

FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

IT'S THAT time again. When, throughout the weekend, the entire focus of the nation is fixed on two venues—the Queen's Park Savannah and Skinner Park—for the zonal preliminaries of the annual Panorama competition.

This year's Panorama competition is a very special one, specifically because it marks the 25th occasion that these national championships will be held (there was no competition in 1979).

The first ever competition was staged in 1963 by the Carnival Development Committee, acting upon recommendations made by the now defunct National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandsmen (NATTS), the forerunner to Pan Trinbago. NATTS at the time was under the presidency of the late George Goddard, described by Pan Trinbago special advisor Armin Smith as "the genius behind Panorama."

Smith recalls that the first Panorama "was a tremendous success," which guaranteed the longevity of the competition, "developing it into the success story it has become today."

That initial competition was eventually won by Pan Am North Stars of St. James, playing an Anthony Williams' arrangement of Sparrow's *Dan is the Man*. Runners-up were Sundowners, playing *Harry and Mama*, and Desperados, playing *The Road by Kitchener*. In all, 21 bands competed, with calypsoes by Kitchener and Sparrow accounting for the selections played by 20 of them. One band played a Brynner calypso.

This weekend, a total of 52 steel orchestras were registered to compete in the zonal preliminaries nationwide for conventional bands. In addition, a record number of 25 pan-round ensembles were registered to face the judges when the preliminary of this category was held at the Port of Spain City Hall last Friday evening.

Last year's arduous North/East preliminary lasted almost 17 hours, although two of these hours were wasted with disputes involving Pan Trinbago officials, the police and officials of the National Carnival Commission (NCC). First, president Armin Smith was allegedly debarred from parking his vehicle on the compound; then, there was heated debate concerning accreditation and bar concessions for Pan Trinbago members; and, even later, there were problems with the sound system.

Today's programme is scheduled to begin promptly at 10 a.m. and, should the first band

(Boys Town) appear on time, the final band (Players Symphony) should reach centre stage sometime after midnight. Cash incentives are being given to the bands which set up their instruments quickest on stage.

One of the big questions this morning is whether Phase II Pan Groove can create history by becoming the first steel orchestra to score a hattrick at Panorama. This popular Woodbrook band will be playing Len "Boogsie" Sharpe's *Fire Down Below*, a composition which has fired much debate, most of it centred around Boogsie's choice of former "queen of soul" Ann Marie Inniss as the vocalist for his '89 compositions.

Although Phase II only started the piece in earnest last weekend, Boogsie is extremely confident of his chances at scoring the third consecutive national victory. But, Boogsie has a lot on his mind, including the change in ruling which will require his band drawing for a position along with its rivals for the February 4 national final.

Last year, public opinion was divided over Boogsie arranging for six bands. This year he has added south's Antilean All Stars to his half dozen clients from last year. Boogsie arranged Baron's *Somebody* for the popular Carib Street band. His other bands will play *Two to Go* (Starlift), *Nani Wine* (Potential Symphony), *Free Up* (Siparia Deltonese), *The Rhythm of the Land* (Curepe Scherzando) and *Fire Down Below* (Skiffle Bunch).

Beside Phase II, only five bands—North Stars, Harmonites, Desperados, Trinidad All Stars, Renegades—have scored consecutive victories in the history of Panorama. While they all tried for the big three and failed, three of them almost achieved the hattrick.

After winning in 1963 and '64, North Stars placed second in 1965 behind Guinness Cavaliers, Desperados won handsomely in 1976 and '77 but were beaten into second place in 1978 by Starlift with a scorching Henshel Puckrin arrangement of Sparrow's *Natacha*. All Stars was victorious in 1980 and '81, but Renegades got the better of the Duke Street heavy rollers in '82 with Kitchener's *Pan Explosion*.

Boogsie's main rival in pan (Ken "Professor" Philmore) arranged for five bands this year, including *Vat 19* Fonclaire, Nutones Hoytonians and Panasonic Connection. Philmore swore "to fight fire with fire" by arranging Boogsie's *Fire...* for Fonclaire. For Nutones, performing in position 21 this evening, he has arranged *Two to Go*.

Another arranging ace, Jit Samaroo has three clients in today's preliminary—Amoco Renegades, Sangre Grande Cordettes and Gerizim Angel Harps. For Renegades he has arranged *Somebody*, with Cordettes playing Boogsie's *Going to Toronto* and Angel Harps playing Tambu's *Free Up*. Patrons ought to

find the Renegades piece, scheduled to be heard in position 23, quite interesting, considering the varied rhythmic patterns *Jit* has managed to include in his interpretation.

While Boogsie, Philmore and Jit have asserted their authority within the steelband arranger emerging and reaching for the stars. Teenager Ardin Herbert, the defending schools and national Steelband Festival champion pianist, will make his debut as an arranger today, arranging Boogsie's *Fire Down Below* for Players Symphony.

Herbert's band—Trintoc Invaders—will also be in the spotlight today when it performs Suzanne Wallace-Romeo's *Life's Too Short*, composed and arranged by Kay Holman, at position 5.

Holman, who lent his services to Carib Tokyo and assisted the band to a third runner-up placing with a beautiful arrangement of his own *My Band*, is back with the John John band again. This time around, Tokyo will perform at position 33, playing *Carnival is a Woman*, another of Holman's compositions which was vocalised by Wallace-Romeo.

