

by LYDIA SAM

THE ROAD FROM BADJOHN TO AMBASSADOR

I THINK almost everyone envies the modern panman.

He has also been called a wonderful ambassador.

Who would have thought that the humble oil-drum would speak for greats like Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Brahms, Handel, Litz, Rogers, Hammerstein, Porter? No one.

And no respectable person ever passed near a panyard because panmen were then the most notorious lot of "badjohns." When they were not experimenting with the pans,

they were fighting each other.

Yes, the panman of yesteryear "had it hard." "If yuh sister talk to a steelbandman, de family want to break she hand, put she out, lick out every teeth in she mouth, pass yuh outcast...."

It is wildly different today. The days of Sparrow's social outcast seem to be over..

An Association which is functioning as a reasonably efficient body, has been

formed for steelbandsmen.

Perhaps it has done far more for pan-music and steelbandsmen than all the businessmen in this country put together.

A few, very dedicated supporters, have piloted the panman and his music, into the hallowed grounds of religion; the bands are receiving higher rates for their performances, and hesitatingly, but surely, the women are taking their places in what was previously a man's affair.

They have even decided to project a different image of the panman and his music abroad. The top boys are sent on scholarships, tours are promoted and encouraged. And they are ensuring that the future panman would have expert training. Pan-lessons are catching on rapidly at schools.

It has begun to pay off. Different arrangements, like the combination of steelband (the West Indian Tobacco Gay Desperadoes), and brass (Herb Alpert's Tijuana) for the hit tune "Mr. Sandman."

Innovations have come, more will develop. And we owe it to discarded drums and talented men.