

PAN GAZETTE

Profile of a winning team:

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Exodus reaches pan's promised land

By KIM JOHNSON

THERE HAVE BEEN shocked protests and even those most pleased seemed surprised at the victory, but Exodus has been a movement gathering momentum for over a decade.

"I'm really pissed off about the snide remarks," says Amin Mohammed, chairman of the band's management committee. "This band was in ten Panoramas before 1992, and was in eight finals. We won the East Zone four times and came second three times. In 1985, we won the national semi-finals and were three points from the leaders in the finals," he said. In that year, Despers and Renegades, three points ahead, tied for first place. Tokyo were two points ahead and All Stars one point ahead.

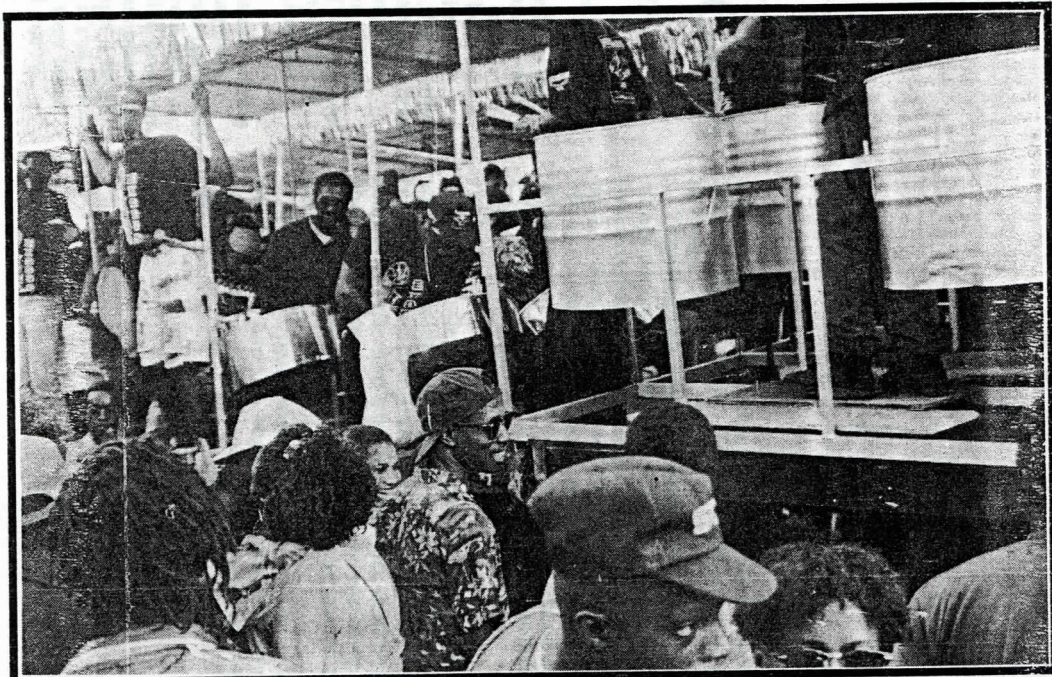
The beginning was an exodus from the St John's Road Gay Flamingoes, a band which began in the late 1950s as the Harmonettes but changed its name when Morvant's Harmonites became better known. The Flamingoes had got into the finals several times in the 1970s when east bands, Scherzando and Birdsong, were flexing their muscles, but somehow the St John's Road side felt stagnant.

After Carnival in 1981, after Flamingoes had failed to make the finals for the fifth time, some members sought to have the matter discussed. "It was at the second abortive meeting I walked out of Flamingoes pan tent, walked across the road and said, 'If anybody interested in talking seriously come join me.' There were 29 of us," recalls Mohammed about the incident that gave birth and name to the winning band.

JOHAN GONZALES DONATED a plot opposite the Flamingoes, Amin Mohammed raised a loan from his employers, Republic Bank, and Rudolph Charles contributed some of Desperadoes's background pans. So there was more than Flamingo experience in the blend: "I met Rudolph through our tuner, Wallace Austin, and we became good friends," says Mohammed, "he taught me a lot on how to approach Panorama."

The Despers leader knew that Panorama was merely a sublimation of the old gang warfare; he always wore battle fatigues, and he drilled into Mohammed the four necessities of a bid to win Panorama: good instruments, good players, undivided loyalty and proper management. So today Exodus's pans are tuned by Leo Coker who also tunes for All Stars. And although in 1987 Exodus came first in the East Zone semis with Ray Holman's arrangements, they felt compelled to dispense with his services after the 1988 season had begun: "I loved Ray's music the first time I heard it, but he wanted to arrange for Tokyo," explains Mohammed. "Rudolph used to say, 'You cyar have an arranger who training your troops for battle working for another army.'"

THE BAND'S PRESENT arrangement evolved slowly. After Ray Holman left, Mohammed contacted his old friend and Nutenes rival, Desmond Waithe. After 1988, however, Waithe felt unable to arrange a victory for Exodus: "Boogie was on the up and Panorama seemed to be more jazzy. Desmond is a traditionalist, he didn't feel he had the ability to win." But he didn't want to leave the band so he remained as Exodus's musical director and Pelham Goddard, leader of Charlie's Roots, was invited—at Ellis Chow Lin On's house according to Mohammed; at Atlantis disco according to



Goddard—to join the team.

