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Title of Thesis:

Dissociation and Reformation of Select National Steelbands in Trinidad & Tobago

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## **ABSTRACT**

This Caribbean Studies Project explored the disassociation and reformation of national Steelbands and how they began, survived and developed. Steelband history and research is often times not properly documented and is usually passed down through word-of-mouth. This was evident in this research process as majority of the information had to be found via interviews. Thus, four (4) members from three (3) national Steelbands, each holding a different position were interviewed.

Keywords: Steelband, Panorama, Supernovas, Exodus, Phase II, Sponsorship

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## INTRODUCTION

The Steelband is a collective showcase of the many varying types of the steelpan, the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. The origin of the steel pan stems from the early days of skin drumbeating between 1838 and 1883, to the rise of the Tamboo Bamboo from 1891 – the 1930's, the addition of metal cans from 1935 – 1938, until finally forming bands comprising of steel pans around 1939 (bestoftrinidad.com). The credit for the origin of the steel band or even the first instance of a metal sound has had multiple claimants and no precise dates. Hence, it will simply be stated that the steel band was unofficially established between the years 1934 – 1940, three of those claimants being the *Gonzales Rhythm Makers*, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* and *Hellyard* (Goddard & bestoftrinidad.com).

Previously called “barracks yards”, steelbands were nowhere near as loved and supported as they are presently. Multiple contributing factors included the general socioeconomic status affiliated with steel bands, violence at carnival celebrations between rival steel bands, and the overall timbre of multiple, poorly tuned steel tins being played at once was not particularly a positive auditory experience for some (Waithe, Worrell). One of the earliest steel bands, credited for their ambassadorship in promoting the steel pan overseas in France and the United Kingdom, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was formed in 1951. The evolution of the steel band movement has been guided along since 1956 by politics, small competitions and foreign involvement. The socioeconomic status and overall stereotype changed when foreign priests introduced the steel fraternity to classical music in the early 1960's, piquing the interest of middle-class citizens (Waithe, Worrell).

1963 brought about the establishment of a National Steelband and the introduction of Panorama to Trinidad & Tobago. This gave birth to a wide variety of following competitions including the *Steel Band Music Festival* in 1967 and *Pan Is Beautiful* in 1980 (panonthenet.com). Some of the well-known large category steel bands that have existed since the early days and some of the more recent ones are Renegades, Desperadoes, Invaders, Trinidad All Stars, Phase II Pan Groove, Supernovas and Exodus.

This paper will cover three chapters. The first chapter will look at the origins of Supernovas Steel Orchestra and their transition to the large category as detailed by Amrit Samaroo. The second chapter will explore the origins of Exodus Steel Orchestra and how they became the world-renowned Steelband they are today, as described by Ainsworth Mohammed. Chapter three will investigate the origin and growth of Phase II Pan Groove as defined by Terry Mohammed. This paper will focus on these three breakout bands, how they survived and developed their names and respective reputations they hold today.

## **RATIONALE**

The author of this paper has been performing in Steelbands in both primary and secondary school, at local gigs and in two secondary school junior panorama competitions. He is also an arranger for Arima Boys' & Girls' R.C. schools' panorama ensembles. The author also currently has ten (10) years of experience in professional, national Steelbands of each sizing category, currently being a tenor pan performer in the frontline of First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra.

This study will provide information on the origins of three large category, breakout panorama bands, detailing their journey from their inception to their current status in the Panorama sphere. This is important in journaling the growth of steel bands in Trinidad and observing their accomplishments.

## **THESIS STATEMENT**

**Title:**

Dissociation and Reformation of Select National Steelbands in Trinidad & Tobago.

**Thesis Statement:**

New and progressive Steel Ensembles have been reformed from traditional Steel Orchestras.

## PARAMETERS

This study focuses on the dissociation and reformation of select national steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago. The research database surrounding Trinidad and Tobago's cultural heritage is either limited, scarce or non-existent with regards to certain aspects of local culture. Information is traditionally passed down via oral means / word-of-mouth. Due to there being no official means of documentation, such information can be easily lost, incorrectly translated or twisted due to little or no written evidence.

The purpose of this research paper is to learn about the means behind the inception of three (3) local bands, where the players either directly disassociated themselves from another band, or where the arranger decided to start his/her own steel band. The bands of interest in this study are First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra, Republic Bank Exodus Steel Orchestra and Hadco Phase II Pan Groove. These national steel bands are located in Lopinot, St. Augustine and Port-of-Spain, respectively.

Further research was done via interviews with band leaders and documenting conversations about historical events in the steel band timeline through their eyes and experiences. With the limited, specific information available on this topic, interviews will be the key research method in obtaining new information on the development of the Steelband.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this research project are to:

- Identify select steel bands that were formed from previous entities.
- Investigate their origins.
- Enquire about their growth and development.

## METHODOLOGY

For this Caribbean Studies project, dissociation and reformation of select national steel bands in Trinidad & Tobago, the qualitative method was chosen for this research. This method was chosen to select and investigate three (3) national steel bands that were conceived by the dissociation from another band, the origins of those bands and the growth and development to what we know them as today.

