

newsviews

Today

reviews&interviews

Pan – musical miracle that's slipping away

1. Pan Factories

Two full-fledged steelpan manufacturing plants have been established in Bern, Switzerland (since 1976) and Akron, Ohio, USA over the past five years.

An examination of the more developed factory in Switzerland reveals the following features:-

(i) Operated by Swiss nationals; the leader being a former university professor, who resigned his job to take up pan-tuning on a full-time basis.

(ii) Fully computerised and organised as a departmentalized operation, catering for all the various stages and aspects of the tuning process i.e. drum storage, sinking, grooving, heat treatment, fine tuning, showroom.

(iii) The market for its products is: (a) the more than 100 steelbands in Switzerland (b) the other hundreds of steelbands that have emerged all over west and central Europe (c) the brand new market of the former Eastern European states.

(iv) The raw material is supplied by German manufacturers to defined specifications e.g. 18-gauge steel for Tenors, 16 gauge steel for Bass. Furthermore, the factory has access to various grades of steel (including precise alloy specifications), e.g. steel used in the manufacture of Mercedes-Benz.

It is of note that the drums now used by steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago are on display at the factory as HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS!

(v) New methods of tempering the metal have been employed. The wood-fire which is still being used in Trinidad and Tobago has been replaced by a computerised, thermostat-controlled furnace. There is also the use of a new

chemical treatment. One product of this process is the **black pan**, which when polished is a sight to behold!

(vi) The instruments produced are made from drums of various diameters, including 25-inch drums. Our master tuners, Bertie Marshall and Anthony Williams, have for years lamented the limitation placed on the possible range of the instrument because of the 22-inch drum we use in Trinidad & Tobago, e.g. our tenors start from the D above Middle C, leaving out D Flat, C Sharp and C from the treble clef range. The products of the Swiss factory are not so constrained.

(vii) The major problem of the cumbersome and costly packaging of the larger instruments of the orchestra for transportation is diminished considerably by the use of smaller skirts on the individual drums of a set, which fit into each other.

(viii) Of major focus is the heavily funded Department of Research and Development, where new tuning methods and techniques are constantly under review, with the use of the most modern technologies.

It is of note that Mr Roland Harrigan, one of Trinidad and Tobago's leading tuners, has been retained as its main technical consultant for the factory's tuners' operations. He has visited the factory and remains in constant contact throughout the year.

(ix) Training is another high priority and is conducted through an organised programme for young pan-tuning enthusiasts. All the tuning skills are taught, together with other areas of related activities e.g. computer science.

It is of note that a 17-year-old member of the factory staff was apprenticed to tuner Roland Harrigan here in

Trinidad and Tobago for five months (November 1993 to March 1994) and performed at the Panorama Finals in 1994 with Pamperi — all expenses paid by the factory.

(x) Apart from the production of instruments and accessories, another emphasis is the production of literature. This includes music scores and the history and development of the steelband. The sources of this literature come from its own material and its many direct relationships with steelband organisations around the world, including Trinidad and Tobago.

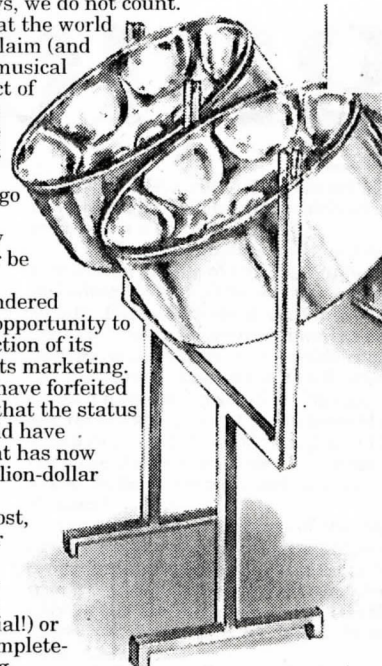
2. International Acceptance as a Legitimate Musical Instrument

(i) There are now thousands of steel orchestras/ensembles throughout the world. The USA has more than 800. London alone has one 160 steelbands in schools. Canada and Europe can also boast of many more steelbands than exist in Trinidad and Tobago. Countries worldwide as diverse as Australia, South Korea, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Alaska, Iran and many more are all caught up in the steelband craze.

(ii) The steelpan instrument has also found pride of place in a number of top international and recording acts. Nagoya Matzuka and his famous Japanese band, Banda Grande, now includes the steelpan. John Lennon, Taj Mahal, Grover Washington, Ralph MacDonald, Barry Manilow, Jimmy Buffet have all recorded with the steelpan.

An Andy Narrell performance can fill a stadium in the United States. Othello Mollineaux's ensemble performs all over the world. Rudy Smith's trio is in demand internationally, as well.

(iii) The demand for steelband performances worldwide, at music festivals, concerts, etc., obviously has intensified ten-fold. The reality of course, is that this demand is being filled now by the steel orchestras/ensembles which are established abroad. The London steel orchestras have been satisfying the markets of Europe (including Russia and the former Eastern European States) and North Africa, with tours throughout the year. The American steelbands have begun servicing the Far East/Asian market. Generally, Trinidad and Tobago steel orchestras/ensembles now have a very tiny share of this international market for steelband performances.



FIRST of a three-part series on the steelband

By NESTOR SULLIVAN and TEDDY IAN BELGRAVE

JUST OVER 50 years ago the people of Trinidad and Tobago created the steel orchestra. This apparent miracle of creation was actually the culmination of a metamorphosis which began some 150 years before.

The process of development of the instrument/orchestra has continued long after its birth; in a sense encompassing symbolically all the struggles of our people to define a legitimate civilisation in a world where, in so many other ways, we do not count.

The truth is that the world has long ago laid claim (and rightly so) to this musical marvel, the product of our people's collective genius. There is still the element of patronising Trinidad and Tobago as the land of its birth, which pretty soon will no longer be required.

We have surrendered opportunity after opportunity to dominate the direction of its development and its marketing. Consequently, we have forfeited the derived value that the status of monopolist would have brought us, in what has now become a multi-billion-dollar industry.

All is still not lost, however; we either move swiftly to maximise our benefits (and they are still very substantial!) or we give it away completely and gain nothing.

The purpose of this submission is to dispassionately (without recourse to any false patriotism) review briefly the realities of the instrument/orchestra in today's world and today's Trinidad and Tobago and to propose a detailed strategic plan, which would allow us to derive maximum benefits from this creation of ours. We begin with **Section A — "Pan in The World"** — investigation of where pan reach internationally. The serious implications for our claims of being the birthplace or the mecca of pan, or for our ability to maintain leadership of this meteoric take-off of the steelpan industry worldwide, ought to become even more self-evident in the following **Section B — "Pan in Trinidad and Tobago"**, where we will review our attempts locally to promote, develop and market the steelband.

The final discussion, **Section C — "A Five-Year Action Plan for The Steelband"** — will suggest concrete steps, which must be taken post haste, if we are to maximise the benefits of our rapidly diminishing advantage in the international steelpan industry and so avert the catastrophe of our marginalisation.

A. PAN IN THE WORLD