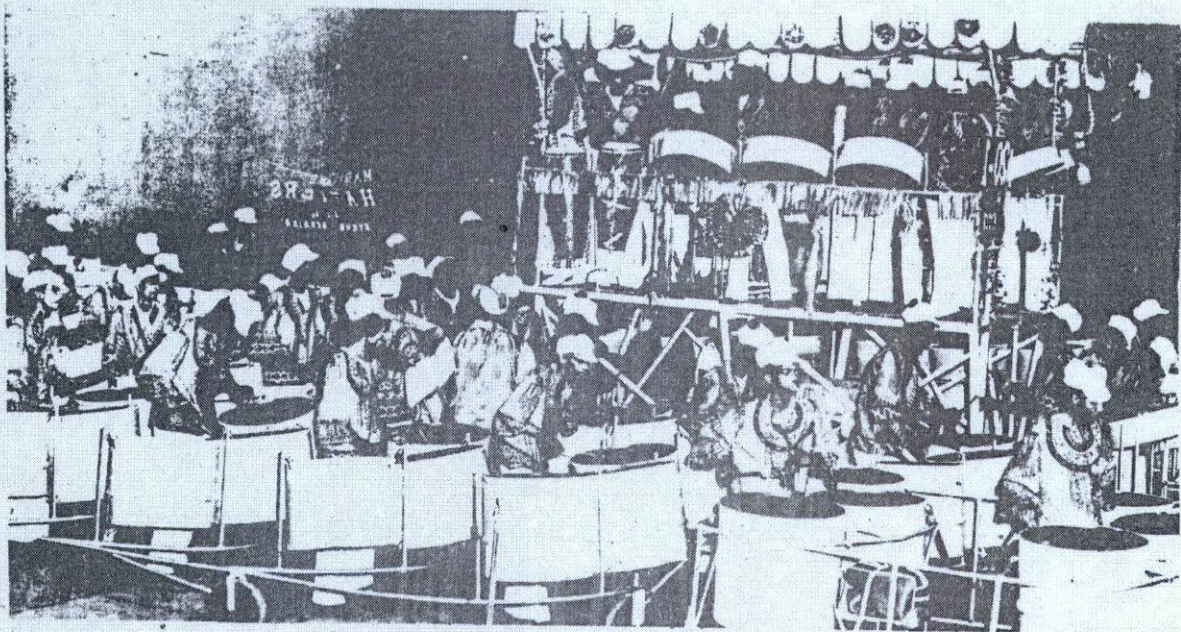


MAS AH KNOW YOU...



LENNOX GRANT

"PAN FEVER" turns out to be a better title than it sounded when it was first put about by Pan Trinbago on January 29. It wasn't immediately clear why a different name from "Panorama" was needed for the annual Carnival-time contests of steelbands mounted on wheels, or pan-on-the-move.

But "Pan Fever" has proved to be a successful marketing headline. It captures a reality and then affects that reality in its turn.

The "fever" or high-temperature condition that creole Trinidadians and Tobagonians manifest at this time of year is of course represented as an illness. And that, come to think of it, is interesting.

The Lord Kitchener who is always right about the words and the music of Carnival had one called "Fever" last year which described the effect on people of the coming of the spirit of Carnival.

One stanza had a plea which was as urgent as that of an addict asking for a fix. "Come on ... form some kind of a band ..."

It came back to me last Sunday as I stood with Kit Roxburgh and Roy Boyke of Key Caribbean in the middle of the paved track in the Savanah looking fifty yards down at a sea of waving

hands in a coming steel-band.

It was Stag Fonclaire playing Flag Woman.

Their yellow canopies inched steadily forward surrounded by people jumping up. And from the distance it looked like a prized piece of food being carried home by the co-operative effort of a colony of ants.

"A steelband in full cry is a formidable thing," Kit Roxburgh commented. Within minutes we had to move aside as the human tide all but engulfed us.

Intent on their instruments, the Stag Fonclaire panmen seemed indifferent to the bacchanal going on around them. Yet the rhythm and the music never lagged. The men were working, despite the bored or distracted look on some of the faces. It was a style, I thought.

"You ent go find nothing more original and more Trinidadian than the steelband," goes a line in Earl Rodney's Steelband Music. Perhaps I should quote the whole stanza:

Maskeraders, you know it's true
You need steelband and steelband need you

Now, after due consideration
Panmen demand recognition
We don't want just Carnival tolerance

We ent go settle for nothing
less than total and complete acceptance
In all aspects of culture in this land

You ent go find nothing more
original and more Trinidadian
than the steelband.

That is how a panman tells it. Earl Rodney, arranger of Solo Harmonies and a highly considered musician, a new kind of panman, has an image that transcends the pan world. As a composer and arranger and bandleader, he is widely respected.

Wearing a Marvin Gaye cap over his plaited grey hair, he crouches over the double tenor which is the lead solo instrument in the band he founded called "Friends".

I wonder how many people heard the lines "We don't want just Carnival tolerance/We ent go settle for nothing less than total and complete acceptance." The new panman is a man who "demands".

But what happens when the fever passes?

Why must the admiration of pan which is now expressed by the thousands who come out to hear and dance to the music be as transitory as a "fever"? So that we depict it as an abnormal condition.

REALITY

"The masks are on again," wrote Roy Boyke in the introduction to the 1975 Key Carnival Magazine. He was not heralding the beginning of Carnival, but rather its end and the return to everyday life. When the masks are put on again.

So maybe it is Carnival and "Pan Fever" that are normal; it is in the

Carnival season that we touch reality jumping up and winning in a band.

Fever!

All ah want to do is jump around

Fever!

All ah want to do is tumble down

Fever!

All ah want to do is dingolay

But calypso, to take up Earl Rodney, is just as original and Trinidadian as the steelband. Which makes Carnival the great and unique celebration of what is "original" and "Trinidadian".

Yet we have an original metaphor about "mih money jumping up in steelband" which means the same thing as "mih money going down de drain". And that coexists with the notion that pan and kaiso and Carnival are "we ting" which is healthy and progressive to encourage and take part in.

The contradictions are there. Jumping up in steelband was expressly forbidden as part of the 1962 Independence celebrations. It was held by the authorities to be inconsistent with the mood of solemn dedication then seen to be appropriate to the occasion.

The Prime Minister, who has been eminently identified with the disparagement of the "Carnival mentality", in 1973 loftily set himself apart from the jumping-up masses by declaring that he didn't wish to stop

the Carnival, merely not to be involved.

Then there has been the rather facile radical view that Carnival is encouraged by the Government as part of a policy to provide circuses to appease and distract the masses. Not the least this view has been influenced by the obvious attempts of Williams and the PNM to make political capital out of Carnival etc.

VALIDITY

The visits to mas camps and panyards in 1971; the hurry to get sponsors for steelbands; the scholarship for Desperadoes in 1970; the way in which Williams can quote calypso (like Scripture) to serve his own ends — all of these are examples.

The result has been to write into history a new section in the chapter on Carnival and Society — that Carnival in the 1970s still has to prove its validity to a number of people who are at least embarrassed by it or who are unconsciously hostile to it.

In the heady days of the early 1970s to say that you enjoy Carnival was, among radical people, to acknowledge a residual decadence or a political blind spot.

Meantime Carnival, calypso and pan went ahead, making some kind of accommodation to a changing society. And to tell the truth that hasn't been widely noticed.