Due to the nature of this topic and the general availability of related documents, research for this topic was very limited. Initially, the goal was to contact one (1) member from each of the steel bands (Supernovas, Exodus, Phase II) and conduct an interview with each of them in-person to acquire necessary information that might not have been found online. However, due to availability, interviewee changes and schedule constraints, it was decided upon to conduct interviews over WhatsApp calls, text messages and voice note mediums. One extra interviewee was sourced out due to uncertainty with the original person. Each of these interviews contained the same, if not similar questions directed to four (4) sources of varying positions in their respective bands, in order to obtain differences in points-of-view. These interviewees are Amrit Samaroo (Supernovas Steel Orchestra – Leader / Arranger), Ainsworth Mohammed (Exodus Steel Orchestra – Manager), Terry Bernard (Phase II Pan Groove – Captain) and Jamal Glynn (Phase II Pan Groove – Performer). For summarized transcripts of these interviews see Appendix A.

Research was conducted on multiple websites, e-books, online journals and scholarly articles. Due to the nature of the topic and the lack of scholarly articles, majority of information gathered was from interviews, which was then expanded on within the chapters. YouTube

sources documenting specific segments of the topic containing recorded interviews with steel band pioneers were also utilized for research. Websites such as “Panonthenet.com” provided details as to specific dates and time periods surrounding certain key moments in the Steel band movement. Portions of reference material were taken from publications containing transcriptions of interviews with pioneers such as George Goddard and Carleton “Zigilee” Constantine.

## **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This study consists of three (3) chapters all similar in terms of structure, but tailor-made to focus on each respective steel band of interest. Chapter one (1) focuses on the origins, sponsorship and development of Supernovas Steel Orchestra. Chapter two (2) investigates the origins, sponsorship and development of Exodus Steel Orchestra. Chapter three (3) explores the origins, sponsorship and development of Phase II Pan Groove. Each chapter will seek to explore and describe the motivations behind the creation of the bands, the process of formation and growth and the journey they underwent to arrive at the current level of prominence they hold today.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research information surrounding the formation of steel bands and the intricate details behind it are extremely limited. Most research articles either focus on the invention of the steel pan, history of the steel pan or just simply the Panorama competition. Furthermore, to this day there is still no definitive claim as to who the first person to discover the sound of the steel pan, nor which was the first band to make the switch to metal. Most of the research material was derived from interviews and selected websites and articles online.

Despite the variety of claims as to the origination of the steel band, the journey of the gradual switch from tamboo bamboo to metal / tin cans is what paved the road for the formation of the steel band we know today. The story of the early days follows a story given by Carleton “Zigilee” Constantine. The tamboo bamboo was an ensemble that comprised of three (3) types of instruments: the foulé<sup>1</sup>, boom<sup>2</sup> and cutter<sup>3</sup> (Dudley). These varying types of bamboos were each performed in their own respective manners to produce an intertwining mix of rhythmic sounds to achieve tonal balance (seetobago.org). The very existence of a Tamboo Bamboo band was initially frowned upon, due to it being considered as non-melodic noise. From the government’s perspective, the nature of the instruments served as a potential hazard to fellow citizens and damaged the road. Eventually, acceptance toward the instrument grew and the Tamboo Bamboo bands found themselves performing alongside various string bands and brass bands, further expanding the reach and celebration of the instruments (seetobago.org). Also incorporated into the general instrumentation of the Tamboo Bamboo bands was the bottle-and-spoon. The

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<sup>1</sup> “Foulé” (French for “Fuller”) was a type of bamboo used to represent the tenor pitch.

<sup>2</sup> “Boom” (also known as the bass bamboo) represented the low-ended, bass pitch.

<sup>3</sup> “Cutter” was a group of bamboos representing the soprano pitch.

bamboo instruments provided the basic rhythmic element, while the introduction of the bottle-and-spoon provided the taste of rhythmic improvisation. These bottles were the ancestors to the more commonly used “Iron” in traditional steel bands of today.

As is the case with regards to majority of the research around this topic, seldom information is finalised and proven true. Such is seen in the transition from bamboo to metal, as one former member of the “Destination Tokyo” steel band from John John, Anthony E Rouff praised the “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” as the founders of the earliest steel band (Goddard). Rouff also recalled the use of old tins and dustbins being the first metallic sounds to welcome the steel band era. Carleton “Zigilee” Constantine and George Goddard both attest to “The Newtown Boys Bamboo Band” being the first to change all their bamboo instruments to metal, upon which renaming themselves to “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” (Dudley).

The steel band movement was not a one-man drive, but an ongoing mission uniting the passions of those with the willpower and strong desire to elevate the steel band to what we know it as today. In the early days of the steelpan, little respect was given to the instrument and the players, as the judgement passed upon steel bandsmen was that of disdain and disgust. The Mohammed brothers, Amin and Ainsworth, have been two of the many pioneers of the movement who believed in the importance of the instrument and the possibilities of its impact on Trinidad and Tobago. Despite Amin’s passing, Ainsworth Mohammed has continued to press forward with the primary objective of his band, Exodus: to continue to fly the flag of Trinidad and Tobago high with the power of pan (Newsday).

