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Sean Richards gets down for
a solo contribution during the
Ramsey Lewis medley as his
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BASS MAN: David Every pulls on
the strings of the box bass during the
performance at Robert Munn's Among
Friends one of the guest artists at
last Friday's Panazz concert.

Photos: COLIN SHEPHERD

Panazz Players

BASS MAN: Dave Evelyn pulls on the string of the box bass during the performance of Robert Munro Among Friends one of the guest artistes at last Friday's Panazz concert.

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Panazz Players please pan fans

By TERRY JOSEPH

FEWER THAN 700 lucky people got to experience Trinidad's top show-steelband on Friday and Saturday nights at the Central Bank auditorium in Port of Spain.

And what the rest of the nation's pan-lovers missed was a fantastic concert put on by the Panazz Players.

The auditorium itself holds 350 at best, and for a show that opened on the evening following a thrilling day of cricket between world One-Day champions (Sri Lanka) and the home team, it did well.

Here's a steelband which has introduced a sense of humour into the performance of its music and one which puts its audiences immediately at ease.

Too often have we seen a bunch of grim-faced men purporting to be *playing* pan. For some reason, those who master the instrument always look vexed during performances, giving audiences the impression that the playing of pan is a most unpleasant and tedious exercise.

Not the Panazz Players. From minute one, the group gets into a warm, smiling and friendly frame, with co-captain Yohan Poppell clowning around the set while executing some of the most intricate passages and solos on the double tenor pans.

His continuous interface with fellow double tenor player Natasha Joseph was not only in place during regular performance, but specially highlighted in the performance of the perennial favourite "Summertime" (from *Porgy and Bess*).

It was an interesting audience too that came together that evening to celebrate the musicianship of the 13-member group, plus the work of their guest artistes.

First among the guests was Danica Daniel, a relatively new singing talent.

Then, there was saxophonist Curtis Lewis and Robert Munro Among Friends, who opened the second half of the two-and-a-half hour show.

Daniel was just a little more tame than she needed be, what with the showmanship of Panazz immediately behind, she could have injected just a tad more life into her presentation.

Normally associated with the Mike Boothman group Kysofusion, Daniel did "L.O.V.E." and "Fly Me to the Moon". During the band interlude in the second song she engaged in a little dancing with tenor pan player Dane Gulston, much to the delight of the audience.

Curtis Lewis for his part, played only the soprano sax and flute that night (on Saturday he included works on the tenor saxophone).

Even so, there was some visible difficulty with his microphone and transmitter, which caused him to play the soprano saxophone pointed toward the floor for the entire performance of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" and Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Girl From Ipanema".

His work on the flute for "El Dorado", however, freed him

of the physical constraints, as he played this time in front of a standing microphone. Judging from the tremendous response from the audience, the difficulties of amplification did not detract unduly from his performance.

The other guest performance came from Robert Munro Among Friends, who opened the second half of the show. The four-member aggregation features David Evelyn on box bass, Gilbert Corbie on guitar, his wife Lorna on maracas, Monty Dolly on guitar and Robert himself on cuatro.

Munro, who has been hailed as one of the best cuatristas in the world, certainly brought home his versatility on the instrument that night, with works ranging from solos to calypso and Latin melodies.

Munro opened with a solo "Ai!", following it with "Como Una Flor" (Like a Flower), "El Diabolo Suelto" (The Devil is Loose) and the piece made famous by the Pan Am North Stars steelband, "El Relicario" (The Locket or The Jewel Box).

He joined The Panazz Players for a performance of "Tico Tico" which absolutely delighted all present.

But the Panazz Players were the very real stars of the evening. Their polished performances of a repertoire designed to engage mature audiences, brought them continuing applause from the house.

From their opening performance of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"—the most engaging choice of repertoire—through "I'll Remember April", "Iron Man" and the Latin flavoured "Passion Fruit", the band took the audience through the first half with full support of the house.

AFTER accompanying the first two guest artistes, they came back with Errol Garner's "Misty" to complete the first half.

This intricate and well-loved song gave the band the perfect opportunity to introduce their 12-year-old six-bass player Donell Thomas.

Donny is still the quintessential showman (or is it boy?) dancing around the pans to execute the requirements of some tricky pieces which the lad, who is barely taller than the drums, manages to play.

He would be back, but when not playing the six-

bass would fall in on the percussion, losing no flair in the exchange. Then, the standards came rolling off the pans: "Carmen" and "Shadow of Your Smile" attracting particularly warm receptions.

BUT it was the jazzy (swing) version of the Ramsey Lewis medley which brought the crowd to hand-clapping and finger-popping on hearing traditional jazz favourites like "Wade in the Water", "Hang on Sloopy" and "The Inn Crowd".

All of this left room for only their prize-winning version of "Portrait of Trinidad", the work which helped to win them top honours at the 1995 Pan Ramajay competition.

After that, we simply got to meet the members of the band and then go out on a warm and merry note with the

three-quarter time "Jumping with Symphony Sid".

It was just 10:30. This was no Panorama band; they entertained, finished early and everyone was pleased.

Pan Trinidad president Owen Serrette probably put it best. "This band should not be here for a concert, they should be out touring the world, spreading this fine blend of pan and showbiz across the globe."

Panazz Players are not far behind that ideal. They played London last December and are off to St Lucia next week for the fringe concerts which will accompany the much touted St Lucia Jazz Festival.

Besides, last weekend's performances, let us not forget, were staged to record their next compact disc. Already, the product is worth the purchase price.



CHINESE CLOWN: Dane Gulston, centre clown, around in Oriental get up, to highlight the Chinese tint in the song "Portrait of Trinidad".