conductor of the West Indian Tobacco Desperadoes in the steelband festival which opened last night, once observed that Trinidad and Tobago did not deserve the steelband since as a country we did not know what to with it.

Ms Bishop is closer to the steelband movement than most people of her background. She has given unstintingly of her services towards the steelband movement out of love for the instrument and out of an uncompromising belief in its worth to the world of music.

Her exasperation after the accolades Desperadoes received in the United States, this year, is therefore understandable. In Trinidad, in spite of the ritual declarations before and after each Panorama and each Festival, the general attitude is indifference almost as if, well almost as if we do not know what to do with it.

Usually, when that charge is made the organisation indicted is the government but one cannot escape the feeling that "pan" is a collective responsibility and we have all failed, and one feels, too, that in our attitude towards this thing we have created, lies part of the answer to the things that are wrong with Trinidad and Tobago.

One fears, for example, that the preliminary and semifinal stages of the competition will not be well attended, not because money is the problem, since the situation was the same during the "boom," but because too many Trinidadians feel that support for the steelband movement is everybody's responsibility but theirs.

Surely the news that the organisation is \$600,000 short of its Festival Budget should galvanise every employed Trinidadian who

ever danced to or boasted about his indigenous instrument to invest \$10 in the one thing distinctly Trinidadian and which, more than any other, has put this tiny nation on the cultural map of the world.

Ten dollars is the price of a "preliminary ticket" and while the Festival will, naturally, reach its zenith in the finals, such is steelband competitiveness that attendance at the preliminaries over the next few days guarantees exposure to some of the best music being played in the world.

The truth is Trinidadians do not have much regard for each other. Here you have hundreds of men and women who have spent days and hours practising and practising on their instruments to achieve a particular level of proficiency and the likelihood, as they move through the preliminaries into the semifinals and finals, is they will only be assured of an audience worthy of their efforts on one night—the finals. They have given many nights of their lives. Most so-called pan aficionados are only prepared to give one.

The typical Trinidadian retort, perhaps, is "who send them"—nobody forced the steelbandsmen and steelbandswomen to sacrifice those nights. But, if not them, who? Who, in these times of "dub" and "rock" is going to continue flying the steelband flag if not these Trinidadians touched by the steelband muse? And who is to pack the Jean Pierre Complex to its rafters to judge and applaud if not us? The tourists whom festivals like these are supposed to woo? To believe that is to believe that somebody other than ourselves has to protect and nurture us. Come to think of it, that is part of what is wrong with Trinidad and Tobago.



THE TRINIDAD EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS
LTD was started on June 6, 1967. Its registered offices are at 35 & 37 Independence Square, Port of Spain, and 30 Penitence Street, San Fernando. Telephone: 62 3171/8 and 652