A steel band can be easily formed; however, the future of the band is dependent on the level of support given from players, supporters, sponsors and management. In an interview with Ainsworth Mohammed, he highly praised the support given to his band, Exodus. The growth of

his band he says has always been down to the number of dedicated, committed players who all shared a similar interest in the love of the steelpan. Over the many years of the competition, it is evident that the survival of emerging steel bands has been heavily dependent on player support, especially bands in the single-pan and small band categories who are not as widely promoted as the large band category. The journey toward the social acceptance that we have come to know today however, was a gradual process in the early days. Interest from the People's National Movement (PNM) under the late Dr. Eric Williams sparked the formation of a steel band association in 1950 (panonthenet.com).

Despite majority of the historical Steelband movement yielding negative and disheartening news, there were quite a number of positive events. One of which Carleton "Zigilee" Constantine recalled in 1983, "I have to be very grateful to Steelband... I left [Trinidad] in 1956 and lived in the UK and up to this day I am making a living from Steelband" (panonthenet.com). Another experience was relayed by Curtis Pierre when he praised his experience in the Steelband for the development of his leadership skills which he utilized in other aspects of his life.

Possibly the most game-changing stage of the Steelband Movement was during the period of Social Change and Acceptance of Steelbands, whereby acceptance was contingent on the viewpoints of influential citizens, Government, commercial sponsorship, open involvement of the People's National Movement party, involvement of white, better-educated middle-class persons and involvement of the Steelbands in music festivals, to name a few (panonthenet.com).

# CHAPTER ONE: SUPERNOVAS STEEL ORCHESTRA

## 1.1. BACKGROUND

Supernovas Steel Orchestra was formed in 2010 by members of the Surrey Village community in Lopinot, inspired by Kenneth Persad and the late Dr. Jit Samaroo. The band is currently led by Amrit and Anthony Samaroo (Samaroo). Supernovas was created with the original purpose of engaging the youth of the Surrey Village community by encouraging them to channel their energy and time into musical productivity. After parting ways with Renegades Steel Orchestra as their arranger, using the wealth of experience gained from working with other bands such as Melodians and Trinidad Nostalgic, Amrit assembled a managerial team to push forward with the establishment of Supernovas. This team comprised of Bhesham Ramlal, Kelly Ramlal, Selwyn “Fruits” Williams, Simone Johnson and a few members of the Samaroo Jets (Samaroo). The name “Supernovas” was chosen to represent the explosion of bright, new talent... somewhat of a challenge to the other bands with celestial names (All Stars, Silver Stars). “The whole idea of the Supernova signifies the end of a star’s life... bring forward new life. It was a powerful name” (Samaroo).

Supernovas registered with Pan Trinbago in 2010 under the small band category. “The management’s initial plan was to do a single-pan band, but I did not want to do a single-pan band with my experience... I wanted to head straight to the large band category” (Samaroo). However, due to monetary limitations with Supernovas being a new band with no sponsor, instant entry into the large category was not feasible. The band’s initial entry into the National Panorama sphere was through the Small Band Category in 2012, placing second (2<sup>nd</sup>) (panonthenet.com). Supernovas continued to make a statement in the Small Band Category by placing in the top

three (3) in the 2013 and 2015 National Panorama competitions, but the first victorious year for the band occurred in the 2014 National Panorama with Winston “DeFosto” Scarborough’s tune, “In De Minor.” This victory was monumental, as Supernovas became the first band to break Terrence “BJ” Marcelle’s five-time win streak with Arima Golden Symphony (panonthenet).

Despite the accolades and accomplishments being rapidly achieved by Supernovas, remaining in the small band category was never the plan. As Amrit described, “It was tough being in the small band category... you doing all the work, being put on a Carnival Thursday in a venue next to nobody, and you’re not getting the national or international coverage that the medium and large were getting. That kind of cemented our decision to move to the large category.” According to Amrit, for Supernovas, remaining in the small band category would not have brought the type of exposure and attention needed to attract the attention of a sponsor, which he added is “- imperative for a lot of steel bands to exist... especially being a new band.”

The founders of the band had previously set a five (5)-year plan toward their journey to the large band category. However, Supernovas was given a significant boost with the intervention of the International Conference and Panorama (ICP) which was held in 2015 on “the big stage”. The International Panorama invited steel bands from across the world to compete against Trinidad and Tobago’s best in the Queen’s Park Savannah. Supernovas Steel Orchestra, having been highly ranked in the top three (3) positions in their four (4)-year national small band category panorama run utilized the momentous event to market the band. Not only did Supernovas amass a wider audience at the International Panorama, but the band placed second (2<sup>nd</sup>), surpassing the likes of the highly acclaimed Renegades Steel Orchestra and foreign steel bands (panscore.com). This was the moment Supernovas knew that they were ready to grace the stage as a new member of the large band category.

