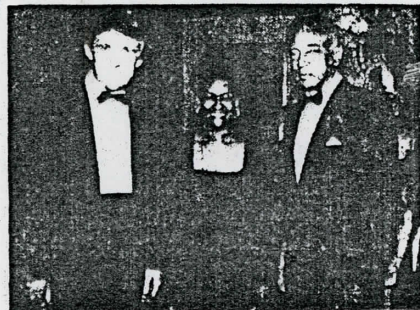




BIG APPLE: DONALD TRUMP, (left), real estate billionaire tycoon of New York with Dr Marjorie Thorpe, Ambassador of TT to the UN, and Senator Ken Gordon, Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism. Photo by ROGER HAYDEN CELESTIN.

NEXT WEEK — ON TOUR WITH DESPERS

Desperadoes upstage New York Pops

By SELWYN TARRADATH

STEELBANDS have been touring the world since the early years of their formation. But the quaint, exotic sounds of Russian Symphony, who later became Red Army and then Merry Makers, Katzenjammers, TASPO and Invaders have given way to the symphonic music of Pan Am North Stars, Desperadoes, Tripoli, Trinidad All Stars and Casablanca.

These bands have established the status of the Steel Orchestra as a bona fide member of the musical family by performing at some of the world's most prestigious venues, such as the Royal Albert Hall, The Apollo Theatre, Carnegie Hall, The Hammersmith Odeon and the Lincoln Centre, to name a few places.

Steelband music is still a luxury among connoisseurs of fine music, but we have been capturing new devotees with each performance before an international audience. The steelband can hold its own against any renowned symphony orchestra; in

But hassles for steelbandmen in big city

fact the performances of the works of the masters leave hardened music buffs spellbound and breathless after hearing it performed on pan for the first time.

Native Culture

It is interesting that certain high officials of the Tourism Authority, and even a government minister are trying hard to sell off the steelband as a mere gimmick to promote tourism. We are supposed to project the "Yellow Bird" and "Rum and Coca-Cola" stereotype, native culture to appease the imaginations of a few tourists, instead of doing the correct thing, which is marketing the steel orchestra in the heart of the metropole where our sophistication can be appreciated in a financially viable way.

The steelband is our greatest ambassador. All the money spent on missions abroad is really a waste of time unless we

can jolt the attention of the people we wish to target. Time and again we have seen our diplomats frustrated by foreign dignitaries who are not too keen to indulge officials from this little speck of dust that has nothing much to offer.

Steelband music breaks all barriers and opens channels of communication. I have been on tours with high ranking government officials who normally snob panmen.

Recent Tour

It was amusing to see after a few days, officials liming with us and borrowing pan sticks, so that they could pass themselves off as band members, and get a chance to rap to the ladies.

The steelband has always been used as a political football by those in power, simply a means to an end. I had many opportunities to witness this at first hand on the recent tour of New York City by Desperadoes.

This I will go into full detail next week.

I was in a meeting with Senator Ken Gordon the morning after the Carnegie Hall concert, at his posh Essex Hotel suite, along with representatives of the North American region of Pan Trinidad. They had requested the meeting to find out how in the future they could assist bands that will be coming to North America, to avoid some of the hassles that Despers endured through bad arrangements between our government and the organisers of the tour.

The evening before, the Desperadoes had upstaged the New York Pops orchestra at their own gala benefit, annual birthday concert.

The Trinidad orchestra received the only standing

Selwyn Tarradath is Education Officer with Pan Trinidad, and has recently returned from touring with Desperadoes.

ovation at the show, which was patronised by the elite of the city, including billionaire Donald Trump, who was allowed to wave his hands in front of the Pops in a charade of conducting the orchestra through one of their selections.

Obviously this impressed Minister Gordon very much, as Donald Trump epitomises the American dream: rich, powerful, handsome and young.

This gesture was just another successful public relations manoeuvre by Trump, who could afford to patronise the New York Pops to the tune of a few hundred thousand dollars, and get a chance to play with another toy.

During our meeting I had intended to keep quiet

and allow the others to conduct their business, but Mr Gordon was intent on painting a rosy picture to them of things to come.

Knowing better, I could not help but cut in and bring it to his attention that unless we put the correct structures in place back home to properly handle the export of the steelband art form, we would continue to spin "top in mud," and be putting ourselves at the mercy of people like John Campi.

The Minister's response was that we need the Campis of the world, and that we should not be fighting now that we are winning. I had to ask him "Winning what?"

He went on enthusiastically about how many connections we had made

through Desperadoes' performance, and that he was in the process of drafting a letter to Donald Trump.

I left that meeting knowing that the Steelband had achieved nothing; all my Minister was concerned about was the connections he had made.

It mattered little that the government had bungled all the arrangements for the tour, and given Mr Campi the mandate to treat the artistes like chattel.

It would have been all right for the band to receive a standing ovation in the most prestigious concert hall in the world, help in filling the coffers of the New York Pops, and go back broken and unhappy to the dreary confines of the Barnard College dormitory, where they would not have been allowed to even entertain friends.