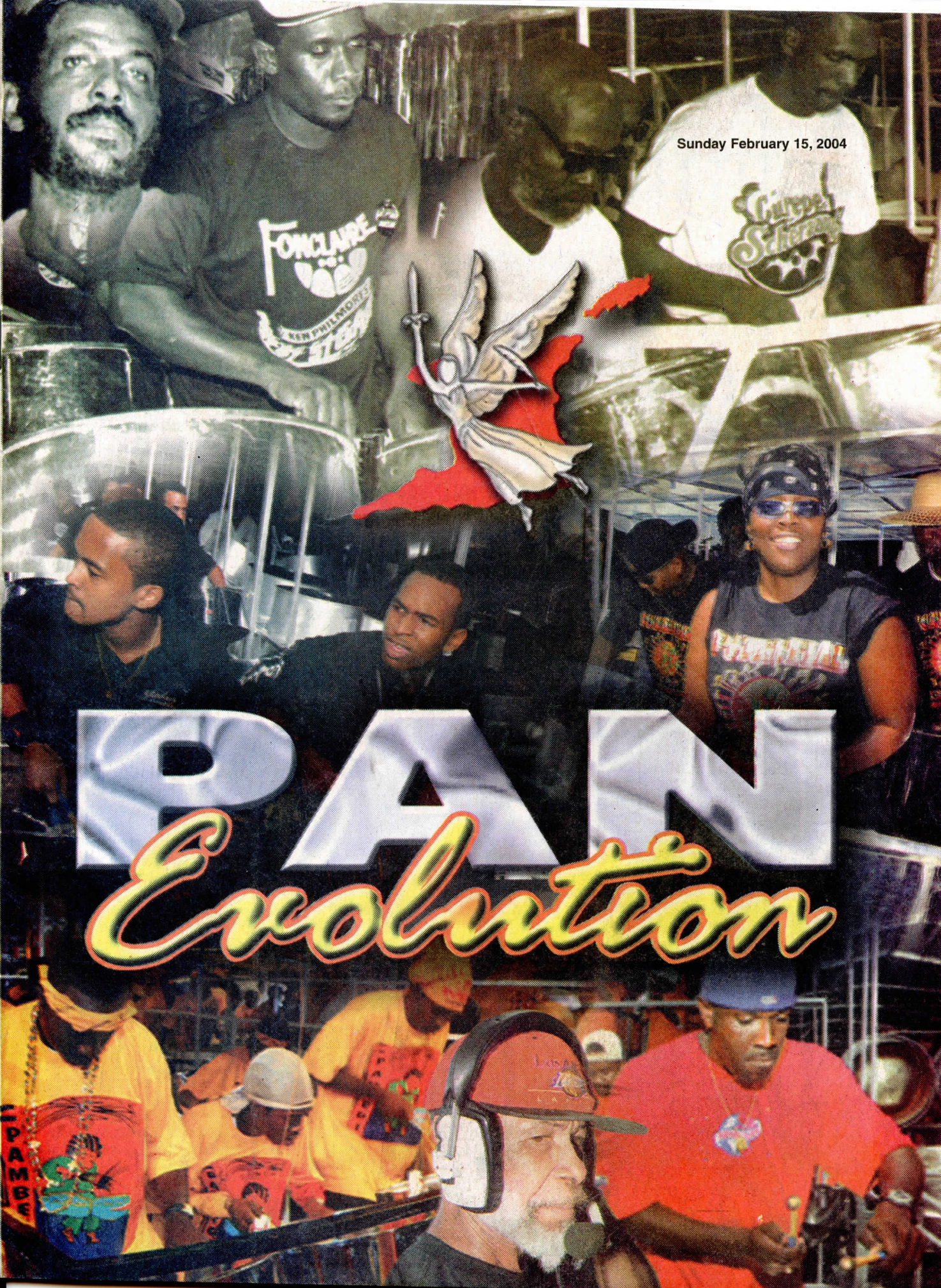


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PAIN

Evolution



History of pan

For over 50 years the world has enjoyed the scintillating, pulsating music of the steelband. Audiences from London to New York and beyond have been left spellbound, amazed that such rich tonal quality could come from discarded oil drums. The refined sound we now hear is the result of decades of hard work, research and innovations by master tuners such as Ellie Mannette, Neville Jules, Bertie Marshall, Anthony Williams, Rudolph Charles and Lincoln Noel to name a few. But how and where did it all start?