## 1.2. SPONSORSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Supernovas Steel Orchestra would officially bear the banner of First Citizens Bank from the year 2016 – present, which significantly aided in their movement from small band category to large. However, Amrit stated that Supernovas have always been beneficiaries of assistance from local and community businesses, and even community residents who provided T-shirts and monetary donations to the band. “Our Public Relations Officer, Selwyn “Fruits” Williams was a head-hunter, going out to find sponsors. Petrotrin was one of those groups that helped a lot of smaller bands, and we were beneficiaries of that as well,” he explains. Amrit goes on to explain that First Citizens have been in collaboration with Supernovas since 2014, but only when the band was ready to make the necessary steps toward transitioning into the large band category and make a name for themselves in 2016, Supernovas was offered a contract of a full-term sponsorship. This newfound sponsorship took majority of the financial strain off the shoulders of Amrit and the management committee, assisting in provision and allocation of funds toward outfits, food, transportation and general band maintenance. As Amrit points out, “You really need to have that financial support in culture. It’s quite a lot to manage with 150 players without it.”

However, sponsorship was not the only catalyst in the growth of the band. As Amrit praises, “...the phenomenal growth of the band really came down to sacrifice from players, myself, tuners, pan makers and the financial management committee.” He also pointed out that the players during the panorama season understood the mission and the sacrifice by willingly accepting a minor cut in their pay out in the initial years prior to official sponsorship. Player

acquisition was not much of a challenge, due to the initial members showing a keen interest in being a part of the dream to put Surrey Village, Lopinot into the public spotlight in a positive manner. “A lot of the people in the community were family, friends and neighbours of the Samaroo Jets, as well as supporters of Jit Samaroo. To have a band set up and doing so well within their community did a lot for the self-esteem of the community,” he noted.

Outside of the Panorama sphere, Supernovas is a band well known for their participation in multiple events across the island and even regionally, participating in Carifesta XII in Haiti, in 2015. They are also famous for hosting events, such as “Mallets, Brass and Steel, Reaching Souls” and the most coveted annual event, “A Day in Surrey.” According to Amrit, “A Day in Surrey” was created as an effort to give back to the community of Surrey Village in appreciation of their consistent support since the band’s inception, as well as an open invitation to encourage people to visit the community. This event also provides an opportunity for community-based artisans to showcase their respective trades by setting up booths and conducting sales with patrons.

The impact of Covid-19 was actually somewhat a blessing for Supernovas, as the downtime in rehearsals and events presented the opportunity for the band to make the necessary upgrades. The home of Supernovas was originally the Surrey Village Community Centre, which was in a dire state of disrepair. Today, the band proudly showcases its new and modernized pan theatre, outfitted with LED lights, a flatscreen television, dedicated pan storage, canteen and bathrooms. As Amrit expressed, “The Community Centre had to be broken down, so we were out of a home since late 2020. Without that period of rest in the entertainment sector, we would have been out of a home.” First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra has established their name

in the national and regional scene, which they intend to maintain with Amrit's current plan to deliver more music and performances, while also continuing to improve the Steelband's home.

## CHAPTER TWO: EXODUS STEEL ORCHESTRA

### 2.1 BACKGROUND

Exodus Steel Orchestra was formed on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1981, born through the initiative of Amin Mohammed. The founders of Exodus were initially mostly members of the “Gay Flamingoes Steelband” who, under the leadership of Amin Mohammed invited all who were interested to leave Gay Flamingoes and follow him. This decision came about after two (2) unsuccessful attempts to engage in a meeting with the Gay Flamingoes leadership at the time (panonthenet.com). According to an interview with Ainsworth Mohammed, “The standard of the Gay Flamingoes was falling quite a bit. When an effort was made to improve the band, we were met with resistance.” He also stated that the name ‘Exodus’ came about after the first manager / leader, Amin Mohammed indicated to the Gay Flamingoes membership that he was going to start a new band. ‘Exodus’, by definition is “A departure... usually of a large number of people” (collinsdictionary.com). According to an article in the Trinidad Express Newspapers, the original core members of Exodus were Amin Mohammed, Bob Theroulde, Vernie Theroulde, Charles Cottle, Don Wilson, Edmund Dolabille, David & Keith Dolabille, George Theroulde, Anthony Melville and Ainsworth Mohammed, to name a few.

This fresh-faced Steelband, under the leadership and management of Amin Mohammed were loaned their first set of instruments by Rudolph Charles, who was the then leader of the Desperadoes Steel Orchestra. In addition to the instruments given to them, Exodus hired their first pan-maker and tuner, Wallace Austin to create their own, new set of steel pans. Approval was granted by John Gonzales for the usage of a parcel of land located in St. John Village, which the management then used to build the band’s first pan tent (Mohammed). Exodus’ first rehearsal

