

STEELBANDS MUSIC FESTIVAL POST MORTEM — 2

By VALENTINO SINGH

THERE was something steamy about Jerry Jemmott last Wednesday morning.

He wasn't in possession of his magical baton, which has been used so often to urge on Catelli Trinidad All Stars in its many conquests over the years.

Instead "Uncle Gem", as he is affectionately called by members of his orchestra, was conducting a different session; he was in a different mood from the happy and lively one which Trinidadians and, indeed, pan lovers the world over have come to associate him.

His band had a few days earlier placed second to Witco Desperadoes in the 1986 Steelband Music Festival which was held at the Jean Pierre Complex. In doing so it had won two of the three categories — the best calypso and the best tune of choice — but it was the third category, the test piece, which failed to generate enough points to win the overall title.

In fact, the winner was an unbelievable five and a half points ahead of Catelli.

But as far as Jemmott is concerned, the performance of his band surpassed all others.

"Uncle Gem", while congratulating Desperadoes on its performance, said the circumstances under which Catelli performed the test piece was irresponsible and "could only happen in Trinidad."

He said that had All Stars not been genuinely interested in the pan movement, the finals would not have been allowed to take place on the night of October 4.

Early Part Of Festival

Producing two versions of the score, Jemmott said the correct version was only handed to All Stars on the Wednesday before the finals "and that was by accident."

He said a first version was given to the band some time in July and it was this version which the band practised and played throughout the early part of the festival.

He pointed out that he began to get worried when his band made low scores in the preliminaries and also when he heard the different interpretation of the other bands.

"I spoke to my assistant, 'Smooth' Edwards, about it and he said to me jokingly, 'Be careful we don't have a different score from the adjudicators'."

They agreed to get a new copy from Pan Trnabago and it was then they discovered the band was not playing what the adjudicators were seeing on their scores.

Jemmott said there were several differences as most of the metronomes were left out of the first version, "which meant that I interpreted 'allegro' as I thought it to be."

While this provided a minor problem, he added, it was the instructions on the 21st, 76th, 96th and 98th bars which were not included in the original score that made all the difference in Catelli's performances.

Even at that late stage he felt that Catelli would be able to correct its mistakes in time for the final night. "I knew that the others had a chance to be judged on the correct version in the preliminaries so that they would know how effective their performance were. But we went into the final night without having that privilege."

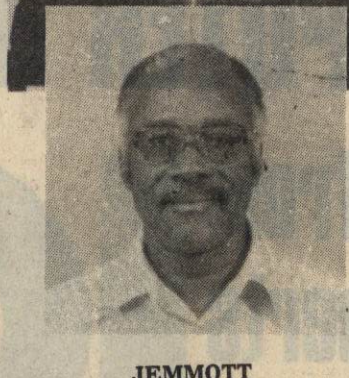
Not a man to query judges' decisions, Jemmott said there was evidence to suggest that the bands paid no attention to percussions in the test piece. "Knowledgeable musicians would tell you that the bands did not stick to what was on the score sheets — and this includes the eventual winning

We surpassed all other bands on final night says Catelli's Jemmott



Catelli All Stars under the magical baton of "Uncle Jerry" Jemmott at the finals. INSET: Jerry

'The circumstances under which All Stars performed the test piece was irresponsible and could only have happened in Trinidad'



JEMMOTT

band. This unfortunately was an oversight by the judges and this means that the bands were playing incorrectly."

Asked his opinion of the test piece, Jemmott congratulated Winsford De Vine on his work but said he was not satisfied with the selection. "After the pieces of the previous years, I don't think it should have been the test for '86."

Insult To Steelband

He was dissatisfied with the manner in which the test piece was selected. "I think it is time that trained musicians be treated with a lot more respect. How could people who know nothing about music select a test piece for a festival of this nature. I think it is an insult to the steelband movement. Surely a body of trained musicians who have a working knowledge of the steelband

should be called in to make such a decision."

Stepping up his tone, Jemmott said he considered some statements made by the president of Pan Trnabago, Arnim Smith, irresponsible. He said:

"How could he say that it is not necessary for the panmen to learn to read and write music?"

"In this day and age, it is very important for panmen to do so. It is time that panmen be taken from their semi-literate state as far as music is concerned. They must be able to converse in music, they must be able to talk about modulation, key signatures, phrasing and composers, and not be the robot that they were over the years."

Jemmott said that even if panmen were offered scholarships today, they could achieve little because they knew nothing about music and "even a man like Boogie would waste time in something like that."

The angry conductor said that given the envi-

ronment surrounding pan in this country, it was difficult for the panmen to make strides. "It seems like they even want to tie down the calypso movement, specifying what calypsoes to play. That surely must be madness...you can play any classic but not any calypso."

He felt there were instances when the executive of Pan Trnabago appeared to be suffocating the panmen. "I myself have offered to help Pan Trnabago with respect to music but this has never been taken up."

Jemmott wanted to find out why it was necessary for a Pan Trnabago official to go into the booth where the adjudicators were summing up on the final night of competition. "I find this very unusual. I don't think the adjudicators asked for any help, so what is the reason?"

Catelli Trinidad All Stars has won the Music Festival on four occasions — 1968, '72, '80 and '84 — and has the reputation of being one of the few steelbands considered an all-year band.