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ON THE ROAD Students beat a different tune

BY KEITH SMITH

WHAT THE school's Panorama missed most was children. Noisy children running underfoot and getting in the way. Children looking everywhere but where they going and when you tell them:

"Girl, look where you going!" they answer:

"Steups!" or:

"Sorry, pops! Sorry, old man!" so in the end you don't know whether you prefer the *steups* or the "old man" label. At least you could threaten to clout the *steupsers* but with the others you just have to take your label and *bus it* as they say.

Bus it? What is that, anyway? Is it "bus it" as in "bus" the vehicle, meaning to evoke the sense of movement, the sense of departure? Or is "bust it" as slang for rupture, evoking the sense of letting go and going. Who knows? Who knows anything about this generation anyway? But I missed them yesterday. And not only me. Everywhere you turned some irate person, looking at the kids playing with only a few of their peers to cheer them on, had a name on their lips as they fretted and fumed.

That name belonged to my old teacher (after yesterday I dying to find somebody to call "old" and your college dean bound to be older than you) Clive Pantin. Pantin this and Pantin that and Selwyn Tarradath, coordinator of the *Junior Panorama* professing "disappointment in the Minister of Education" whom he knew to be a man who stood up for what he believed in (hear! hear!) but who had now allowed "political expediency" to cloud his actions.

At issue was the Minister's (you can't call your old dean *Pantin*) refusal to give schools a general holiday yesterday and the truth is, whether he intended it or not, the majority of the 15 participating bands played—often magnificently—to a meagre audience, so that the thing lacked electricity, missed that all-important sense of participation and involvement.

Tarradath did not go as far as another teacher who, quite seriously, told me that it was the "greatest assault ever perpetrated on the art form since the 1940's when scorn was heaped on the panmen" but he did think that the holiday denial was an overreaction by the Minister to "negative press reports" in 1988 but, last night, there were hordes of them in the streets, unruly for truth, but don't blame that on the Panorama, over by four o'clock by my watch.

Two o'clock with three or four bands left to play and the children were streaming in, heading for the North Stand, having learnt from their elders that's where you go to play rebel. The din and the cacophony started, a welcome sound to make up for the boredom of the morning's peace and looking around at today's children I recognized that this was a difficult generation with those absurd hair-cuts, *zugs* really, but each generation, Walcott once noted, is entitled to its own culture and there was a time, remember, when we used to wear pink shirts and black pants and shoes with tyre-soles, *platforms* that had us walking around, looking, for all I know, like "slanted grasshoppers", God, the shame of it now!

Look at them now, though, playing big man and big woman, innocents who don't know they know nothing, having the time of their lives, the boys behind their pans in big-man stance, the girls paying them not the slightest attention, knowing that now, as later in life, they have to keep this thing together:

"Roger, get behind the pan!"

"Denzil, everybody done see yuh already, come in the band, nuh!"

Tell them, girl, and tell the world that this is wholesome activity, that man-for-land we have more young musicians than any country on earth, that the boy with the long foolish earring playing as if the stick is an extended hand, smiling, eyes rolling, is on a natural high!

When they practising and they playing you sure they not piping nothing in no base house, tell them that, girl and tell them how El Dorado Senior Comprehensive make people pores raise, sliding Rose's *Fire, Fire* into Boogie's *Fire Down Below* and tell them about Sterling Smith, youth footballer extraordinary, beating a wicked tenor for *South-East* and tell them, too, how you hear in the Panorama that next year they planning a Commission to vet which political calypso acceptable and not acceptable and beg them, please, not to go down that riotous road because *kaisoniens* say all kinda scandalous *ting* about Williams, Chambers and the rest and *nutten* ever happen. And all of them in opposition then only laugh and conveniently quote the slander. Tell them that, tell them let the calypsonians censor themselves, girl, but better yet, beat them pans and when you beating beat out a symphony for free expression.