There are varying accounts as to the exact date and location in Trinidad the first steelpan was tuned since no official records were kept by either the pioneers or the British colonial government of the day. This, however, is one popular version. Necessity, it is said, is the mother of all inventions, and the steelpan is sound proof of that maxim. It was born out of deprivation, a desperate need by a people to fill the void that was left when something central to their existence was taken away.

Since the 1800s, the inhabitants of Trinidad had been participating in a street carnival brought to the Caribbean island by the French. When the freed slaves (slavery was abolished in the West Indies in 1834) joined in the festivities, they could not afford the conventional instruments, so they used African drums, the instruments of their ancestors, then created percussion bands made up of bamboo joints cut from the bamboo



Rudolph Charles

plant. The "Tamboo Bamboo" bands (tamboo is a corruption of the French word tambour which means drum) bands were rhythmic ensembles that provided the accompaniment for the masqueraders in the annual parade.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s these bands flourished, but by 1940 something dreadful was about to plunge the world into perhaps its darkest and most notorious period in the twentieth century. Unwittingly, the events of that dark era would provide the beam that lit the way to the discovery of a new musical instrument. When Adolf Hitler drew Europe into World War Two, the British colonial government summarily banned the Tamboo Bamboo bands, forcing the

people to look for other ways to make merry. Readily available were steel drums discarded by the oil refineries on the island. As they banged against the flat surface of the drum, the fun seekers accidentally stumbled upon a sound that would lead to further experimentations, and consequently, the birth of steelpan, the only musical invention of the twentieth century.

While death and destruction consumed Europe in the early forties, the lives of the underprivileged, unemployed young men in Trinidad were filled with hope and excitement. They realized that the constant pounding against the flat end of the drum left an indentation, and the sound changed as well. Word would soon spread

about the discovery, and the possibility of making music with the drums. Further experiments would follow. To achieve further indentation, they would heat the drums in bonfires. What they discovered too was that by varying the size and depth on the indentation, it was possible to get more notes with different tones. As the creativity of these youths took over, one note led to two, three, then four on a single drum.

When the war ended in 1945, Trinidadians, like most people around the world, took to the streets in celebration, carrying of course, their new instruments. While they made music, there were still limitations. They needed an instrument on which an eight-note scale could be played. Who would be the first to tune such an instrument?

It is said that a young man from a depressed area of east Port of Spain, the capital city, was the first to do so. Legend has it that Winston Spree Simon, tirelessly working to improve on the initial discovery was able, sometime in the early to mid-forties, to tune the ping pong; on which he could play a complete eight-note scale. With rubber wrapped around one end of a piece of stick, Spree played a simple melody to the excitement of those who surrounded him at what would later come to be known as the panyard. News of Spree's achievement spread like wildfire around Port of Spain and from there on, experimentation with the drums went on apace across the country.

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Much like the rapid changes in modern technology, the development of different instruments with their own distinct tone came in quick succession. At the dawn of the fifties names such as Ellie Mannette and Neville Jules emerged as top class tuners. Simultaneously, bands were being formed across the land, some of them adopting names from American movies such as Destination Tokyo, Casablanca, Rising Sun, Invaders, Tripoli, Bar 20, Red Army, Desperadoes.

These bands were made up of instruments such as the ping pong (which by that time had been improved and expanded by the likes of Mannette and renamed the tenor pan), double seconds, guitars, cellos and bass. To further illustrate the rapid development of the instrument, by 1951 Trinidad was invited to send a steelband to the Festival of Britain at the South Bank Exhibition. This led to the formation of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) with members drawn from steelbands such as Casablanca, Invaders, Free French, Crossfire, Tokyo, Southern Symphony, North Stars, Rising Sun, Sun Valley and City Syncopators. Among the chosen few were Mannette, Spree and a man who would soon earn his place among the legendary innovators/tuners, Anthony Williams.

