

# Dr Jeannine Remy Starting life over in Trinidad

JOANNE BRIGGS



Getting her hands dirty, DR JEANNINE REMY guides members of BWIA Invaders at the pan yard.

PHOTO: DAVID WEARS

**A**DAPTING to Trinidad is easy as playing a pan. It's all about syncopation, rhythm and style, once you get the hang of it.

For Dr Jeannine Remy, who was born in Wisconsin, USA, it was about timing.

"Bernie Mannette told me practice was at 7 pm and I came on time," she said.

1989 was her first time here. She was collecting data for her dissertation at the University of Arizona.

"I was staying with a lady on Warren Street. Phase II, Starlift, (BWIA) Invaders were nearby and I was peeping around the yards to see where felt comfortable. But I did not know whether to turn right or left," she said.

Her decision to stay with Invaders served as a valuable lesson. She was a player first before she was a conductor for the band, her role at the recently-concluded Steelband Music Festival at which the band placed fifth.

Playing tenor pan was not a difficult task for her. It was far easier than learning how to drive on the left side of the road.

Back in the United States she attended the University of North Illinois which is known as the first institution to establish a steelpan programme at tertiary level. There, Trinidadian Clifford Alexis trained her.

Remy has a musical background with special emphasis on percussion. Learning the pan was a mere transposition. So much so that she gave up a 10-year teaching position at Idaho State University and started life over in Trinidad.

Ironic though in these tough times when locals want to migrate, this foreigner decided to make here home and teach pan.

"You have to do things that make you happy," she said. "I could sit behind my

desk and be an armchair arranger or get my hands dirty."

Remy opted for the latter. She has composed pan pieces for solos, duets, ensembles, quartets, pan around the neck. In 2000 she wrote a Carnival overture. In 2002 she created a piece called "September 11."

At present, Remy is attached to the University of the West Indies where she teaches pan at the Creative Arts Centre.

Her greatest lesson since she first land-

ed here? Every steelband is a family.

"It is a social gathering. It's more than music," she said.

She is also in the process of writing a book on Invaders' history. She is working with Mannette and the band's elders gathering information and finds time to write after pan rehearsals which finish very late.

"When I go home, I write. No matter how tired I am, I have an extra burst of energy," she said.