

Pan, media, town/country syndrome

Why the notion that progress and development means the town?

By ROOSEVELT WILLIAMS

WRITING in another newspaper of October 30, 1988, a resident from Sangre Grande made the observation that there was an "open bias of the print and electronic media to the achievements of residents of Sangre Grande" evident in the scant coverage given to Cordettes Steel Orchestra when compared with Merrytones whom they had beaten in the first night of the preliminaries of Pan Is Beautiful V.

The resident was referring to only part of what is a much larger problem that is very deeply ingrained in the mentality of many in our society. I am referring to the town/country, urban/rural dichotomy and all that that implies.

Hospitable Attitude

In our society, there is a general notion that somehow progress and development are associated only with the town while backwardness and lack of development are associated with the country.

For the town people, hardly anything of worth comes out of the country. Don't try to tell them about all the garbage and filth that you can find on any street in Port-of-Spain.

Don't try to tell them about the dog-eat-dog attitude of town life, about the hostile atmosphere to be encountered there, about the ill mannered behaviour of many town folk.

In their one way, they will indicate that these are minor social costs to be borne for the progress they are enjoying.

On the other hand, the openness and hospitable attitude of the "country folks" will be seen as naivete and possibly, stupidity.

But what does all of this have to do with the complaint made by the resident of Sangre Grande about the treatment handed out to Cordettes by the media?

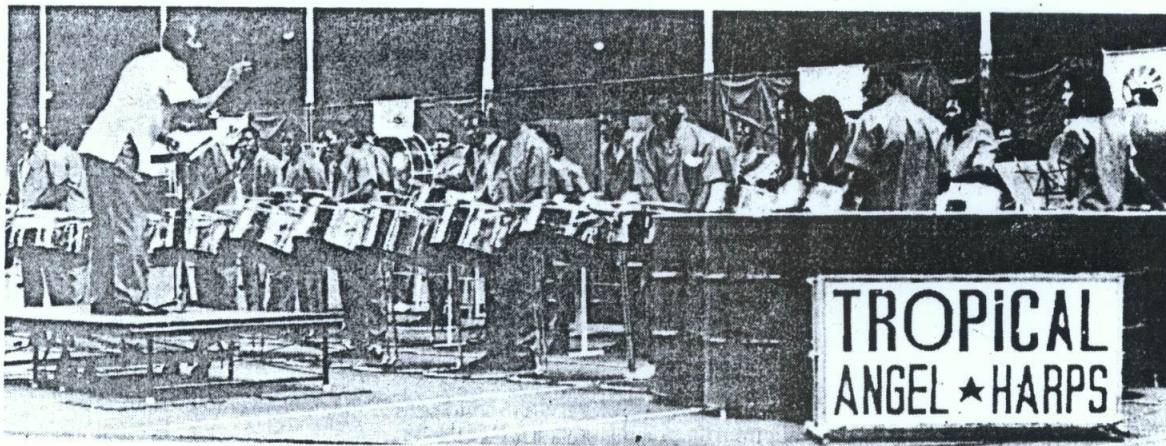
It is simply that Cordettes is for them "a country band," not deserving of the same attention as a town band.

Few Lines Mention

If the bias of the media is evident in the case of Cordettes, how much more flagrant is it in the treatment accorded to the band that topped all the other bands in the semi-finals of the competition — Tropical Angel Harps of Enterprise Village, Chaguana.

When the band came first in the October 24 preliminaries, beating WITCO Desperadoes, many town people had it to say that it was a "fluke," that the band had received too many points.

They could not possibly conceive of a "country band" outplaying the town band Desperadoes. Their anger and frustration came not so much from the fact that Despers had been beaten but by



File photo shows conductor Fitzroy Innis as he directs Tropical Angel Harps to the top place in the semi-finals of the World Steelband Festival held at the Jean Pierre Complex.

whom they were beaten.

(There is a tendency among town people to regard any place east and south of Curepe as "country.")

While the media has not come out openly and voiced the above sentiments, their attitude is clear. They behave as though Tropical Angel Harps never played and won.

The town bands have received more credit in their defeat than Tropical Angel Harps has in its victory.

The so-called self-styled pan experts like Peter Blood, Jessy Mitchell and Angela Pidduck are ranting and raving about the town bands, writing copiously about them, while grudgingly giving Tropical Angel Harps a few lines mention.

Focussing on the big names, they spoke about their entrance, how they looked, how they excited the complex everything that it was possible to say.

The conductors and arrangers of the town bands were splashed across the pages of the newspaper. One newspaper even had the "gall" to headline a very small article (two paragraphs) tucked away in the corner on the arranger of Tropical Angel Harps — "Clarence Who?"

The treatment of the band seemed to have received worse when they came first in the entire Semi Finals, copping a score of 843 points ahead of both Neal and Massy Trinidad all Stars and WITCO Desperadoes.

In what has seemed like one big conspiracy on the part of both print and electronic media, it is almost as though Tropical Angel Harps does not exist.

They would rather forget about them. In a seven-page Pan Festival supplement put out by another newspaper (not the Guardian) eight bands are featured and all but one of them are town bands, the exception being the band from Guy-

ana, Bidco Invaders.

The band that came out second in all the preliminaries and first in all the semi finals was to be seen nowhere.

What is worse, in all of the analysis and comments on the Festival not once is Tropical Angel Harps mentioned anywhere, even when it seemed so obvious in places where there was discussion on Merrytones' Scheherazade or on the use of soloists for playing "difficult passages," or on a discussion on conductors and arrangers.

Overall Results

As though to add insult to injury, during a mid morning programme on FM 100 on Sunday October 30, the host of the show, after finding himself in a position where he had to give the overall results of the semi-finals, stated that he could not play any Tropical Angel Harps selections since he did not have a tape of the band; yet throughout his programme, he proceeded to play selections from many of the other bands which played the same night that Tropical Angel Harps played.

Is it possible that he was unable to get a tape of the band's music from both preliminary and semi-final nights? Why was he able to get tapes of the other bands?

Let the people hear the music and decide for themselves, even if you think that it is not good enough for mention.

The television, likewise, is no exception to this type of bias. One Saturday night, channels 9 and 14 brought what was supposed to be the show from the previous night.

Only two tunes from the winner of the night were played, while all of WITCO Desperadoes and Carib Tokyo were played. Coincidence, again?

The implications of this type of biased behaviour on the part of individuals and

institutions of the print and electronic media are far reaching.

In the first instance, it perpetuates the big band/small band, town band/country band syndrome which only works against the overall development of the art form in the nation.

It almost guarantees the demise of bands that have not yet made a name for themselves. It guarantees as a consequence the survival and domination of only a few big bands in the country.

Since big bands are almost always associated with big sponsors, it works against the unsponsored bands as well, and we have not yet said anything about it being unfair and unjust to hundreds of bands attempting to keep the people's culture alive in all the corners of our country.

Presumptuous Pan Experts

The town reporters and announcers like Phil Simmons, Jessy Mitchell, Angela Pidduck, Peter Blood and all the other presumptuous pan experts of the various media need to examine their objectivity or rather lack thereof, before writing about pan again.

If they cannot contribute towards the building of the art form, then they must not be allowed to destroy it.

This however is a universal risk which must be looked at very carefully, and which many societies have had to deal with — one group or class of people create the culture and another group/class attempt to usurp it, define it and point out the direction in which it must go by the focus they place on it.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

DEAR DR WILLIAMS: Thank you for your letter; your point is well taken. Anybody reading your letter and our coverage of the Festival will appreciate that your criticism cannot apply to the Trinidad Guardian.