"I arranged for Third World from 1973 until 1978 when Charlie's Roots became a road band; in '83 I arranged 'Rebecca' for Invaders and 'Pan in A Minor' for Starlift in

'86," says Goddard, "but nobody does see me as a Panorama arranger." His arrangement of Maestro's "Gold" for Third World had, however, impressed the Exodus manager.

The Goddard-Waithe team was inspired. Waithe, a professional music teacher, instilled the discipline and self-confidence in the band—the "drill master" they call him—leaving Goddard free to concentrate on the music. "They're different personalities, Pelham is more cool while Desmond, he's more of a leader to drill the band," says Julie Williams, leader of the

cello section.

But even to British students from Eclipse steelband in Tottenham, who played in Trinidad for the first time, the unfamiliar rigour was never onerous. "The practice was very hard. Once we

got home at 3 a.m.," says Monica Morgan from London, "but Desmond kept the band going, cheered you up, made us laugh while he kept us going over the parts."

Her companion from Eclipse recalls: "It was very tiring some nights; we were pushed to work but not harassed; we were instead given inspiration to play."

For an outside contender, the psychological edge Desmond gave was important. "You cyar go with ideas that you cyar win; the feeling of music is the feeling of the players," says Goddard, "and Desmond told that to

them the Thursday after they fell so far behind in the semis. After he and David (Rudder) spoke, everybody felt better."

Those practice sessions made the **EXODUS** continues on page 19



Pelham Goddard



Rudolph Charles



David Rudder

PAN GAZETTE

Pan from the East breaks Panorama monopoly

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difference between the semi-finals and the big night. The band was in Balisier House carpark, sweating until 3 a.m. the Thursday and Friday, and on the Saturday of the finals they planned to begin at 5.30 pm. At 6.30, Mohammed picked up Goddard and, driving to the band, entering Stanmore Avenue, said, "Boy, if they serious, they there by now." Goddard replied, "You hearing what I hearing?" They'd already practised for nearly two hours.

Throughout, Goddard's flexibility—"cool"—allowed him to listen to advice from players, from Waithe and Mohammed, and most importantly, from the judges who prepared detailed reports on the strong and weak points of each band's preliminary and semi-final performances.

"If Desmond in the band doing something, Pelham and I are outside listening, discussing, and vice versa," explains Mohammed, "We'd be hearing a harmony he didn't put in, a chord that's not there. Each man respects the other's opinion and this year, on several days—Pelham with a keyboard, Desmond with a cuatro and I with a tape of the band's last

performance—we studied the music chord by chord."

In this trio, Mohammed has the least musical influence; his portfolio is management—Charles's fourth ingredient for success. The seven-man management committee has Mohammed as chairman, his brother Ainsworth as assistant manager, chief cook and bottlewasher, musical director Waithe, and four players including the captain. "That way the non-playing members get feedback from the players," says nine-bass player Andy Husband.

Feedback, communication—this is more than part of a management structure, though; they emerge out of something wider. "It have a kind of love, everybody treated like brothers an sisters," is how one bass player put it. "If Exodus goes through, I don't think I'll play pan again: it's as if you married to someone and they leave you, you don't feel you'd marry again."

That's why Exodus hardly loses members to other bands; instead people come to play for one season—like Rudder's "short rasta from Nu Tones" on the scratcher—and they remain. "They really stretched their arms out to us, and I really want to

say thanks," says double second player Marcia Brown from London; "They really made us feel at home."

Together, communication, loyalty: these values require a home, and it was only in 1986 that Exodus found its home in the natural hollow next to the St Augustine/Tunapuna bridge. Minister Marilyn Gordon and Parliamentary Representative John Scott helped the band get permission to use the large overgrown hollow of Crown Land where people dumped their rubbish.

But even here was tradition, because here was where the original Flamingoes of the 1950s were buried, when a badjohn named Foots, who had contracted them to play for his club, destroyed their pans after they said they were too tired to continue playing. Foots threw all the ruined pans off the bridge that bounds Exodus.

Today this pan theatre is one of the grandest in Trinidad, and has been the venue of many a music concert—steelband, pop or calypso. An

annual ladies' windball cricket league is held there. UWI's Creative Arts Centre has also held two plays in the yard. And the ten-a-side Pan Ramajay competition—an Exodus fund-raising initiative—has brought the best players from all over to St Augustine at the foot of St John's Road.

"We studied All Stars' festival strategy—they had their classical jewels the year between music festivals, so they were playing classical throughout. We considered a mini-classical festival but with everybody talking it over it suddenly emerged—we have Panorama, which is calypso, and Music Festival which is classical; and what was needed was to facilitate small groups to show the power you could get out of them. The large bands constrain the individual but in the small group he has more freedom of expression, more like jazz."

So if Exodus has busted a gaping hole in the Port of Spain Panorama monopoly for every band possibly to enter, don't think it was a fluke.