

PAN VS THEATRE

Panmen, actors in Hart Street row

By TERRY JOSEPH
"ITS A DREAM come true," says Theatre Workshop manager Stanley Marshall about the group's acquisition of the Old Fire Brigade Station building in downtown Port-of-Spain, but for Pan Trinbago the award comes as a nightmare on Hart Street — part two.

The pan body had already been through what they termed "the initial horror of

hurdlng all the bureaucratic delays" involved in making good its application for the premises, having surveys done and structuring their vision of a proper headquarters in the city, when the surprise came.

Proper Procedures

According to Pan President Owen Serrette, "we had applied for the facility since 1987, with the hope of developing the entire block into the World

Street row

Steelband Centre. They applied mere days before the award.

Serrette argues that his organisation had gone through all the proper procedures in an attempt to acquire the building.

"We have documents to show that we applied through our ministry, and we had the support of the Minister of Culture, who strongly recommended that we get the place.

"The authorities were aware that we had a sponsor who had expressed willingness to underwrite the cost of restoring the building. It would not have cost the Government one cent, so in the absence of any other explanation, we can only assume that the award was based on class."

Theatrical Flourish

On behalf of the Theatre Workshop, Marshall dismisses the possibility of snobbery with theatrical flourish.

"What class are we?" he asks, hoping aloud that the Pan Trinbago response was not "based on a perception that only high-coloured people are involved in local theatre."

But Serrette, who is the brother-in-law of Workshop Artistic Director Albert La Veu, was quick to add that "it is not a question of colour, but theatre people were not normally from the working-class.

"Their class," he said, "works by

strings and connections. For instance, they went straight to Property Management (a division of the Ministry of Finance) to get the favour."

Serrette added that even the Ministry of National Security, which wanted to regain control of the building for use as a base of rapid-response to fires occurring in the city, was left out.

Marshall, a recent recipient of the Humming Bird Silver Medal for his contribution to drama, said that his group did not wish to pursue any argument with Pan Trinbago, but wanted to spend their time concentrating on plans to develop a conservatory on the site.

The Workshop, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, has been working with architect John Gillespie toward cementing its vision of a fully-equipped theatre, rehearsal rooms, property storage, offices and audio-visual facilities; and hopes to use the finished version to extend its training of the young for their roles in theatre.

Ancient Building

But the young might become quite restless, waiting on the facility to be completed. The ancient building which has been the source of this dispute is going to take a Herculean effort, just to make it "a nice space" as they say in the theatre.

In the roofing, there are holes, the



STANLEY MARSHALL
dream come true



OWEN SERRETTE
we applied first

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size of which allow for heavenly reconnaissance, while the present state of the upper floor is good only for a game of hop-scotch.

Tourist Attraction

Estimates from both Pan Trinbago and Theatre Workshop come in at around one million dollars for restoration and construction works.

Parliamentary incorporation as a non-profit organisation, coming now for the Workshop, would make them eligible for grants from international bodies associated with theatre. Pan

Trinbago has enjoyed such status for the last decade.

"With that site we could have done so many things that would benefit this country, lamented Serrette, "the headquarters would have been a tourist attraction, with pan night and day, but somebody managed to convince someone else that it would have been better for a theatre, which would probably only be open three nights per week."

"It only echoes what the Calypsonians have been singing even up to this year — where the hell pan really reach?"



THE OLD fire brigade building on Hart Streetwill cost millions to refurbish.