

T/G 11/10/86 p7



JOHN SEWELL

Rev. Fr. John Sewell, Anglican priest, musician and arranger. Fr. Sewell is well known for his association with the steelband; he is also the first to have a full steelband perform in Church. Fr. Sewell says:

THE answer is, where do we allow the steelband to go, because from the musical point of view this festival has shown there are no limits to where the music can go.

This is highlighted by the performance of works such as Rites of Spring by Stravinsky which, less than a decade ago, most people would have thought impossible.

The comments of the recent adjudicators illustrate that steelband music must have arrived. There is still, however, that constant limitation presented to the steelband world by lack of outlets for their musical talents of the festival type.

There is still, after all these biennial festivals, that same sense of frustration on the part of steelbandmen of 'whats the point of it all?'

You get offers from foreigners, but this is just a musical flash in the pan. There ought to be regular outlets for steelbandmen to demonstrate their continuing musical achievements. Everything grinds to a stop after the festival.

What is needed are incentives. What Pan Trinbago and Government — the Ministry of Culture in particular — need to provide are such incentives, if they are really serious about culture.

Everybody applauds the steelband at the end of the festival. Ministers get up

We must surrender pan to rest of the world

and say how great the steelband is and how it is a wonderful thing.

But words and platitudes are cheap; there is need to do more than that.

I think that the steelband needs to be let go to become an international instrument.

If it is going to be accepted as a worldwide international instrument, the notion that it is something peculiarly Trinidadian has to be surrendered in the same way the Italians no longer claim the piano as their own, even though it was invented there.

Form Of Flattery

This does not mean that Trinidad would cease being given credit for being the inventors of the instrument.

The steelband world ought to be very flattered that other countries want to use it or claim it for their own. It is the highest form of flattery. History would not deny the fact that it was invented in Trinidad.

The future is where the steelband world wants the pan to go from here.

It is all very well for bands to be asked to go away, and to say how clever they are in playing the classics or transcribing the classics. But this musical circle will not be complete until a symphony orchestra is prepared to reciprocate by attempting to play in a symphony concert hall a performance for instance of 'Desperadoes' arrangement of "Rebecca". But the problem is that there is no written version.

Pan will have arrived when the calypso composers or arrangers are able to write down in orchestrated form their brilliant arrangements so that they can be performed by other musical media such as the symphony orchestra.

Until that happens, the steelband arrangements of calypsoes will forever remain in that rather naive musical world of "folk."