

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES



Jit Samaroo

Chancellor, Mr. Jit Samaroo is a world class arranger and composer for the steel pan, reputedly the only acoustic instrument to be invented in the 20th century. Widely traveled, he has performed within the Caribbean and across the world. Jit Samaroo is self-taught. With no formal instruction in musical theory, he writes own scores and arranges complex renditions for Amoco Renegades, an orchestra that he has personally assembled.

Born in Surrey Village, Lopinot, Trinidad, Jit Samaroo was one of thirteen children in a way of life framed by his father's work in basic agriculture but also by the creativity of his mother, who played the dholak - a twenty inch long drum traditionally part of Hindu weddings. After their mother died, when Jit Samaroo was only eleven, the seven Samaroo Kids played for financial support but also for stability and cohesion, filling the dark, still evenings (in a life without electricity or telephone) with parang and calypso, with folk and classical music. After thirty-six years, this family band, now Samaroo Jets, survives under his brother's management, and includes

Jit Samaroo on the guitar pan.

But the drum beats in his blood. Jit Samaroo encountered traditional pan in the late fifties. Multiracial, multicultural Lopinot provided a ready context for breaking traditional associations of ethnicity in focusing on pan (an Afro-Trinidadian invention) and composing and performing East Indian Music on pan. His inherited musical talent proceeds on down the generations, his son being an arranger for the Renegades Junior Band, which won the Junior Steelpan Panorama title in 2002. Jit Samaroo's own varied accomplishments include folk, classical, chutney and East Indian music; he also combines many rhythms of his nation, as in *La Trinity*. From a rural culture that was partly Hispanic, partly Indian, partly African, he has carried over his multicultural and eclectic experience to the formation of the Renegades, composing over fifty original pieces of music, for solo, duet, quartet and full orchestra. Of these, *Meditation* may well be considered his most demanding and rewarding work.

Jit Samaroo dreams of a music school for young pannists, of incorporating a pan section in a full conventional orchestra, and he has already performed in a combination of piano and pan. Indeed he has pioneered Caribbean music on a number of dimensions: with the Samaroo Jets winning the first religious steel band music festival in 1972; winning the first pan chutney festival in 1985, and nine National Panorama Titles between 1982 and 1997. Longfellow described music as the universal language of mankind, and outside of the Caribbean, Jit Samaroo has played in the New Orleans Jazz Festival, and in France on Bastille Day in a presentation for over two million people. World interest in the steel pan brings its own challenges, and he warns of the need for patenting the instrument, as a steelpan factory develops in Switzerland and as Japan enhances the technology.

He has been showered with awards and honours:

Hummingbird Silver, 1987; Chaconia Silver National, 1995; President's Award for Creativity and Excellence, 1996; Legends of Pan Award from Trinidad and Tobago Folk Arts Institute in New York, 2001; United States of America Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition, 2002; Trinidad Hilton award for dedicated service, and Icon of Trinidad and Tobago award from the Prime Minister, 2002.

Softly spoken, humble and self-effacing, Jit Samaroo views the pan-yard as an environment of community spirit and national pride. His dedication to excellence in Caribbean music and his unassuming boldness in interweaving the culture of differing ethnic groups into a musical fusion that expresses the hybrid identity of his region has been a powerful unifying force.

*Chancellor, I present Mr. Jit Samaroo, and ask that by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of The University of the West Indies, you confer on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.*

*St. Augustine campus
October 31, 2003*