

All pan and no ramajay

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Steelband contest needs an overhaul

By PETER RAY BLOOD

ON WRIGHTSON Road that Saturday night, traffic was snarled along the west-bound carriageway as far as the eye could see, aggravated by late arrivals for the Kumar Sanu concert at the Stadium, and early birds for *Pan Ramajay V*.

Humidity and excitement were high inside the National Flour Mills compound, as a soft westerly breeze gave the slightest movement to the many colourful flags and banners adorning the spacious open-air venue. It was obvious that among this audience were serious pan aficionados and critics, as patrons quickly seated themselves for what would prove to be one of the most keenly contested finals in Pan Ramajay history.

Two finals were taking place, the Solo Skills category and the contest between ten ten-member ensembles. Judges for the solo contest were Earl Caruth, Carlton Alexander and Kendall Lewis, with Merle Albino-de Coteau, Joycelyn Pierre, Dennis Khadan, Joslynne Sealey and Junior Howell being adjudicators for the ensemble final.

This year's final was dedicated to pan tuners, who were to be inducted into the Pan Ramajay Hall of Fame. They were Lincoln Noel, Herman "Guppy" Brown, Bertram "Birch" Kellman, Leo Coker, Kelvin "Zuzie" St Rose and Bertie Marshall.

Four-year-old Atiba Williams, one of the finds of the Ramajay, opened the proceedings. While he's one of the positive discoveries in the pan world, providing a flickering ray of hope for the nation's youth, Williams's skills made me sad. Like so many before him, including pre-teen Donnell Thomas of Royal Castle Potential Symphony, Williams's faces a dim musical future, as there is still no national school of music. Williams is doomed to follow that precarious, rugged path travelled by hundreds of gifted pannists who have preceded him.

Another find in Pan Ramajay '94 was Lisa Durieux, the lone female bandleader in the final. This Amoco Renegades pannist not only took debutante Stryke Stars to the final, but to within two points of champion Panazz Players' winning total. At the preliminary stage, female pannists had also made their mark when Allison Dyer led the all-female In Focus in a commendable performance, missing a place in the semi-finals by five points.

The 1994 edition of Pan Ramajay was the fifth. Taking a

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