

PANMEN TO MEET EAR SPECIALIST

Trinbago officials hope for solution to deaf problem

By THERESE MILLS

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PAN TRINBAGO, which represents steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago, announced yesterday that steelband leaders, tuners and arrangers are shortly to meet Ear Specialist Dr. Mohammed A. Aziz to discuss the problem of deafness which is affecting an increasing number of panmen in the country.

Dr. Aziz reported last week that steelband players were seeking treatment in increasing numbers at the General Hospital's Ear, Nose and Throat Clinic which he heads, and he expressed concern at the general increase in deafness in the country which was becoming a public health problem.

Mr. Roy Augustus, president of Pan Trinbago, and Mr. Peter Aleong, yesterday praised Dr. Aziz for making public his clinical findings, a development which, they said, they had previously suspected to be the case.

"What Dr. Aziz has done," Mr. Augustus said, "is given scientific evidence to what we have suspected for some time based on our layman's observations."

"As far as the steelband is concerned we have been aware of the effect of noise on the players' hearing, and tried to do some research on our own."

"We are grateful to Dr. Aziz for his study in this field and hope to work with him to find a solution to the problem so that the future of the steelband is not hampered in any way."

The Trinbago officials also announced that Mr. Aziz would be carrying out tests on all members of two leading steelbands whose names are to be announced shortly.

Dr. Aziz has also promised to assist the association with a lecture and film show programme on deafness for the enlightenment of all panmen.

The association stressed, however, that individual pan players who wished to be involved in the programme should not go direct to Dr. Aziz, but should apply through the association.

Mr. Augustus also stated that

Dr. Aziz had made two suggestions which might help to eliminate the degree of noise caused by the steelband.

One was the standardisation of bands in one key which would cut down the tuner's work; and secondly, development of a 'noise shield' which panmen could wear and which, while eliminating some of the noise caused by hitting the pan, would not affect the note itself.

Mr. Augustus also said that plans were afoot to develop machinery which would do the early preparation of the pans and leave the tuner free for the really important technique of putting in the notes.

"The machine," Mr. Augustus said, "would eliminate the tedious early work of sinking

and grooving the pans, and all the tuner would have to do is put in the notes."

Mr. Augustus agreed with Dr. Aziz that pan tuners were the worst affected by the noise due to the long hours they had to put in.

"The affect of all the noise on their hearing is obvious," he said, "from the fact that the first pan tuned is always so much 'sweeter' than the others. This is directly due to the fact that the longer a tuner works on pans the more his sense of hearing loses some of its keenness."

Both Mr. Augustus and Mr. Aleong stressed that panmen should not be afraid that the danger of deafness meant the

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Goddard's hearing is defective

MR. GEORGE GODDARD, former president of the Steelband Association and a noted panbeater in his time, said yesterday that he suffers from defective hearing — a hangover from his steelband days.

suffer from hearing problems from the constant beating of the pans during tuning.

"Nobody in Trinidad loves the steelband more than I," he said, "But I think we have to be serious about the side effects of its noise not only on the players but on residents in the vicinity of a steelband yard."

He thought that finding a solution to the problem was not beyond the ingenuity of the people who had created the steelband in the first place.

He added that he did not think the possibility of deafness would deter young people from beating pan.

"Now that the problem has been given prominence by an ear specialist," Mr. Goddard said, "we should be able to do something about it. The country to whom the steelband is so important, should be grateful to Dr. Aziz for his study on the subject."

Commenting on an exclusive "Sunday Guardian" report that the noise of steelband playing was making panmen deaf, Mr. Goddard said that 15 years ago he reported this to the Prime Minister with certain recommendations.

Among the recommendations, he said, was that pan tuners, who suffer the most, should be employed by the State for a period of ten years and then given a gratuity because they were almost certainly bound to