By the time the sixties rolled around, the steelband was still a work in progress. The pan-yards became laboratories, and men like Williams would take the experiments one step further. His contribution was perhaps the most innovative piece of work of that era. He designed a tenor pan known as the "fourths and fifths," meaning that next to the tonic



note were the fourth and fifth notes of that scale. This design is still the standard used in most steelbands to this day. And Bertie Marshall of the Highlanders would soon follow with his creation of the double tenor, a must in every steelband. The seventies belonged to Rudolph Charles, leader of the Desperadoes who took innovations beyond the tuning aspect of the instruments. He introduced the nine and twelve bass, which effectively extended the range and depth of the bass drums by increasing the number of drums from the traditional six to nine and then to twelve.

Charles followed up with the quadrophonic, and improvements on the pitch of the tenor pan to what is now known as the high tenor; He also changed the appearance of the steelband with the silver chroming of instruments replacing the oil paints of the fifties and sixties. For better movement of bands through the streets, and to protect the instruments from the sun during the carnival parades, he

put the stands on wheels and covered them with canopies.

These developments were not confined to Trinidad and indeed Tobago, the other half of the twin-island nation. Across the seas on the smaller islands of the eastern Caribbean, in the late fifties and sixties, bands were being formed as well, at first with instruments bought in Trinidad, but later with home-made brands by men who had, over time, learned the art of tuning. For instance in the early fifties, Antigua, to the north, boasted of such bands as Brute Force and Hell's Gate. In the decades that followed, the steelband would move beyond the shores the Caribbean to North America, England, other parts of Europe such as Holland, Switzerland, Sweden and as far east as China, Japan. Today in Trinidad alone, there are more than 100 steelbands. Across the world, hundreds more.

Back in Trinidad in the late fifties/sixties, the developments in the steelband world

were not simply a contribution to the family of musical instruments. The bands, comprised mainly of unemployed young black men, often found themselves in violent confrontation, something akin to the gang warfare that gripped certain cities in North America. As a result, these young men who should have been regarded as pioneers, were reviled by a large portion of the society, regarded as social outcasts, particularly by the middle and upper classes.

After the island became independent from Britain in 1962, the new government moved to change the image of the panmen as they were being called. Official involvement was evident with the hiring of bands to perform at social and state functions. Corporate sponsorship was also encouraged to provide the bands with funds to purchase drums, pay for arrangers, tuners and uniforms. Hence such marriages as Amoco Renegades, Coca Cola Desperadoes, (now West Indian Tobacco Company (WITCO) Desperadoes, Pan Am North Stars (since disbanded), Shell Invaders (now BWIA Invaders), Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) Starlift (now Petrotrin Starlift). The involvement of corporate citizens in the affairs of these motley groups slowly helped to erase the stigma and bring about social acceptance by the wider community. Panmen are now regarded as the cultural ambassadors of the land and the steelpan has been officially recognized as the national instrument. In addition, both sponsor and band have grown to respect each other's role in their mutual existence.

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With this new image, the war on the streets soon gave way to another kind of warfare - a musical war on the stage. In 1963, the Carnival Development Committee which was formed to put a sense of organization into the street festival, started the panorama competition with each band vying for recognition as the superior band in the land. In this competition, every band is required to play a 10-minute rendition of a calypso of choice. The winners and other participants are rewarded financially and there are other perks, such as trips overseas and engagements at home.

Over the past three decades, several bands have shot into the national consciousness as they repeatedly claimed the coveted title as panorama champions. Bands such as Desperadoes and Renegades (9 wins each), All Stars (4), Phase Two Pan Groove (2), Exodus (1) are now household names with international followings.

Indeed, over the past four decades, the steelpan has come a long way, moving from the panyards of the most depressed areas of a society to some of the most prestigious concert halls around the world. The Desperadoes, for instance, have performed at the Royal Albert Hall in London, Carnegie Hall, the Apollo and Lincoln Theaters in New York, the United Nations building, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Other bands like Renegades, All Stars, Phase Two, Exodus have wooed audiences from London to Paris to Japan, mesmerizing them with their renditions of some of the most complex works



of the classic composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Sibelius, Rossini, Borodin.

As the world gets ready to enter the new millennium, the students of Spree, Manette, Williams, Marshall, Charles who with their genius and creativity gave this century perhaps its sweetest gift, are preparing to take pan to higher heights. No one knows what the final product will be, but we know for sure that it will continue to make a joyful noise unto the world of music.