was held with around 25 to 30 players, led by arranger Henry “Bendix” Cumberbatch in 1981, comprising of mainly breakaway members from the Gay Flamingoes Steelband (panonthenet.com). In preparation for their entry into Panorama in 1982, Exodus was allowed to utilize the Scarlet Ibis Hotel’s carpark on the Eastern Main Road for rehearsal. After leaving that location in 1985, Exodus gradually settled on the land on which they still reside today. With more persons expressing interest in this new band, Exodus’ entry into the Panorama sphere occurred just one (1) year later in 1982, where they amassed a player base of 65 performers and qualified to the national Panorama finals with Scrunter’s “The Will” as their selection (Mohammed). Since then, Exodus Steel Orchestra continued to stamp their authority onto the national Panorama competition, by winning four (4) titles and qualifying for the finals all but three (3) times since 1982. The champion years were 1992, 2001, 2003 and 2004. Exodus would also go on to participate in various other competitions, some being the International Conference and Panorama (placed 7<sup>th</sup>), Caribbean Panorama (placed 1<sup>st</sup>), National Steelband Music Festival (placed 1<sup>st</sup> on three (3) occasions) and the World Steelband Music Festival (placed 1<sup>st</sup> on two (2) occasions) (Mohammed).

## 2.2 SPONSORSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

According to Ainsworth Mohammed, prior to Exodus acquiring sponsorship, the band had no choice but to solely rely on the generosity of a number of corporate companies for financial assistance. “Due to the connections Amin and I had as bank managers, as well as the band’s performance, there were a number of unofficial ‘sponsors’ coming on board to assist us with donations of T-shirts and money...” Ainsworth also noted. Exodus would officially be called ‘Sagikor Exodus Steel Orchestra’ in 2005, with Sagikor assuming the position of the band’s first sponsor. This connection lasted for five (5) years; 2005 – 2010 (Mohammed). This information was taken from a direct interview with Ainsworth Mohammed, however the information surrounding initial sponsorship differs slightly on the band’s online biography. According to *panonthenet.com*, Exodus’ first sponsorship occurred in 1983 when American Stores decided to officially sponsor the band. It is also noted on the website that companies such as Republic Bank, Angostura, K.F.C and National Brewing Company all assisted the band in their early years (*panonthenet.com*).

The band would formally bear the label, “Republic Bank Exodus Steel Orchestra” from the year 2011 – present. As Ainsworth explained, “Sponsorship is an important part for Steelbands who have a big vision, because the money Steelbands get from winning competitions is not nearly enough to cover the cost of taking a [large] band to Panorama.” As seen from a historical point-of-view, the general concept of a sponsor helped to motivate the band members to perform at their best and maintain a certain level of self-respect, as the band now had the image of the sponsor to protect. Exodus is known for more than simply their Panorama appearances however, as they are the proud holders of the country’s second (2<sup>nd</sup>) highest national award, the Chaconia Medal Gold in 2003 for Culture (Mohammed). The band is also the host of

the annual ‘International Pan Ramajay Competition,’ which is an open-floor jazz competition focusing on improvisation and freedom of expression. Exodus is also responsible for the introduction of the ‘Celebrating the Composers’ initiative, which awarded composers who had their songs selected by more than three (3) Steelbands in any year of the Panorama competition (Mohammed).

Exodus continues to strive to improve their community and the country as a whole, by introducing events that can engage and educate the population. The band boasts of a properly functional Youth Steel Orchestra, carrying the name “Exocubs.” The members of this junior school are instructed in music theory and practical exercises and are trained to sit the Royal School of Music Examinations. During the downtime provided by the Covid-19 pandemic, the general infrastructure and facility of Exodus was given a thorough upgrade, from the bathrooms to the canteen, carpark and the junior school (Mohammed). Ainsworth also states, “Republic Bank Exodus is always open to anyone who wishes to host fundraisers, events or anything really, free of charge. If anyone has something to do and wishes to use the facility, we will allow them as long as it supports the local culture. We do not encourage any of the ‘raga-raga’ or ‘dubbydubby’ music in the pan-yard [referring to the likes of ‘Trinibad and Dancehall music’]” (Mohammed). Republic Bank Exodus Steel Orchestra is more than just a community band, with a mission and global vision to “Spread the gospel of pan throughout the world” (Mohammed).

## CHAPTER THREE: PHASE II PAN GROOVE

### 3.1 BACKGROUND

In August of the year 1972, six (6) innovative musicians from the Starlift Steel Orchestra decided to part ways with the band to form their own, with the mission to produce a more creative and unique sound on the steel pan. These six (6) musicians; Rawle Mitchell, Selwyn Tarradath, Noel Seon, Barry Howard, Andy Phillips and Len “Boogsie” Sharpe would go on to form the Steelband known as Phase II Pan Groove in Woodbrook, Port-of-Spain (panonthenet.com). The name “Phase II” was derived from the players’ belief of this band representing the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) phase, or the Phase II of their careers According to an interview with Jamal Glynn, Selwyn Tarradath was the person who provided the band with their first lights on Hamilton Street. Instruments were difficult to obtain, however the members were resourceful and were able to secure instruments each year. Phase II Pan Groove’s musical focus has always been to promote the performance of original compositions in competitions (panonthenet.com).

