

The Great Steelband Composer

By Rudy Piggott

VERNON MANNETTE has become a legend to all lovers of the Steelband, Trinidad's most original contribution to West Indian art.

Mannette was a mere youth when the Steelband Movement was gathering momentum. And he was destined, through his musical talent, to shatter, if only temporarily, the class barrier of his native land.

His music so intoxicated the nation that rich and poor together forgot their differences and danced in the streets of Port-of-Spain. And this was an important contribution to national sentiment.

He witnessed the birth of Carnival and, in turn, went on to win praise in the United States of America.

He witnessed the birth of the Invaders Steelband. And, he was one of the chief architects in carrying Invaders to the "Everest" of the Steelband world in the period from 1948 to 1954.

His greatest contribution to steelband music was "The Bude Mumbo" (for "Bude" is his pet name). This tune revolutionised the Steelband for it required more co-ordination and harmony among the different instruments than any time before it. From that time onwards the Steelband became an "Orchestra".

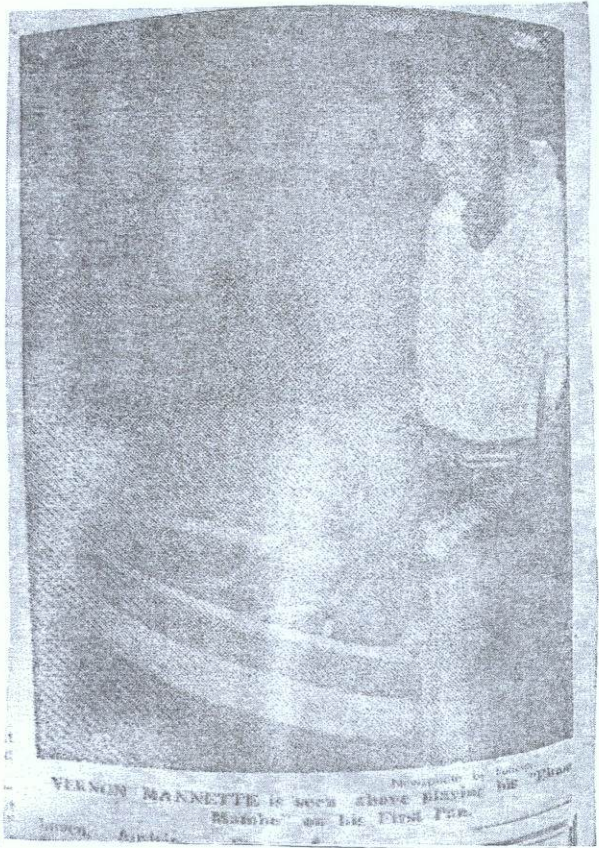
Moreover, Vernon Mannette stands alone. For he is the only Steelbandman who has ever composed a tune which dominated Trinidad's

Carnival and, in turn, went on to win praise in the United States of America.

Vernon also contributed towards another Invaders' hit — "Kelvin's Syncopation". And this tune further accentuated the necessity for co-ordination and harmony among the instruments.

He is indeed an artiste of the highest calibre. He has a style all his own. His touch on the "pan" is soft and melodious. And once one has heard him, he seems to live in one's memory forever.

Vernon has a thorough knowledge of all the different instruments which form a "Steel Orchestra". And he can play them all, although he specialises in the "First Pan". He loves the "First Pan" for it is the only instrument which allows him to be alone to play music for himself. For like Howard Roark of Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead" Vernon Mannette's paramount concern is "the



VERNON MANNETTE is seen above playing "Mumbo" on his First Pan.

head." Vernon Mannette's paramount concern is "the creation itself and not the benefit others derive from it."



He is also a "Pan Tuner." At work with his pencil, hammer and tuning-fork, he is a picture of rigorous, and yet gentle concentration, and, although he tunes all the instruments, his eyes seem to sparkle when he is at work on his beloved "First Pan."

No one has paid a greater tribute to Vernon Mannette than Albert James, musical arranger of the Star Lift Steel Orchestra, who said "The greatest moment of my musical life was when I heard Vernon Mannette play Cole Porter's 'Begin the Beguine.' I heard a genius at work."

Look at history! Every great nation has its men of music. Germany had Beethoven.