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History

PUBLIC DAY SUPPLEMENT, Sunday, September 25, 1988



The Iron section in a steelband



Top band Phase II in New York

THE STEELPAN

The only new musical instrument developed this century and it came from Trinidad and Tobago

THOUGH there is still some controversy as to the exact start of the steelband, local historians agree that it was sometime during 1937. And its origins have been put to the era of bamboo with Afro-French roots.

The pan is the only new musical instrument developed in this century and is Trinidad and Tobago's contribution to the world of music. It has made remarkable strides from those early days in East Port of Spain when the panman, or anyone associated with a steelband

were regarded as social outcasts.

The pan or the philosophy of steelband has gone from the Port of Spain streets throughout the entire Caribbean and has gained popularity in world centres in the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States and Canada.

Our Pan-Men

Today, as has been proven time and time again, our panmen, now with the sophistry of chrome-plated pans, as opposed to the crude, painted steeldrums of yesteryear have impacted forcefully on every country in which is has performed.

Our musical ambassa-

dors stun their audiences with the execution of musical skills and artistry ranging from the simple pop songs to the most demanding classical compositions.

The steelband has an interesting history in the evolution of percussion instruments which accompanied carnival masqueraders for more than a century. The goat-skin drums and the bamboo of the non-melodic era have given way to the present day melodic form of the steelband.

Over the years the movement has made tremendous strides in perfecting these instruments.

Today almost any steelband has a repertoire ranging from calypso to

classics and some have broken new ground by playing sacred music at divine services in a number of churches.

Today the pan has become an integral part of recording artists and church musical ensembles. The range of the modern pan is from A, 2 octaves and a third below middle C, chromatically to F, 2 octaves and a fourth above middle C.

Headly Days

The steelband itself has gone through several changes from the first headly days of the 30s. Today during the annual Panorama competition, bands as large as 100 players converge on centres all over the country vying for the top prize.

As a matter of fact, much emphasis is now being placed on Panorama that bands are unable to build and maintain a repertoire which they could sell to dance promoters. The fever of Panorama seems to have conquered all.

Of course there is the other competition which attracts widescale participation among the bands — the biennial steelband festivals.

This is a Festival year and bands all over the country are gearing for the preliminary competition to start in a few weeks.

