

ML1040

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 their Panorama '96 tune. Part I of her series appeared in the January 21 *Sunday Express*. In the second part today, she reports on the countdown to Sunday's Panorama preliminaries.



Monday January 22

**A** COMMITTEE MEETING is going on in the middle of the panyard under a red, White Oak canopy, even though the pans are jamming in the background and the dreadlocks is still "conducting".

The committee members, seated on long, low wooden benches arranged in a square, are oblivious to the racket behind them and the people "liming" by the bar, only a few footsteps away.

But they look up momentarily, suspiciously, if you get a little too close to proceedings.

You know when it's time to retreat.

It is 7 p.m. and 13 days away from the beginning of the "battle royal".

Most of the players are trickling into the yard and setting up their pans for the long night's session rehearsing DeFosto's "Pan in a Rage".

The ones who are already there are going through the tune alone or in groups, running over the new music or consolidating the older music because it's easy to forget you ever learnt a part when you have to cram notes into your head.

The middle section — cellos, guitars, quadrophonics — are in the process of learning a long solo, so too the tenors most of whom arrive later.

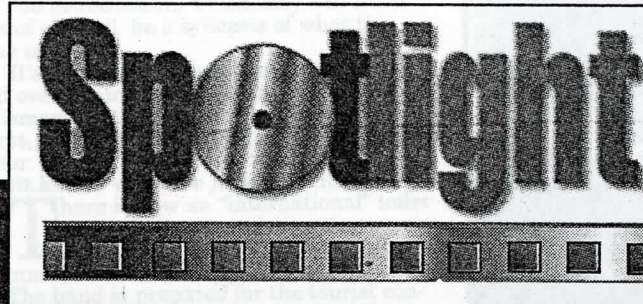
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# As the battle royal nears

## The making of a Panorama tune — Part II



Aldwin Williams, the Carib worker who was practising apace last week in a furious attempt to catch up, is. He's relaxed now because he is no longer behind, and instead of being stashed away in the shed where they store the pans, he's out in the front with the rest of his section.

Ronald Fough who says he is mixed with Chinese though he looks quite black is behind the counter of the band's latest venture: a souvenir shop.

It is bright and freshly painted in a stark sky blue, and stands at the gate leading into the yard so that you cannot miss it.

Fough, who is also head of panyard security (Renegades is well organised), is proud of the paint job he has done.

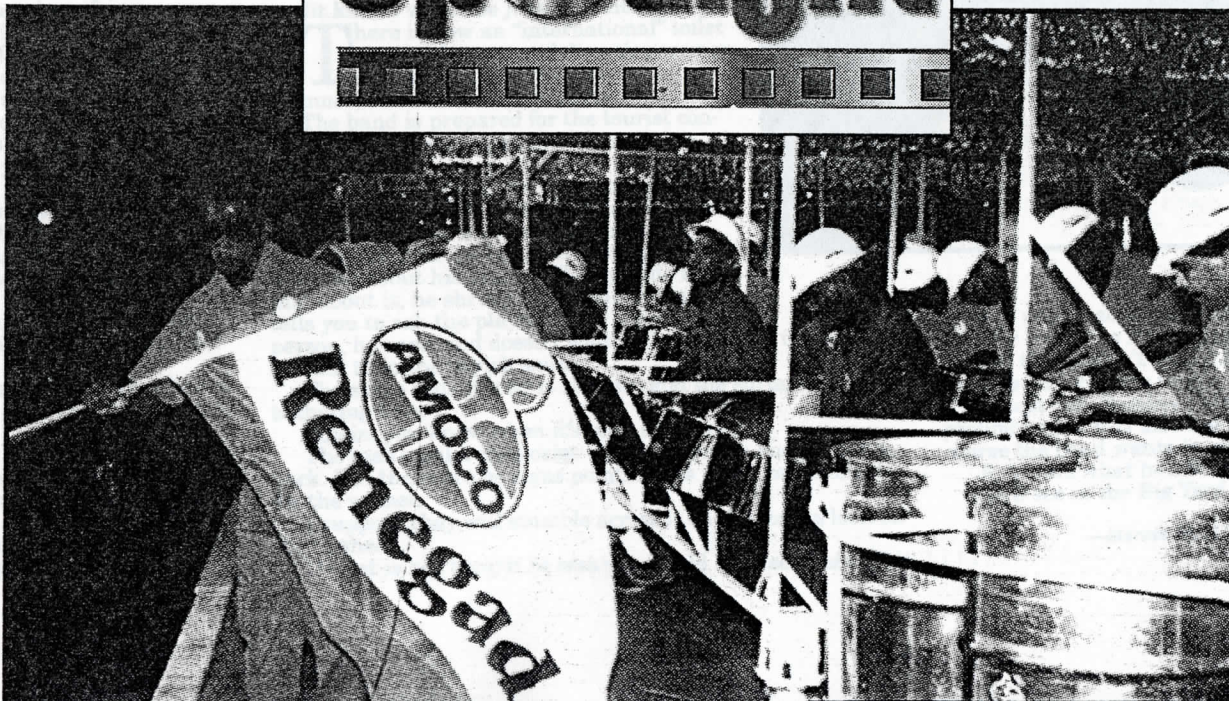
The shop is stocked with red, white and black Renegades' bandanas, replica pans, cassettes ("Renegades Live at Queen's Hall"; "Amoco Renegades Steel Orchestra"; "Panorama Classics"), hats, cups, glasses and badges. It is only open during the carnival season but the aim for the future is that it should remain open all year round.

