

Pan's final conflict

By **COURTENAY
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IN ANOTHER forum last year I referred to the significance of the phenomenon which we casually and somewhat unceremoniously refer to simply as "pan," this art form which bespeaks the creativity and genius of our people.

On that first occasion I made a much worn-out and far from original plea that we needed such creativity and discipline in other spheres of human endeavour to surmount the present economic crisis. It is, therefore, out of great respect for and profound admiration of this genius that I find myself compelled to venture outside of my recognised field of interest to voice a deep concern.

Through the Steelband Festival and the National Panorama events the element of competition is now an integral component of these musical occasions. While the law of competition may sometimes be hard for the individual, it is, however, best for the race since it insures the survival of the fittest in every de-

partment of life and as such is essential for progress. Indeed, since there is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity competitiveness is one safeguard against such complacency.

We, as a people, enjoy competition, but we also have our allegiances to one band or the other, much of which is based on blind loyalty rather than analytical objectivity. This, in itself, is not a bad thing. We must, however, differentiate between public sentiment and public opinion.

Saturday night, Sunday morning saw the exponents of the art in fierce competition. Genius was expressed in several guises. There was the infectious rhythm of a melodious and catchy refrain blended into an effective, albeit relatively simple, arrangement by a gifted composer/arranger. There also was that grand-master of harmonious improvisations always with an uninterrupted legato flow of variations around the theme, and with a masterly fluency in the ilk of the late trumpeter, Clifford Brown. There were other geniuses with various intermediate styles.

Then there was the genius which expressed its talent and confidence with an appropriately bold and aggressive pace as if to say that whereas with mediocrity being modest is mere honesty, in those who possess great talent modesty is nothing but sheer hypocrisy. It was also as if this genius was saying that this is not Carnegie Hall, *this is the Savan-nah.*

We saw associated with this aggression a panorama of musical expressions punctuated with passages of defiant dissonance, ending with a marriage of two musical cultures, the dougla offspring creating an exciting and awesome innovation in pan expression.

The preliminaries and the semi-finals did not matter at all. This was the final conflict and this was all that mattered. They were all mighty bands but some were mightier yet. At the end of the last performance at 4 o'clock Sunday morning there was a relative hush. It was as though public sentiment had given way to public opinion, or at least so I thought.

Criticism is easy. Art is difficult.

The judges gave their decision and that is final. And so, perforce, I will restrict my concern only to the great divide of as many as 14 points between the band adjudged first place and the pair relegated to the fourth position on that night. The mathematics at least I hope I can be permitted to reject. So said, in my view something therefore must be wrong, seriously wrong with the system of judging. May I hasten to add that I am not here criticising the judges per se but the system and unless this is addressed, and urgently so, unless there is some dialogue on this issue I fear that genius will be stifled, talent will be frustrated, creativity muzzled, innovation discouraged and mediocrity will flourish.

Appropriately, this year a chorus line voiced that "We come too far to take it slight/Pan must progress." The system, therefore, must not be allowed to impede this progress. Therefore, because of the lesson of Pan, address the Pan.