Last Tuesday, Desperados captain Anthony McQuilkin finally confirmed that the band is playing Baron's *Somebody* today when it appears in the fourth position. The veteran bass player said that because he was detained on business in North America, arranger Beverly Griffith was scheduled to arrive home last Friday. This year, Despers manager and internationally renowned musician Robert Greenidge arranged the Panorama piece.

Pan aficionados would do well to recall the effect Despers had on the Savannah the last time the band played a Baron piece. That was back in 1984 and the tune was *Jammer*. The North Star was almost demolished after Despers' final night performance, and some people swear that it was one of the sweetest Panorama pieces of all time, rivalled perhaps only by the band's performance of *Party in '82* and *Pandemonium's Sailin'* last year.

Contrary to previous reports, approximately 12 bands will play Baron's popular calypso today. The second most popular piece Boogsie's *Fire Down Below*, with seven bands going to the greens with this selection. It should be interesting to hear what the creator of *Somebody* (Winsford "Joker" Devine) does with the piece when his arrangement for Blue Diamonds is heard at the seventh position.

Meanwhile, several pan pundits are citing Pandemonium as the band with the goods to stop the dreams of Boogsie Sharpe and Phase II. One teenaged Pandee pianist, with her pony tails bobbing on her shoulders, promised that patrons in the North and Grand stands

can be expected to suffer from diabetes today, after arranger Glive Bradley serves his sweet arrangement of *Somebody*.

This year, Bradley, with four national Panorama victories to his credit, is celebrating his 21st anniversary—as an arranger. Speaking with him during the week he singled out *Sailin'* as "the sweetest Panorama piece" he's ever done. Confidently saying that, today's arrangement would be even more "exciting, enjoyable and filled with loving feelings," Bradley has every intention of making it a most memorable occasion for both himself and panatics. Pandemonium will perform just behind Trinidad All Stars in position 13.

Two years have passed since Trinidad All Stars won its last national title and its panatics are hungry to return to the where the star is rare. However, there may be just that little stress today as the band tries to impress its brand new sponsor (Neal & Maury); get into full stride under a relatively new management team; and, produce the kind of stunning performances its supporters have grown accustomed to with new arranger Rudy Wells bringing a new brand of musical expression to the band's fold.

But, let's not forget that there was also considerable stress within the band's ranks last year when it romped home the winner of the North/East preliminary playing Duke's *Pan in Yuh Kooching-Kertungung*. All Stars is strictly championship material and these minor concerns may just be pushed aside as the band canters on to great heights with its performance of Kitchener's *Two to Go*.

It is interesting to note that the first time All Stars won a Panorama title it did so in 1973 playing a Kitchener calypso—*Rainoroma*. Not only that, the selection was arranged by the self-same Mr Rudy Wells. Can Wells duplicate what Beverly Griffith did with Desperados in 1985 with *Pan Night and Day*, 20 years after winning with *Melody*?

Solo Harmonites, having seemingly settled its in-house problems with arrangers, playing *Somebody*, will be the penultimate band on stage tonight. As the year goes by, it seems the band was an awesome force to be reckoned with in the late '60s and early '70s, Earl Rodney will be arranging the selection. Rodney, who like Bradley has four wins under his belt, needs no introduction to this mad, I just reiterate that this was the genius who made magic for Harmonites during the band's golden years.

The hills of Diego Martin are alive with the sound of music and the band responsible for this is Merrytones. This year, everything is in place for Merrytones to reach higher than it has in previous attempts. According to long standing member "Jookit," arranger Lincoln Waldron has been very business like in his approach to Organiser's *Bandit* and Merrytones is planning to steal everybody's thunder tonight when the band performs in position 32.

Also expressing much confidence with what his band has to offer is Pelham Goddard. This legendary Woodbrook musician, having brought *Gold to Third World* in 1977, has now gone to the east where he has been extracting sweet music from the silver instruments of Exodus since prior to Christmas. The band's panists intend putting down a performance today of David Rudder's *Officer* that will have patrons begging them to remain on stage for a few minutes more.

Like the phoenix rising out of its ashes, T&TEC Power Stars is coming quite strong today with a Brian "Beal" Griffith arrangement of Boogsie's *Going to Toronto*. St. James residents are also coming out in full force to support their community band.

Making a welcome return to Panorama is Casablanca. After running into a maelstrom of problems, this historic Belmont band hopes to bounce back to its former heights of glory with Renwick Lewis' arrangement of *Somebody*.

Also returning to the Panorama limelight after many, many years is the celebrated Junior Pouchet. The man who made Silver Stars a virtual legend in pan history, and now resident in Miami, Pouchet will arrange *Somebody* for Valley Harps.

One of the most interesting novelties in today's competition will be the arrangement by a guy called "Babu" Samuel. Babu is the arranger for Antiguan champion steelband Halcyn and will be arranging *Fire Down Below* for Pan Symphony. As far as my preliminary survey goes, I can't recall a previous occasion when a foreigner arranged a Panorama selection for a steelband.

The Tobago Zone preliminary will be held at Shaw Park on Tuesday evening, at 7 o'clock. Nine bands have registered for the contest.



Peter Ray Blood