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Journey through magical world of steelpan

Sateesh Maharaj

NATHAN AND NATASHA, both ten years old, discover a magic steelpan at their grandparents' home in the suburban town of Belmont, North Trinidad. Their curiosity leads them to the revelation of the old steelpan's magical qualities one of which is the ability to take them over land and

sea, across the boundaries of time to places and events of which they have never even dreamt. These events are found in *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan: How Grandpa Conks Got his Name*, a children's storybook which seeks to inspire youngsters to learn about this country's national instrument in an enjoyable way.

The book was recently



PHOTOS: ANISTO ALVES

Story characters Natasha and Nathan listen as Grandma reads an excerpt from the book.

launched at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre.

Speaking on the origin of the book, Mango Rose director Ian "Teddy" Belgrave said that he was one of many who felt that there was something missing with respect to opportunities for young people in the steelpan industry.

"Something was wrong with the fact that young people here in this country continue to master with ease the pan, but they could only look forward eventually to unemployment and frustration. While that is happening here young people abroad were developing significant careers in the steel pan industry."

He continued: "Something was wrong with the fact that at home, here in the Mecca, our impetus continued to be competition. While we are consumed in that, we were leaving the research and development for persons abroad."

This prompted Belgrave along with fellow directors Nestor Sullivan, Nubia Williams and author Leeanna Williams to come together to form Mango Rose Steelpan Services—named after the famous barrack yard which was previously located at the corner of Duke and Picadilly Street, where the Dry River demarcation begins.

Belgrave explained: "It was in the barrack yards, not only in Port of Spain but elsewhere in the urban

sectors throughout the country, where the modern steelband was created and flourished. It is the creativity of the barrack yards that we seek to identify with in our choice of name."

Tax Manager at bp Trinidad and Tobago, Richard Duncan, stressed on the importance of reading. He feared that it was something that society today would soon forget.

Patricia Elder, Curriculum Officer, Music at the Ministry of Education, said that not only do children love stories, but stories that create a sense of mystery and adventure. She said *The Adventures of the Magic Steelpan* uniquely combines elements of our culture and the aesthetic.

Nestor Sullivan, director, revealed that this was the first of seven books in a series to be published. He said that Mango Rose was also involved in the creation of charts which separately illustrated several topics including, steelpan care and maintenance, careers in pan, steelband history and evolution, the steel orchestra and steelpan manufacture. Mango Rose also intends to host a series of steelpan-themed seminars.

Author Leeanna Williams said her inspiration for the book came from her having grown up in a musical environment.

"Growing up in a musical family, among pianists,

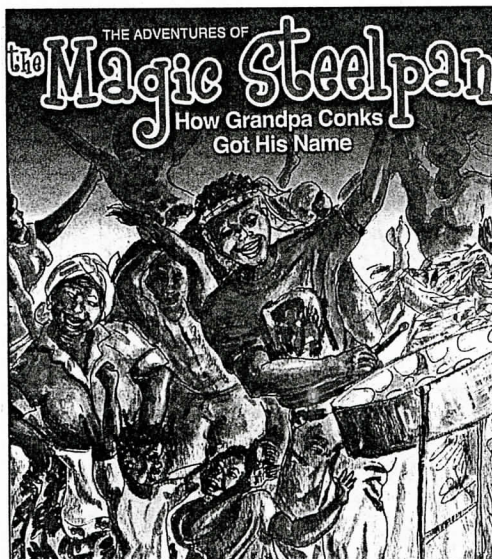
guitarists, recorder players and pannists afforded me the wonderful opportunity of being submerged in a rich, cultural environment from an early age. I developed a lasting love for the steelpan listening to my amazingly talented sister, Nubia, play. Soon I found myself glued to the television and radio witnessing steelpan giants go through their paces."

She said that her world changed when her brother Atiba started to play at just 18 months. She became absolutely captivated by the instrument and would listen to him for hours. When she started teaching, she said she took her love of steelpan with her.

"I wanted my children to know how I felt about the steelpan. I wanted them to know and feel its roots. I wanted them to know that the steelpan is indeed a magical instrument. I became aware of the urgent need for tools specially designed for children in this area when I partnered with my sister Nubia in steelpan education."

Williams said the series was written on three major themes, the steelpan as a universal instrument and symbol of perseverance and triumph, the irresistible allure of the steelpan as an instrument and the heroism of individuals involved in the steelpan movement and advancement.

Illustrator Valerie Belgrave said it was an absolute joy to do the drawings which are watercolour sketches.



The cover of the book.