Len “Boogsie” Sharpe became the band’s Musical Director and leader, guiding Phase II to their first national Panorama title in 1987, becoming the first unsponsored Steelband to ever win a national Panorama competition. Phase II continued to further stamp their authority in the national Panorama competition by emerging victorious in the years 1988, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2014. Between the years 1978 – 2014, the band has rarely dropped lower than third (3<sup>rd</sup>) position in the national Panorama competition (panonthenet.com). Phase II also participated in the International Conference and Panorama (ICP) in 2015, where they tied with Brooklyn Steel Orchestra for fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) place (panscore.com). According to Jamal, the membership of Phase II

has always been large, as a lot of persons expressed interest in joining the band, whether leaving their previous bands or just as their first band.

#### **4.1 SPONSORSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**

In an interview with Terry Bernard, he stated that Phase II Pan Groove was given unofficial assistance from various companies, but an official partnership occurred in 2006 between Phase II and Petrotrin. Hence, from 2006 – 2014, the band was known as “Petrotrin Phase II Pan Groove.” After the band and company parted ways, the HADCO Group of Companies took interest in the band and offered official sponsorship in 2015. On the other hand, in the interview with Jamal, he explains that HADCO assumed part sponsorship in 2017. To this date, the band is still known by the banner “HADCO Phase II Pan Groove” (Bernard). Terry praises Hadco for their partnership and the support given to the band stating, “... Our present sponsor has been a revelation and has transformed our appearance from the pan facility to our general presentation. Quite apart from the structural improvement to the space they have treated the players with respect and appreciation and for they we are thankful and grateful.”

According to Jamal, leadership of Phase II consistently changes, but the head of operations is Len “Boogsie” Sharpe. The band introduced their junior band in 2020, under the name “HADCO Phase II Pan Groove Junior Steel Orchestra,” into the Under 21 category in which they placed fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) with their selection, “Soca Global” ([mytrinilime.com](http://mytrinilime.com)). Jamal also expressed that the Phase II pan yard is a regular visiting ground for persons who wish to “see and hear the living legend [Boogsie Sharpe].” The community support has not waivered since the band’s inception, where Terry stated that in the early days before the pan yard facilities were

operational, one resident's home was used as their washroom facility. As he also explained, "Each year at panorama the name [Woodbrook] is heard around the world when introducing our band and that is a proud moment," signifying the level of significance the band has to that community. Currently, the pan yard is undergoing improvement, new personnel have been recruited to assist with the general management of the band and new, exciting events are being planned in secret (Bernard).

The Covid-19 pandemic, as did with all bands, shut-down regular operations at the pan yard. Terry stated however, that Len "Boogsie" Sharpe initially held a couple free performances to revitalize the energy of the population in the form of a virtual concert. Though the band took a heavy financial toll due to stoppage of events and opportunities for income, as a token of appreciation for the support and as an act of kindness, Phase II Pan Groove partnered with their current sponsor, the HADCO Group of Companies to provide over 300 Hampers for members in need and the communities in which they reside (Bernard). HADCO Phase II Pan Groove is a noteworthy Steelband, with one of the most renowned leaders / arrangers / composers, where people, local and foreign willingly visit ever year to witness their presence.

## CONCLUSION

Due to the limitations of research material, majority of the content of this study had to be taken from interviews. Further studies can be done in the future to source any smaller Steelbands within Trinidad and Tobago that were reformed from other Steelbands.

Based on this study, it is evident that it is possible for members to disassociate themselves with their original band and form their own. With adequate support and possible sponsorship, that new and reformed Steelband can grow and develop into a popular, national name. It is proven that new and progressive Steel Ensembles have been reformed from traditional Steel Orchestras, such as First Citizens Supernovas Steel Orchestra, Republic Bank Exodus Steel Orchestra and HADCO Phase II Pan Groove.

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## APPENDIX A

Summarized Transcriptions of WhatsApp Voice Note Interviews.

### INTERVIEW WITH AMRIT SAMAROO

#### **1. What year was Supernovas formed and by whom?**

- The band was formed in 2010. It was the brainchild of Anthony Samaroo who approached me along with our vice-captain at the time, Kenneth Persad who was also a member of the Surrey community. The goal was really to engage the youth of the community and focus their energy in positive ways. This was a vision of my dad [Jit Samaroo] who wanted to give back to the community. With the experience I had, we pulled a team together comprising of Bhesham Ramlal, Kelly Ramlal, Selwyn "Fruits" Williams, Simone Johnson and a few members of the Samaroo Jets.

#### **2. Why the name "Supernovas"? Any special significance?**

- We all had varying names, but we had a lot of celestial names for the bands... so I thought, what's brighter than a star? A Supernova.

**3. Why did you decide to transition the band to the Large Category and in what year did that happen?**

- Well, the plan was always to head straight to the large category, but the problem was money. So, we had to start from the bottom in the small category and created a five-year plan to move to the large category. What really pushed us to transition was the lack of coverage and sponsorship available in the small category. We debuted in the large category in 2016.

**4. To what would you attribute the growth of your band?**

- Sacrifice from the players, myself and the service team. We were not sponsored in the initial stages, so it all came down to managing funds earned during the year.

