

Is he really the top pan man?

By

ANDREW PITMAN

THIS CARNIVAL the Shell Invaders steel band will hit the road with no less than one hundred and twenty pans.

Whether they win the judges' favour or not, the fact will still remain that their style is unique.

And one name that has always been associated with Invaders is Ellie Mannette—the pan wizard who is now ambitiously imparting his knowledge of the instrument in the United States.

But there is one other—equally responsible for the band's success, and who is constantly shunning publicity.

Ellie's younger brother Vernon—known to the steel-band boys as "Birdie," captains the Invaders and is also their tuner.

FLAGSHIP

Simply put, as one of the bandmen suggested, Birdie is an incredible panman.

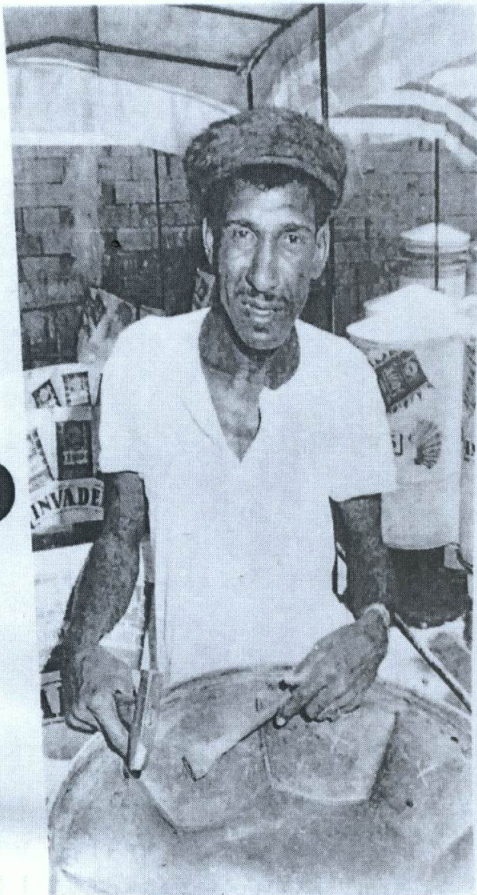
He's most insignificant unless identified. Because once you know him, you try hard to link appearance with reputation.

He's shy and very reserved but has the ability to concisely explain anything with the utmost clarity and confidence.

The small-built, 41-year-old tuner called "Birdie" is one of the founders of Invaders and has been tuning pans for more than 15 years.

Such well known steelbands have profited from his services — Desperadoes, Starlift and others.

Most of the Invaders boys believe that "Birdie"



BIRDIE MANNETTE... an "incredible panman"

'Birdie' Mannette, tuner of Invaders

excels brother Ellie in pan tuning.

As one band member put it; "The boys love him and respect him for his knowledge of the pan.

"There is no doubt that he is better than Ellie.

"Even the arranger invites suggestions from him."

But "Birdie" is very reluctant to make any comparison.

He admits that he learnt a lot of techniques from Ellie and always respects his brother in turn.

And he explains why he is held in such esteem.

"I had to improve when

Ellie went away. I was left with full responsibility of the Invaders.

"I was then placed in charge of the yard where I literally grew up. I made it my life and it's still that way."

Vernon "Birdie" Mannette is also making his own contribution to the development of the pan.

Apart from revolutionising his brother's tenor pan styling, he is presently experimenting with a giant tenor pan.

But he insists that experiments should be confined strictly to the pan.

"By incorporating electronic attachments, the pan itself is actually being neglected.

This is the man they call "Birdie"

Playing one of the major roles in promoting steelbands for so many years, unrewarded, remaining in the background at all times, and yet continuing to devote himself to the pan as very few steelbandmen can.

THURS. 25
ASTOR METRO San F /du
4.30 & 8.30 p.m. 12.30, 4.15 & 8.15 p.m.

PRINCE San F /du