

# The making of a PANORAMA TUNE

## Six weeks to ten minutes of glory



Starting on January 2, Marcia Noel has been witnessing the creative process by which Jit Samaroo and Amoco Renegades are painstakingly putting together the pieces of what could be another Panorama winner. Part I of her panyard report follows:

### MONDAY JANUARY 15

**THE SHORT**, dreadlocked man with the disfigured face is in front of the mighty Renegades steel orchestra, "conducting".

Natty in his blue jean shirt and burgundy pants, he lifts his arms and waves them this way and that to the music in his head.

The background section, in racks arrayed across the width of the panyard, is being drilled. The pannists have just learnt a new part in this year's Panorama composition, "Pan in ah Rage" by De Fosto, and they are running it over and over again.

Nobody has time to pay the dreadlocks any mind.

It is Panorama season, when the nights standing behind your pan are long and tiring, and by 1 a.m. your head tells you it can't take any more music.

**YOU BEGIN** to feel cold on a warm evening because you want to sleep and you have to go to work in the morning but the "cause" just won't let you leave.

If you do, you will probably have to answer to the section leader or the captain on the next day. Pannmen and women have been banned from playing for that.

We are in Renegades' pan yard, the reigning Panorama champions, and the masters of steel are preparing for the battle in the "Big Yard" on February 4.

That is the day of the Panorama preliminary round and the zonal final.

The band had started practising on January 3, when members and prospective members gathered for a meeting with the committee.

It was a time of laying down the law. Bandleader George Duncan told the assembled pannists he wants a "cohesive force" to "battle with united armies" in the Savannah.

He expects punctuality, "total co-operation" and dedication.

They are to be in the yard at 7.30 p.m. promptly, earlier if possible. The arranger, Jit Samaroo, is supposed to meet them there and not the other way around.

They will get refreshments and money to go home.

All they have to do is commit themselves to the task in hand.

The players are in the yard doing what they are expected to do: learn the music and execute it well.

There are 20 days left to "prelims" and so far Samaroo has only arranged two verses and a chorus.

They will be moving swiftly as the days fly by.

The bright overhead lights in the panyard illuminate everything they cast their glare on — the chrome of the tenors and the frontline pans, and the frown on some of the faces of the guitar and cello players who cannot quite get the new part.

The rhythm men on drums, timbales, cowbell and scratchers, keep a steady soca beat, slow and easy.

The background pans play the few bars they have learnt. The drummer strikes four on the foot bass and they take it again from the top.

The piece is not difficult but the phrasing is a little tricky and some of them are having problems.

It's worse when they know they are being watched.

When most of them can play it comfortably, it's time to bring in the tenors and double tenors.

Samaroo has given the frontline pans a descending chromatic run (music scale proceeding by semitones) to play.

That is the easy part. The hard part is that he expects them to play it three notes at a time with the right hand striking one note, the left striking the other note and then back to the right hand striking the first note again.

These notes have to be played on the downbeat of each beat of the bar.

At 60 or 70 beats per minute, it is "suckeye". At 120 bpm — Renegades won't play much below that — only the "crackshots" will make it. (Already one tenor girl is a note or two behind and the tempo has not been stepped up yet).

Samaroo laughs when you mention it to him:

"My job is to give them; their job

is to play it!"

It probably sounds harsh but he knows his players. He's been arranging for Renegades for umpteen years and he and his team represent a formidable combination.

In the shed where they store some of the pans, Aldwin Williams, a shift worker with Carib, is practising furiously by himself.

He is trying to catch up with the rest of the band because he only started two days ago. If he could practice at his leisure, it would not be so bad but he is on shift now so his time is limited.

Williams has been playing pan for 28 years, 18 of them with Renegades. By the flick of his wrist and the confidence with which he plays, you know he should catch up with ease.

Dr Rat, a "celebrity" in his own right, is entertaining a female friend near the bar.

