

PARRY'S PAN SCHOOL
on its first tour
of Malaysia,
December 1999.

Back row (l-r):
Sade Modeste,
Willard Harripaul,
Kim Stephen, Nikeisha
Noel, Val Serrant

Centre (l-r): Candice
Duberry, Kelly-Ann
Bruce, Roger Regis,
Shevan Bowen,
Selwyn "Parry" Paul.

Front row (l-r):
Ayanna Arneaud,
Nadine James and
Kern Summerville.



50 years devoted to national instrument **Arranging a pan school**

By STEVE REGIS

NEARLY 50 years in the pan movement have blurred some of the dates in Selwyn "Parry" Paul's recollection of his career. Nevertheless, the juiciest details remain.

The edges of his grin sharpen as he recalls his boy days: from as early as seven, he would steal away for a ramajay with Tacarigua band Merry Stars. He got licks from his elder brothers and had his ears wrung by his mother any time he was found near a pan.

He says, "In those days people would look at it panmen as wayward."

He remembers performing the tune "Drink Tisane De Durbon" with a five-piece band of youngsters in Tunapuna Carnival; performing with Merry Stars at three Independence festivals in Queen's Hall; and eventually becoming, in his teen years, the arranger for Merry Stars.

Becoming an arranger was important to the evolution of Parry's pan life. He arranged for Symphonettes, Invaders and Silver Stars in his early career. Later, he arranged for Dunlop Tornadoes, Arima Angel Harps and Tobago Our Boys, with whom he toured Washington DC, San Francisco and Montreal, Canada, in 1986.

After being immersed for almost 30 years in steelband, Parry took a respite of about four years, returning with a new arrangement; an excellent idea of which he says, "This is my calling. I have a job to do."

With humble means and grandiose dreams Parry began, in June 1990, what is called today Parry's Pan School.

Parry is full of pride when he reminisces that on the first weekend of July/August school holidays of 1990,

he met with the parents of about 40 pupils of the St Mary's EC Primary School in Tacarigua. From this school he gathered the first students for his pan school.

He did not yet have a single steelpan but his resolution to have a school was unfazed. He taught pan theory until he acquired his first pans—two from Tobago Our Boys and two from Dunlop Tornadoes.

With four tenor pans he held his first graduation at the St Mary's EC School, in which his students in groups of four played the test piece "Love Me Tender".

"You couldn't separate the children. All of them played very well. You couldn't say who played best."

Parry's pan past and pan future were harmonising. He had arranged his "calling" into Parry's Pan School by 1993. By then he had obtained more pans and turned to Five Rivers Junior Secondary School for his second group of students.

Morning and evening, students of Five Rivers were practising under a plum tree in Tacarigua in 1993. In 1994 the band Parry's Pan School/Five Rivers Jnr Sec competed in the National Panorama Prelims at the Queen's Park Savannah.

In 1998, with several National Panoramamas and Schools Festivals behind them, Parry's Pan School placed 11th in Pan is Beautiful VIII.

In 1999 the band placed 9th in Pan is Beautiful IX, and qualified for the World Pan Festival in October—both in the orchestral and quartet competitions.

The musical arranger for the school was now Eddie Coalis.

Proud sighs punctuate Parry's reflections on the "children" and

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Spotlight

Exp. 22/09/00 p.31

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their achievements. Parry says some 200 children have passed through his hands since 1990. Some of them now have their own children. But the band remains young. Almost all of the players are teenagers.

Parry does not intend to take the focus of his school away from the youths. He says, "This is not merely a pan school but to mould you in all round manner."

The band's touring shows this clearly.

In August 1999 Parry's Pan School went to New York and performed for Labour Day. He was then invited to go to Malaysia for the Mines Millennium Celebration at the Mines Resort in Malaysia. The band stayed and performed there from December 19, 1999, to January 13, 2000. Soon after Parry's Pan School went to Malaysia on a cultural exchange organised between the Malaysian government and the Ministry of Sports and Culture in Trinidad. The band played in Kuala Lumpur at the Drumusique Kuala Lumpur 2000 Festival. In the audience was the King of Malaysia.

As the band's horizons extended beyond the Queen's Park Savannah, Five Rivers and the town of Tacarigua into the global village, some of the children were overwhelmed. There was some indiscipline during the New York tour which led to one child being sent home early. Parry, with a rumpled forehead, declares firmly, "If you don't have discipline, you go nowhere. Nobody is bigger than the band."

Ten children left the band after its New York tour. But most stayed and endured the pain of their international teething. Among those are the

11 who have travelled to Malaysia twice with Parry. It comes as no surprise that Parry still wants to "take them all over the world".

Under a red and white striped tarpaulin tent last Thursday night in Parry's sister's back yard (where the band practises) one could savour the flourish of wood and rubber on steel; one could behold the small, stealthy figure of Jit Samaroo rummaging through score sheets, preparing teenagers to compete with the world. Parry sits in deep concentration in a corner of the yard.

The next morning, in his office, he repeatedly says, "You have to stress that these children are representing Trinidad in the World Steelpan Festival. We must maintain that we are the home of steelband."

But he says it's difficult for Parry's Pan School to do that without a drumset or sponsorship or even a suitable panyard. Still he does not charge children to learn, for pans or for uniforms. "I have a job to do and it does not stop in October. Parry's Pan School will always continue."

Parry's Pan School's need for sponsorship is a familiar plight. Many steelbands and steelbandsmen before and after have cried and continue to cry out to the nation. It is a drone that usually drowns out the voice of a small 50-member band like Parry's.

Nevertheless, the children themselves have earned two moments of silence (in the quartet and orchestral competitions of the World Steelband Festival) in which their pansticks alone will cry—now to the world. Hopefully, the whole world will hear them.