The rhythm section is comprised of the following pans:

Bass pans

Bass pans are used to develop the frequencies of the orchestra and can be made up of anywhere from three to twelve bass instruments with each drum having three or

four notes each. The tonal range can move from G1 to C4 to include a tenor bass.

The bass pan is a low range instrument and due to the size of the notes used, there may be as few as three different pitches on each barrel, requiring the use of six, eight, or even more barrels to complete a single instrument.

Quadrasonics pan

This is the sister instrument to the 'cello pan'; but has two drums set flat in front of the player, while the two remaining barrels are set vertically.

Quadrasonics pan can range from B2 to Bb5, was invented by Rudolph Charles of West Indian Tobacco Desperadoes was primarily unique to the Desperadoes steel orchestra, but is now used by many other steel orchestras. Quads or four pans

are used to share the harmony, play chords and some melody. Each drum can have six or seven notes each.

Cello pan

The Cello-pans have as many as nine notes each and are generally hooked in pairs to allow for chording. More recently there are triple and four cello-pans designed to increase the tonal range. The range for the cello-pans move from B b2 to C#5. They are used to add notes to the harmony, and to double the bass.

Usually three or four barrels, set in a semicircle on this instrument. It fills a variety of roles from bass lines and strums, to melody.

Guitar Pans

Guitar pans can have fourteen notes on each pan and can be played in pairs. The range moves from C#3 to C#4. Double guitars can be arranged with two guitar pans, hence double guitars. There are also treble guitars. Guitar pans are used to add notes to the harmony and also to share the harmony.

Tenor Pans

Tenor pans are the most highly regarded of all the instruments because of the skill, dexterity and command of the aural tradition required for playing the most prestigious instrument. The tonal range can start from F3 with the high tenor providing notes from D4 to G6. Tenor pans can be arranged from low tenors to double second and double tenor. The tenor pan is used to carry the melody; double tenors are also used to carry the melody, while the double second is used to play chords and some melody.



From Steel Bacchanal to Panorama

Steelband rivalry was always present and the first Steelband Association saw the need for channeling this energy into a positive direction. Concerts and Festivals where Steelbands competed against each other, began in the early fifties and have become a permanent fixture. The year 1963 saw the introduction of a Carnival competition called 'Panorama' which immediately caught the fancy of both the public and panmen. Pan Am North Stars proved themselves to be the champion Steelband in the world by winning the competition, having won the Music Festival the year before in a most convincing manner. The first Panorama competition required no great extra effort from the Steelbands. Bands just selected the best tune from their repertoire and carried their stage side, along with the best road players.

Steelband activity in the era was varied at Carnival time. The regular stage side was augmented by road players who were needed to play both at fetes and on the road for the band's masquerade presentations. There were panmen who become motivated mainly with Carnival fever in the air and more often than not, put down their sticks after the season. This was also the time for newcomers, particularly youngsters, to be 'blooded' into pan playing. Bands learnt about ten (10) tunes, mainly for playing in Carnival dances and at least one (1) of these was a non-calypso played in calypso tempo, be it a pop tune or classic.

This was called 'The Bomb' and was usually 'stopped' on J'ouvert morning at the beginning of the two-day Carnival festival. Songs were learnt in the afternoon and



late evening by 8.30 p.m. the panyard concert was ready to begin as crowds of people which included both supporters of the band and supporters of rival bands, converged, to be serenaded with hard jamming steelband music as the band rehearsed its repertoire. These same people would make it a must to visit the nearby mas camps to gaze at the pictures on display and possibly to choose a section and make a down-payment on their costume.

The Carnival fetes were dominated by the steelbands with an occasional brass band in attendance and from the mid-fifties to the late sixties the steelband ruled the road on Carnival days from J'ouvert morning to last-lap on Tuesday night which carried revelers to the brink of Ash Wednesday and the end of festivities.

Today the Steelband has lost its place in Carnival, the dance halls no longer reverberate to the sound of steel. The chipping of thousands of feet to a Steelband on the street, its music almost lost in the throng of supporters and masqueraders, is no more. The Panorama show has become a monster which threatens to devour the very Steelband from which it was conceived.

The popularity of the Panorama competition encouraged the Steelband sponsors to use it as one of their main vehicles for promotion and advertisement. Tuners and arrangers were paid retainers' fees and as each band strived to keep an edge, the price of instruments sky-rocketed as did the arrangers' fees.

