

GEORGE GODDARD SUPPORTS PETE SIMON'S CONVICTION THAT TRINIDAD CAN BE THE ONLY VENUE FOR A CARIBBEAN STEELBAND FESTIVAL

Pete and I are thinking ten years ahead of today's panmen

I MUST compliment Pete Simon for his article in last Sunday's EXPRESS under the headline "Trinidad Can Be The Only Venue For A Caribbean Pan Festival." Mr. Simon could not be more true in his arguments and practical in his conclusion.

When I read Mr. Simon's article I was reminded of what one of my friends said some months ago. He said to me, "Goddard, you know what is your trouble? It is your thinking ten years ahead of the present panmen."

"They can't understand or appreciate what you are trying to do for them because they never experienced the hardships of the panmen of 25 years ago who were terrorised by the police, taken advantage on by magistrates and abused by the so-called society, so "dem" fellas now could not care less who fooled them, who used them or who exploited them..."

BACKGROUND

Pete Simon's article and especially the part where he speaks of Red Army and the incident in B.G. (now Guyana), not only reminded me of this truthful lecture I was given on the hills of Laventille, but it made me feel also that it had in Trinidad at least one other such person thinking ten years ahead of the present panmen.

I guess, however, that there are quite a few others like Pete and myself around in both Trinidad and Tobago, though neither their name nor articles written by them, might appear in the newspaper, for numerous and obvious reasons.

brothers in the Caribbean, should have assisted in the provision of the prize for the winning steelband which at the time was a suggested trip to the U.S.A.

Because of not having funds to continue to visit and hold discussions on the subject

Expenses should have been borne by the sponsors of these Steelbands, as the Guyana Government that was sponsoring the festival, could not have afforded to finance the cost of the expenses of the Trinidad Steelbands outside of the boarding and lodging of the members.

This goodly gentleman then informed me that the Guyana Steelband Association, through the assistance of the Guyana Government, was interested in working together with the Trinidad and Tobago panmen to prepare and distribute a textbook of pan and the steelband movement. This textbook, he said, could have been introduced in all schools in the Caribbean.

On hearing these things from my Guyanese visitor, I felt a bit both humiliated and embarrassed and to a lesser degree angry, but I kept my cool.

I however informed my Guyanese guest that I did not believe that the Association of Steelbandmen would have been interested in the project because:

● The Trinidad and Tobago Panmen stood to benefit nothing worthwhile as a result of their participation as guest artistes in the Festival.

● I was of the opinion that the sponsors of no steelband in Trinidad and Tobago would have been interested in the financing of the expenses that would have been involved in sending the steelband they sponsor to the festival and

● I was of the opinion that Trinidad and Tobago, apart from being the birthplace of the Steelband, was too far ahead of any other country on the preparation of any textbook on the origin, history and or future of the steelband, as this would have turned eventually to be a meaningless waste of time, finance and energy.

AMBITION

I nevertheless advised him to go to White Hall and discuss the matter with the White Hall appointed and financed recently formed Steelband Improvement Committee, an official of which was based at White Hall at the time.

A few days later I was informed that the visitor from Guyana and an official

might appear in the newspaper, for numerous and obvious reasons.

But persons like Pete and myself obviously must think ten years ahead of the present panmen, not only because of the fact that "we come from behind the bridge," but mainly because of our association with the panmen of yesteryear and our personal involvement in the steelband (crude as it then was) from its very origin.

Because of this background, one can easily understand why people like us probably think as we do, reaching at times even to the stage of, not bitterness, but disgust, when we see anyone either on the local or foreign scene attempting to push our panmen in a second, third or fourth position. This brings me back to the subject, "Trinidad can be the only venue for a Caribbean Pan Festival."

A DECISION

In May and June of 1967, the Association of Steelbandmen (the only legal body representing panmen) after a decision was taken to try and organise a Federation of Steelbandmen in the entire Caribbean and festivals to include Steelbands from the Caribbean and New York, held discussions with representatives of steelbands of Antigua, Grenada and New York.

At that time neither Jamaica nor Barbados had any well organised steelband although Jamaica then had a good small band of panmen, all of whom were from Trinidad and Tobago. This band I believe was called the Federal All Stars and included Lennard Morris of Merry Makers (leader), Rudolph Johnson of Fascinators, John Gobbs of Our Boys, Desmond Hernandez of Melodixs, Randolph Tyrell of Invaders, Norbert Edwards of Wonderland and Kelvin Hart of City Syncopators.

