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THE

BOOGSIE STORY

By Valentino Singh

FEW young men today find time to visit their mothers and give them a nice big hug and kiss.

So that when Len Boogsie Sharpe, age 32, and one of this country's top musical arrangers and pannists provided the exception to the rule, there must be something more to it.

As Mrs. Grace Sharpe states “if Boogsie visits me five times during the week, I am always greeted with a big hug and kiss.”

Special Place

Indeed Mrs. Sharpe goes one step further “to say that I am proud of him is an understatement. I reserve a special place in my heart for him. He has proven my belief that he was gifted in the musical world, correct.”

When as a young boy, Boogsie decided that he was no longer interested in schooling at the Progressive Educational Institute, and informed his mom, she didn't react with any degree of alarm.

She did attempt to explain the need to educate himself but Boogsie was not interested. Instead he went to play pan and that was where his interest lay.

Today Mrs Sharpe has seen her beliefs materialise, and Boogsie is still maintaining the links by which he has been able to communicate with his mother even then — with warmth.

That he was born into pan is without a doubt. Even as he arrived home from the Port-of-Spain General Hospital, a few hours after being born, steelband music greeted him. Symphonettes, one of the former top steelbands operated from his yard in St. James.

“Everyone would ask me why I don't stop the steelband from making noise in his head, but I got the feeling that he was listening to the music. It never bothered him and sometimes the music appeared to put him to sleep” says Mrs. Sharpe.

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picking up those tiny mangoes which fell off the tree when the wind blew and sticking the mango on to it, to make a pan stick.

Then he would go and start to beat the pan.”

Of course there are chapters in the life of this talented Trinidadian which even he cannot remember.

“My early days are a bit faded” he smiles, playing with a chunk of beard which is a fixture on his face “I do remember Symphonettes and Crossfire operating from my yard. Pan was always there.

“I was told that I would sometimes take a pan and climb on it to be able to play my pan so it must have been from a very young age.

“I don't recall myself not being involved in pan, and although I never regret getting fully involved with the steelband, I must say that as far as education is concerned I feel that I missed out on something by not finishing my schooling at Progressive.”

not read nor write a line, but is one of the arrangers who, year after year, baffle people with his exciting arrangements.

“I see it as a gift from God. The thing about me is that I can play any instrument in the steelband and I would just come up with something, go on the pan and play it and get the man under me to play it.

Good Ear

“You can say that I am a great cricketer with the ability to play all the shots in the world.

“I can certainly use the bat and ball but if you ask me to write how I do it or explain what I do ... then I would be at a loss”.

Boogsie says that things just come to him. “I think a man in my position must be able to understand sound. He must possess a good ear for music. “You have to be able to know the difference in sound

ger, and I used to take in what Roy did.

“I think he had a bit of influence on my becoming involved in this area. After all, it was his arrangements I played while with Starlift” Boogsie confided that while with Starlift, he got a chance to arrange for Angel Harps from Chaguana.

Bottles Thrown

I remember the first year I arranged for them. We entered the preliminaries down San Fernando and when we began to play, people started to throw bottle and other items at us ... Man I just leave the pan and start to run ... That was a debut — eh?

Boogsie's association with Phase II started from Day One.

“There was a group of us in Starlift, who was not particularly happy with what was going on in the band.

“Some nights after Starlift finished practising, we would double back into the panyard and do our own thing.

“Within this period we would also put a little change together and when we were able to purchase pans, we decided we had had enough of Starlift”

Phase II, from birth, decided that Boogsie would be the arranger and their tune for panorama would be his choice.

Over the years Boogsie and Phase II have had some degree of success, many times making it into the finals, but failing to put out that little extra on the big day.

Earlier this week, they got past Amoco Renegades for the North

Zone title with their own ‘Pan Rising’ and at the time of writing had not yet completed the panorama countdown.

The father of four kids said that he enjoyed the 1983 arrangement of “Pan Rebels” best.

“I don't think it was given the right treatment” he lamented. Boogsie is one day hoping to open a pan school in this country.

“I have had offers from overseas to come out there and work, but I feel that if I made such a move, my country would suffer.

“I am hoping that the Government would somehow see it fit to put pan as a subject on the school curriculum. It can do so much for the talented people in this field.

Moments Of Joy

“Right now, arranging is my only means of looking after my family. This as you know, is just for one time of the year, and I would certainly be happy to get a scholarship or some offer to go someplace and study music”.

Boogsie feels that pan has come a long way over the years. “People used to associate pan with badjohn, but that is not the case any more. It is an integral part of our culture and should be given all the opportunities for advancement.”

Boogsie Sharpe ended by stating that as far as his livelihood went, pan is not really rewarding.

“It doesn't bring in money so that it isn't rewarding, but it has certainly brought me many moments of joy, and as long as there is life in me, I will continue to be associated with pan”.

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