**5. Describe your experience in the ICP and how it impacted Supernovas (popularity/outreach, funding etc).**

- It levelled the playing field and allowed us to be heard too and compete against the mighty legends like the All Stars and Renegades. It worked well for us, because when people heard us, it was fresh, new and different when we performed 'Dr. Samaroo' by Mark Loquan. ICP really helped push up our transition timeline by one year in terms of the finances which we did what we had to do with to help us move to the large category the following year.

**6. How and when did Supernovas gain sponsorship and how greatly has that connection assisted the band?**

- The band has always been open to sponsorship. We were always getting assistance and support from community businesses and community members. Petrotrin also assisted us as a smaller band. First Citizens officially came on board in 2016 when the band made steps to make a name for ourselves. It took a lot of stress off the management and myself. You need a sponsor in this game.

**7. What were the methods of player recruitment utilized by your band/management?**

- It was home-grown. Everyone who was involved told someone else who would also want to be involved and they just started to fall in. We also tailored our practice times to suit those “quality” players who had commitments with large bands in town when we were a small band, so we had to know our place on the ladder.

**8. How has the community embraced your presence? Can you say that the existence of Supernovas positively impacted the Lopinot/Arouca community? (Population growth, higher levels of visitation)**

- Yes. A lot of these people were friends, family and supporters of Jit Samaroo. To see a band set-up in your community really did a lot for the self esteem and pride of the people. That’s why we do shows like “A Day in Surrey” to encourage people to come up to the village and experience what we have to offer.”

**9. What caused your transition from Renegades to Supernovas?**

- Just a change in management style of the band. They wanted to do things differently and I wasn't too comfortable with it, so we just parted ways.

**10. How has the absence of a 2021 Panorama and the Covid-19 pandemic affected Supernovas and how have you continued to engage the band during the pandemic?**

- That really helped the band to be quite honest. We were out of a home due to the Community Centre being broken down due to disrepair. So, during that time we were able to get approval for a piece of land and erect a pan tent that we are very proud of today. So, without that period of rest we might have had to leave Surrey to find some sort of participation because we did not have a home.

**11. Any new developments within the band? (Leadership, panyard improvements, future plans)**

- We have a lot planned coming out of this pandemic. One is mainly doing some new music for the artform and to build a product we could sell outside in a more unique way.

## INTERVIEW WITH AINSWORTH MOHAMMED

### **1. What led to the creation of Exodus?**

- Most members were part of Flamingoes, a band in St. Augustine. When an effort was made to improve the band, we were met with resistance. Amin Mohammed decided then to form his own band, hence where the name “Exodus” came about. This was in 1981.

### **2. How was the foundation of Exodus laid? How did the founders obtain pans and a practice area?**

- Initial instruments were loaned to us by then late Rudolph Charles and we made some instruments through out first pan maker and pan tuner, Wallace Austin. We were given the approval by John Gonzales to use a piece of his property to build a small pantent. Henry “Bendix” Cumberbatch was our first arranger. This also took place in May, 1981.

### **3. What were the methods of player recruitment used by the band?**

- Well, most of the original membership came out of Flamingoes. From time-to-time new people would come in when we started going to Panorama in 1982. We went into our first Panorama with about 65 players and were a national finalist with Scrunter’s “The Will”.

**4. Describe your experience in the ICP and how it impacted Exodus (popularity/outreach, funding etc).**

- That did not really affect us as we already had our sponsorship with Republic Bank. It was just like another competition for us.

**5. To what would you attribute the growth of Exodus?**

- Committed players really.

**6. How and when did Exodus gain sponsorship and how greatly has that connection assisted the band?**

- Prior to being sponsored, we used to beg and borrow from a number of corporates. Because of the connections we [Amin and myself] had with banks, as well due to how well the band was doing, we had a lot of support. 2005 was the first year we got sponsored by Sagicor, which lasted for 5 years, then 2011 to present with Republic Bank. Sponsorship is really an important thing, because the cost to just go to panorama, even if you win, you making a loss.

**7. Any new developments within the band? (Leadership, panyard improvements, future plans)**

- We upgraded the entire pan yard. A lot of money was spent on that and we're very proud of it. We took the downtime of the COVID-19 lockdown to fully renovate the facility and the junior school [Exocubs].

**8. How has the community embraced your presence? Can you say that the existence of Supernovas positively impacted the Tunapuna/St. Augustine community? (Population growth, higher levels of visitation)**

- Certainly. We focus on that a lot. We don't only cater to the St. Augustine community, because we open the facility to anyone who wants to have a fundraiser or an event or something, free of charge. We try to promote local music though, so we don't tolerate the "dubby dubby" and "rararara" music in our facility.

**9. How has the absence of a 2021 Panorama and the Covid-19 pandemic affected Exodus and how has the band continued to engage the population during the pandemic?**

- Since the "Tase of Carnival" we've been slowly pulling back the repertoire and resuming rehearsals.