Children are crawling all over the main float and one boy squares up to fight with another.

Except that the boy who is doing the squaring, the smaller of the two, is at ground level, while the one doing the "backing back" is on the float, and it's a good thing there is a decent space

between them.

It's all part



tune alone or in groups, crawling over the new music or consolidating the older music because it's easy to forget you ever learnt a part when you have to cram notes into your head.

The middle section — cellos, guitars, quadrophonics — are in the process of learning a long solo, so too the tenors most of whom arrive later.

The basses have not yet been given their solo and the seconds have already learnt theirs.

Some seconds players are sitting on the bottom of their rack, bored.

The double tenor players, whose pans are principally used for harmonising, are learning snippets of the solo from the middle pans. They will do the same with the other sections.

The introduction of these solos means that Renegades is following its tried and trusted formula: long runs — scales and arpeggios (notes of a musical chord played in succession) dominating the tune, snaking their way first through the frontline pans and along the middle and background pans, smooth and mellifluous.

You can count on Renegades' panmen/women to sound polished and unified, their instruments well tuned.

And you can expect the "engine room" to be a force of its own — the drummer crashing and dropping, phrasing perfectly, the ironmen levelling their ironbeaters at the gleaming silver metal with hypnotic rhythm and flair, the scratchers sizzling, the tambourines jingling and jangling, the cowbells "tock-tocking" like a steady heartbeat, the congas moaning rhythmically, entrancing you, and the timbales exploding at intervals.

Renegades have never been less than electrifying.

If you've ever heard "Sweet Pan" (1984), "Pan in A Minor" (1987), "Iron Man" (1990), "The Bees' Melody" (1994), you'll understand the state the music makes of a listener.

It is why they have won Panorama so many times (seven—Desperadoes, however, have won eight).

But learning Jit's arrangement does not come easily. The phrasing is often tricky, especially this year, and the speed awesome.

It's easy to go out of time—which is what the middle section is doing now—and it's easy to lose track of where you are.

If you make a mistake while playing a long run, it can mean having to wait until the entire piece has ended before you can rejoin the band.

But if you learn your part well enough, and your hand remembers where to go when your brain stops thinking, you can slide right in again.

With the pace some of these top bands play at, your hands usually slip into autopilot anyway and the brain just reminds you of major parts to come.

Who can think that fast?

Because Jit teaches players their solos first before he does any bridging, it's difficult to work out where he has reached in the tune.

What you do know is that his arrangement will be classical in parts, Latin or even Zouk in others.



The key will change once, probably twice, with one of the keys being a minor.

There will be a lot of drama in keeping with the "rage" of "Pan in Ah Rage" and there must be a jam towards the end as well as a return to the verse and chorus.

The introduction, which they will learn last of all, will be a synopsis of what the tune is about.

It's a formula Renegades has used over and over again. Though many are critical of it, lamenting the lack of a fresh creative burst, the formula has been highly successful so far.

Jit knows what the judges want.

There is now an "international" toilet sign in the panyard directing women to that facility: "Ladies, Frau, Femmes, Senoras", with an arrow.

The band is prepared for the tourist contingent who are always present in silent admiration.

Jit arrives during the background section's rehearsal and he is smouldering. Who or what upset the maestro will remain a mystery since he doesn't like talking much — not even about his music. When you do ask him about it, he shrugs his shoulders and tells you to ask the players. He's a private person, he says, and doesn't want to be quoted in the paper.

And then the boyish smile.

The smile tells you he is shy(ish) and the shrug that you're bothering him.

Again, you know when it's time to retreat.

The men's toilet does exist — it is not in the bushes at the back. But there are no signs pointing the way like there are for the women.

I suppose they will stumble across it on the way to look for the bushes.

Dr Rat is not here; if he was you would have seen him. But

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Except that the boy who is doing the squaring, the smaller of the two, is at ground level, while the one doing the "backing back" is on the float, and it's a good thing there is a decent space

between them.

It's all part of the action in the panyard.

**Friday  
January 26**

Nine days left in the countdown and the yard is bursting with eager ears waiting to hear Jit's music.

The "hangers" spilling out of the yard onto the pavement outside talk animatedly, cups or bottles in hand, glad for the Friday night lime.

Jit still hasn't bridged many of the parts and the band still has approximately three-five minutes of music to learn.

It is uncharacteristic of him, says one player: Renegades usually learns its Panorama tune with time to spare.

But they needn't worry. As reigning champions they are automatically in the finals.

Except that Sunday February 4 is not just the Panorama preliminaries; it is also the day of the zonal finals and of course the band wants to capture the North zone title again.

Jit knows what he's doing, the player concedes.

We'll see in the Big Yard when battle commences.



**JIT SAMAROO**

—Marcia Noel has played in Panorama as a member of Neqi & Mussy All Stars