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From Steel Bacchanal to Panorama

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The Music Festivals accelerated the development of the Steel orchestra as the demand for a suitable range of instruments to faithfully reproduce the scores of the classics, which the bands favored, was met. The Panorama competition took this quest for innovations to a ridiculous height as some range of instruments was often duplicated as double pans became tripled, quadrupled, even reaching to as much as six pans for a set. The five (5) bass sets made way to six (6) sets, seven (7) sets, nine (9) sets and even twelve (12) sets. This has made the steel orchestra cumbersome and unwieldy and because new and larger designs of stands had to be made to carry these instruments, the Steelband is presently faced with a problem of mobility on the road. The year 1965 saw a new trend to the Panorama competition. Port of Spain was rocked by the power and sheer weight of a band from San Fernando, Guinness Cavaliers which came to the city for the National Panorama Preliminaries with what seemed like all the pan players from South Trinidad. Public acclaim for the band was enormous and they were run away winners, dethroning Pan Am North Stars who were champions of the first two competition and eclipsing bands like Coca Cola Desperadoes, with a simple arrangement.

The following year saw a remarkable increase in the size of bands and if Pan Trinbago had not stepped in to place an upper ceiling of one hundred (100) players in the early seventies, who knows how far this situation would have reached?

We had begun to see bands

appearing with over two hundred (200) players and taking up the whole massive Queen's Park Savannah stage.

All emphasis was now placed on the Panorama competition. Un-sponsored bands were left in the cold as they could not cope with the sudden increase in recurrent expenditure. The Panorama competition served to grade the bands. Bands which were inclined not to make the competition a priority, were in danger of losing their sponsorship and bands without a sponsor were not given much attention in the competition.

Panyard activity changed dramatically. The bands learnt fewer tunes as most of the time was spent on perfecting the Panorama tune. The attraction of the panyard diminished in the public eye, no one wanted to hear the band rehearsing the same part for hours. The mas camp was neglected and bands refused fete engagements as these disturbed Panorama practice. The dance promoters turned to the D.J. and conventional bands, which, with the increasing use of electronic equipment, began to create a bigger sound than the steelband.

Costumed bands become a commercial venture and

the steelband with its preoccupation with panorama lacked the resources to stave off the challenge of the mas bandleaders, who, with the power of the amplified brass band, could now produce bands of over a thousand revelers and so successfully turn the tables on the Steelbands which traditionally attracted larger crowds.

The Panorama competition has become the biggest event in our annual entertainment calendar but the Steelband has been forced to pay a high price to be King for a year. We have lost most of our traditional activities and sources of revenue.

The Steelband Music Festival has now become one of the most important events on the social and music calendar and is now beginning to attract international attention. Pan Trinbago is gradually introducing more of a local flavor into the festival by giving a greater role to the local musician in the areas of composition.

They are also obtaining the services of international musicians to act adjudicators and the standard of performances is steadily rising until today the Steelband can almost cover the range of the symphony orchestra and in fact matches the symphony

orchestra in the execution of the classical works of the great masters. The development of digital recording techniques augers well for Steelband music which has always posed a problem when it comes to putting the music on wax. The Steelband is slowly gaining international recognition, although it is still regarded as a novelty and the very mention of the word Steelband still conjures up visions of exotic, tropical Islands, palm trees, sandy beaches and scantily dressed natives.

The Pan sound is now frequently used in tracks of popular recordings and many of the better known exponents of the art of pan playing are regularly featured on works of some of the biggest names in the recording industry. Some internationally known panmen are Robert Greenidge, Andy Narell, Othello Molineau, Rudy Smith, Anise Hadeed, Len 'Boogie' Sharpe, Earl Rodney and Ken Philmore. The pan sound is even simulated on the synthesizer and used for recordings and live performances.

International recognition for the Steelband also depends a lot on the integration of Steelband instruments with those of the conventional bands. This fact has not been lost to the practitioners of the art and there are some good and fairly successful efforts in direction.

Prior to 1963, the Carnival Steelband Competition was called Steelband Bacchanal. It was the Chairman of the National Carnival Commission Mr. Ronnie Williams, who gave the name 'Panorama' to the Steelband competition which is part of the carnival celebrations in the country.