INTERVIEW WITH TERRY BERNARD (Copied text replies)

**1. What led to the creation of Phase II?**

- We had the upcoming youths lead by the now genius Dr Len Boogise Sharpe wanting freedom to exudes themselves.

**2. Describe your experience in the ICP and how it impacted Phase II (popularity/outreach, funding etc).**

- While it was a great idea it could have been executed much better and to date most of the Local and bands have not been paid the advertised and promised payment. About funding I can't say what the organizing body received and did with same. We were popular as our music originally always stand out and is expected by all whether supporters or not

**3. What were the methods of player recruitment utilized by the band/management?**

- There wasn't any organized player recruitment policy however the promise of the now legendary composer and arranger along with the exciting musical passages for Panorama made it somewhat easy for players to want such an experience and it was.

**4. How and when did Phase II gain sponsorship and how greatly has that connection assisted the band?**

- While we were getting partial assistance at times from various companies which we will always be thankful for. The official sponsorship began mid 2006 from state company Petrotrin. This lasted to 2014. However, from 2015 we partnered with the Hadco Group of companies and that blossomed into sponsorship and has been great to date. Each phase we are thankful for, and they would have played their part however our present sponsor has been a revelation and has transformed our appearance from the pan facility to our general presentation. Quite apart from the structural improvement to the space they have treated the players with respect and appreciation and for they we are thankful and grateful.

**5. To what would you attribute the growth of Phase II?**

- That is easy. The brilliance of Dr Len Boogsie Sharpe and his Charismatic leadership coupled with his outstanding compositions and arrangements with the commitment of the management players and sponsorship. The willingness to be different musically.

**6. Any new developments within the band? (Leadership, panyard improvements, future plans)**

- Yes indeed. We are celebrating our 50th anniversary this year and we have quite a few events planned. We have quite a few plans we'd like to unfold soon however we like to keep that close to our chest until that time.

**7. How has the community embraced your presence? Can you say that the existence of Phase II Pan Groove positively impacted the Port-of-Spain community? (Population growth, higher levels of visitation)**

- From inception the community has embraced our band. In fact one resident home was used as our washroom facility in the early days. The neighbourhood has been supportive and understanding with our operation. We have started the Dr Len Boogsie Sharpe Academy for youths ages 5-20. A junior band. We have recruited some new personnel to assist with running an efficient and productive organization. Our sponsor is assisting with the continued improvement of our panyard and facility. However we are severely constrained with the plans we have for development as we don't have title possession of our space. Yes we have positively impacted and represented our community as our band has always been referre to as from Woodbrook. Each year at panorama the name wood broke is heard around the world when introducing our band and that's a proud moment.

**8. How has the absence of a 2021 Panorama and the Covid-19 pandemic affected Phase II and how has the band continued to engage the population during the pandemic?**

- Like most industries we would have suffered from a huge loss of earnings all around. From the band losing revenue earning opportunities to the members and service providers. In the beginning our leader and musical director Dr Len Boogise Sharpe did couple free performances to cheer up the population. The band did an exciting and entertaining virtual concert. We partnered with our Sponsor the Hadco Group of Companies to provide in excess of 300 Hampers for some of our challenged members and needy memebers of the communities in which our members reside.

## INTERVIEW WITH JAMAL GLYNN

### **1. What led to the creation of Phase II?**

- 6 members wanted a change in the music being played in Starlift. Those players were Rawle Mitchell, Selwyn Tarradath, Noel Seon, Barry Howard, Andy Phillips and Len “Boogsie” Sharpe.

### **2. Describe your experience in the ICP and how it impacted Phase II (popularity/outreach, funding etc).**

- ICP was a huge success. I was not there as I had a conference so I cannot answer this question on Phase II’s behalf.

### **3. What were the methods of player recruitment utilized by the band/management?**

- Phase II has a large membership. We are a band that has an open invitation to other players. We don’t necessarily pay players to come in and play specifically unless you’re a drummer.

**4. How and when did Phase II gain sponsorship and how greatly has that connection assisted the band?**

- 2000 – 2001 Petrotrin was in partnership with Phase II. 2005 – 2006 Phase II won with Petrotrin and the following year with Digicel respectively. In 2017, HADCO came on board as part sponsorship with Phase II.

**5. To what would you attribute the growth of Phase II?**

- The evolution of Phase II's music attracts players which results in a growing population.

**6. Any new developments within the band? (Leadership, panyard improvements, future plans)**

- Leadership is always changing, but the person who spearheads everything is Boogsie.

**7. How has the community embraced your presence? Can you say that the existence of Phase II Pan Groove positively impacted the Port-of-Spain community? (Population growth, higher levels of visitation)**

- Yes. A lot of support comes from individuals around. Several other Woodbrook bands also came together and brought the "Pan on the Avenue" celebration to life.

**8. How has the absence of a 2021 Panorama and the Covid-19 pandemic affected Phase II and how has the band continued to engage the population during the pandemic?**

- Phase II experienced a lot of loss during this time, so it was very challenging. We weren't really able to do much due to the lockdown other than the first virtual concert in 2021, which was a major success.