ABILITY

Antigua and Grenada had about a dozen steelbands each at the time, and seemed very interested, but the leaders of the steelbands in New York, though interested in the organising of such a festival, felt that the New York steelbands should have participated only as guest artistes because of the small membership that made up a steelband in New York which they felt would have been to their disadvantage.

It was their feeling that they, because of finding themselves in a much better economic position than their pan

men, because of not having had the time to visit and hold discussions on the subject with other neighbouring countries in the Caribbean such as St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Guyana, St. Kitts etc., this planned project had to be discontinued.

Efforts were then made to get assistance from Government through its Ministry of Education and Culture, but this fell on barren land and as a result the Association of Steelbandmen had to abandon the idea of such a festival.

There could be no doubt as to what country in the Caribbean would have won and continue to win for a damn long time, for while in Antigua you would find fairly good entertaining steelbands, our Trinidad and Tobago panmen are most certainly ten years ahead of them if not in business acumen and loyalty to self, in musicianship and artistic ability and the panmen in Grenada can be regarded as very far behind those in Antigua.

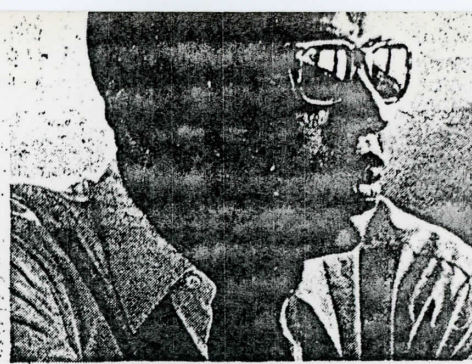
This is not meant to cast any aspersion on brother panmen in the other islands in the Caribbean, but facts must be faced and truth be told.

DISCUSSIONS

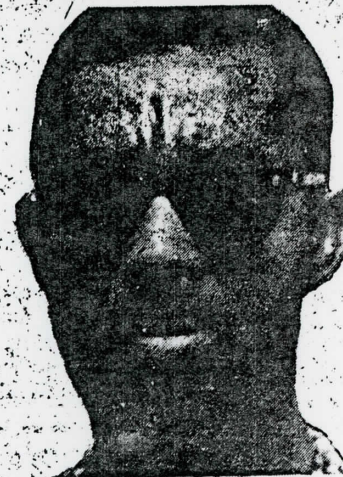
This too, not for one second ought to be interpreted to mean that panmen from Antigua and Grenada and even Jamaica, Barbados or St. Vincent could not have found themselves in the fortunate position of learning the science of panology (as Pete might call it) in a few years, and emerge the champions of the world of steelbands.

Because after all is said and done, the same way that our people in the Caribbean can learn the Englishman's in origin game of cricket and beat him at it today after a few years of trials and tribulations, the same is quite possible in the world of the steelband in relation to festivals.

Sometime in early June last, the Secretary of the Guyana Steelband Association visited me, and in discussions with him



PETE SIMON



GEORGE GODDARD

after he had informed me about a festival that was scheduled to take place in Guyana in July which was to have included a competition among some seven or eight steelbands in Guyana, he requested that the Association of Steelbandmen of which I was then President General, arrange to have appearing as guest artistes three to five sponsored steelbands from the Association.

A few days later I met someone who was the visitor from Guyana and an official of the Steelband Improvement Committee had appeared on television discussing among other things, the participation of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbands at the Guyana Festival with a view of organising a Caribbean Festival of Steelbands in the near future in Guyana.

No one, however, should be angry with either the Government or panmen of Guyana in regard to their ambition to hold such an inaugural Steelband Festival in Guyana, because one must face facts and understand that while on the one hand the Prime Minister of Guyana, Mr. Forbes Burnham and his government are prepared and are making every effort to organise the very few panmen that are 20 years behind their Trinidad and Tobago counterparts into one solid and strong organisation of Panmen, on the other hand certain influential people in the Trinidad and Tobago Government were making every effort to divide the only legal organisation of thousands of panmen in both Trinidad and Tobago.

WARNED

This shows quite clearly that the Government and panmen in Guyana now find themselves in the same unfortunate position as Pete and myself, (as my friend from Laventille told me) thinking ten years ahead of, not only the panmen of Trinidad and Tobago but the Government as well, while the panmen and Government of Trinidad and Tobago are only prepared to play mas and be led by Guyana.

In the not too distant future it might very well be as far as the Steelbands are concerned, "Mas in Trinidad and Tobago, but bacchanal down in Guyana" as Lord Kitchener might say in his calypso.

If a situation like this should in future develop, no panman in Trinidad and Tobago could not say that they were not warned long in advance by Pete "Lord Tabanca" Simon.