

# 't be slow

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"OUR cultural traits are draining away and we eh doing nothing to make them stay; Tobago goat race, crab race, bongo limbo and stickfighting draining out slow. Why not put in every school a steelbandsman to train children to beat pan? That is what I call brain drain."

No Trinidadian resident at home since 1968 can forget these words. They were sung by Calypsonian Chalkdust, who is also a school teacher, in his song "Brain Drain."

It was indeed an educational and informative editorial which he released to his people, but unfortunately it fell on deaf ears.

Since then our steelband movement has been plagued consistently with an "overseas attraction." The best tuners of steelband instruments are now residing outside of the country, the majority in the United States of America. Is the country aware of this?

And what is being done to remedy the sorry situation? Nothing worthwhile!

## PRODUCT

The director of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Band, Superintendent Anthony Prospect, last month, called for the establishment of a steel pan factory in Trinidad.

"If we don't look sharp Trinidad and the rest of the world may soon be buying pans marked "Made in Japan" at a relatively cheap price, or perhaps we are going to wait until America enlists the services of a few pan tuners and starts mass production," said the musical authority.

Trinidad and Tobago has been lax in developing and promoting its own national product. Chalkdust, in song, brought attention to the situation and the action was negative.

## STIGMA

Now that an influential Mr. Prospect has spoken, how much fuel will be added to the flame is left to be seen. In his treatise on the Steelband of Trinidad and Tobago Prospect says: "The steelband could be described as the new sound in music: an invention of the twentieth century."

Beyond any doubt Tony Prospect is correct about his pronouncement. And America is aware of the uniqueness of this form of music. What proof is there?

Simple. Ellie Mannette, well-known pioneer since 1966 has been teaching the art to Americans. The project is being financed by the City of New York.

Ellie is aware of the backwardness of his people in putting steelband where it belongs. He told me: "If the City of New York can offer me an opportunity to teach in the schools, I don't see why the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should



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wait so long to put it (steelband) in the colleges."

Ellie is still conscious of the stigma which affects the movement consequently he added: "Obviously when the college boys graduate they won't be called pan men and underprivileged boys. They will be considered musicians."

Take it or leave it Ellie Mannette is quite correct. Evidence of this is seen at Carnival time when lawyers, teachers and civil servants play these same instruments on the two-day festivities, when you hear remarks like: "You eh see doctor 'X' betin' pan wid Starlift yesterday?" or "Ah didn' know dat lawyer fellah cud beat pan."

## UNIQUE

Due to this unfortunate, narrow-mindedness on the part of our people the steelband movement is suffering. There is a positive need for the broadening of our vision and heeding the call of our unique musicians.

Prospect's call for a pan factory must receive immediate attention. But there is one thing about his prediction. The pans will not be as cheap as he believes.

Ellie Mannette who is currently engaged in manufacturing instruments in the U.S. indicated that a set is likely to cost between six hundred to one thousand dollars (U.S. currency).

In this country (U.S.) it costs between \$75 and \$125 to have one tenor pan made. "They do not hesitate to pay for these instruments," said Ellie.

## CUSTOM

The Trinidadian would wail when he has to pay between \$25 to \$40 for the same tenor pan, in his homeland.

However, there is a reason for the difference in prices. In the words of the steelband pioneer: "We have proper steel here, much better than I have ever used. I have a furnace where the entire drum is heated and I get a better ring."

Over the years it has become a custom for one to sit back and wait for

government to do something.

But what about the people themselves?

It is useless to be complacent and throw the buck around. Has the steelband association

ever approached businessmen and the many influential organisations in a position to help? Steelband is ours and we must make the best of it at all times.

Our Jaycees colleagues

have been boasting, over the years, of developing leadership, but how many are active members of our steelbands? If any, are they influential enough to assist the movement?

Let's put the Jaycees

to this test. The president of the West Indies Jaycees, Steve Touzali was quoted in Montserrat as saying: that it was not the objective of his organisation to overthrow the existing political order in the region, but rather to provide leadership.

"The Jaycees are not prepared to accept anything bad, but when we criticise, our goal is to do so constructively and offer alternatives."

## CHANGE

Now the steelband movement can examine the depth of the statements by the Jaycees officials. You are seeking change. It is not change for change's sake, but one which will be beneficial to your social and economical standing in the world.