Early in the afternoon, while Charlotte Street bustled with traffic, Rat, "lingay" with shoulder-length, brown, matted locks, was in the yard painting the floats white.

That is his job.

Now, he is relaxing, beer in hand, listening to his band.

Samaroo has not yet got to the "bridge", that vital turning-point in a Panorama tune.

But already he is contemplating changing key (from A flat, the tune's original key).

He is not sure what key he will go into. It all depends on the pan he selects to assist him with the music. He may do that by the weekend, he says.

He will probably do it before the weekend.

Arrangers are never totally forthcoming about their music: they have to think of the opposition.

Samaroo's task is complex. It is all about trial and error. As an arranger, he could spend a whole evening in the yard giving his players five or ten bars of music, only to scrap the whole thing the next night.

It is all part of the creative process and pannmen/women have to learn to expect it.

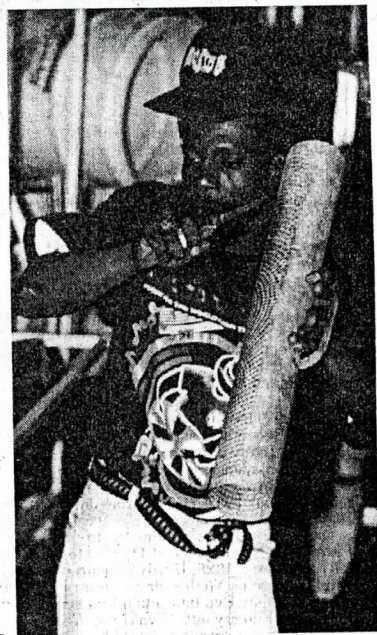
(As 1995 Panorama champions, Renegades are automatically in the finals. But they still have to enter the preliminary round if they are to compete for the north zone title.)

A man goes over to talk to Rat and the two men hug and slap each other's backs.

When you look for Rat later, he is talking to two other men in another part of the yard. There is hardly anybody in Trinidad who does not know the Dr.

Over on the wooden structure, directly opposite the floats, sit an assortment of people. The structure was built for the public and people liming there are talking animatedly, their beer bottles standing next to them.

Or they are sitting alone or in twos, soaking up Samaroo's arrangement.



Some tourists arrive — they tend to be attracted to Renegades — and ensconce themselves in the structure too.

Other "hangers" are dotted around the panyard, leaning up against the bar or against somebody's car outside.

They usually prefer to stay way in the background where they can hear the music better.

Different signs are displayed in various points of the yard: "Ladies and Girls Toilet" and the arrow showing the way; "Non-players not permitted beyond this point"; "Renegades welcome all members and supporters and visitors", followed by practice days and times.

The men's toilet seems to be non-existent. Maybe it's in the bushes...

Chicken, cheese, beef and potato pies are on sale along with tea and coffee. The bar is separate.

A nutman wanders from one end of the yard to another touting his stock.

By now it is 11 p.m.

**THE BACKGROUND** pans have their part "down pat" and the frontline sound unified. Most of them can play the chromatic confidently and it registers in the pose they adopt while rattling it off or the flip of the stick in the execution of it. And of course they have to look smug about it. Those who cannot play it properly look uncomfortable. They avoid looking up.

Tenor section leader Selwyn John inspects the run played by some of the members of his section.

One man is not playing it well and John screws up his face.

With hard work and lots of practice, he might get it in time for prelims.

But he might not.

It depends on how flexible his wrists are, hence the importance of doing wrist exercises.

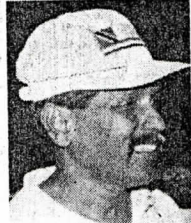
The "skaters", those who only play some of the notes some of the time, are usually covered up by the more able players.

But that is not how it is supposed to be and Renegades is renowned for being crisp and unified.

The erring tenor player at least has time.

If he still cannot play the chromatic by time the final night comes around, he will probably be pushing one of the floats on Panorama night instead.

It is the way it goes in the pan yard.



JIT SAMAROO

