

Challenge of the East

SITA BRIDGEMOHAN profiles the two top bands of Panorama prelims

AT 8.30 pm. Renegades is running through its repertoire, giving a concert for its fans gathering at the band's Charlotte Street panyard.

Ban captain George Duncan is cool, so is arranger Jit Samaroo. The panyard is filling up gradually; people finding seats on the damp wooden bleachers facing the band or just standing around.

At the Exodus panyard, it is 9 pm. There is a cacophony of sound as players go through their drills. Where is arranger Pelham Goddard? Goddard is busy now, says the man registering masqueraders for the band's J'Ouvert band *I ent' fraid powder*.

When he emerges from the midst of the men and chrome, Goddard is hot, as much from the evening's heat as from the constant drilling going on. The rain will come later. There are fewer people liming on the slopes of the Exodus amphitheatre; there is manager Amin Mohammed who will give his band a pep talk before the night is out.

It is the week of the semi-finals of the Panorama Championships, and both bands are readying themselves to make the most of their favourable postings at last Sunday's Panorama Preliminaries.

Renegades emerged in first place with De Posto's "Pan in a Rage", Exodus in second place with "The Case of the Disappearing Panyards," by David Rudder.

One band is a veteran in the panyard arena, the other a virtual newcomer, one armed with seasoned pan-players, one with a wealth of young talent.

One, always a contender in the race for the Panorama Championships, the other being the first to successfully test the truism that "only town sides could win Panorama." Renegades is relaxed about its win. It's been there before, many times.

The main focus for Renegades at Panorama preliminaries is to go on-stage with a completed tune. "We are pretty sure to get through the prelim-

inaries with the kind of music we play" says Duncan, "the arranger (Jit) challenges the panmen, we don't leave anything to fate."

Having come this far, there is to be no turning back for Exodus, the band known as the pride of the East. "We played good for a preliminary, we took the East Zone title, now we are ready for the semi-finals," says Goddard.

Now that the preliminaries are over, the competition becomes more heated and demanding. It is time for the bands to show their hands; the prize being entry into the grand event, the Panorama Finals. This is when the arranger really begins working for his money.

"Panorama is like a mas costume, you add on a few sequins here and there, that is the strengthening of weak parts of the performance," says Goddard.

For Renegades, semi-finals is about near perfection. "The day after preliminaries we go back to the yard and clean up the music, every phrase, accent, note. By the semi-finals we are near perfection. People say Renegades play better in the semis than the finals," says Duncan. Duncan wasn't saying what Renegades' secret weapon will be for today's session.

"Addition could come from an inspiration the arranger has," he says. Jit is influenced by nature so his style, as Duncan points out, tends to be natural as opposed to the mechanical.

Is this a complex way of saying to look out for the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves as a zephyr drifts by, the babbling of a brook as it rushes to the stream?

In fact, for Renegades, no one, not even the players, hears the complete tune until the Saturday evening before the band goes on-stage on Sunday.

Whatever the arrangement, the strategy employed by Renegades is straightforward.

"If you don't study the score sheets, crapaud smoke your pipe," says Duncan, "for the preliminaries the judges point you in the direction concerning arrangement, it is up to you to heed this advice."

"You heed the judges' comments, but you also work towards having a



THE FUTURE belongs to me: When Kitchener composed "Pan in the 21st Century," Chantalle Edselle was just three years old. Today, Chantalle personifies the future of the national instrument, as well as that of the nation's youth. A graduate of the Bishop Anstey High School, she is currently a sophomore at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, but Chantalle, 21, didn't hesitate to take up Robert Greenidge's invitation to come up to Laventille Hill to take a knock with WITCO Desperadoes for this year's Panorama competition. Chantalle's first love is the tenor, but as this ALDWYN SIN PAN photo shows, she is equally at home with any member of the steelpan family.

more dynamic impact on the judges and the audience," says Duncan.

This is Goddard's idea of adding more sequins to a mas costume. Goddard promises "more bacchanal" in Exodus' performance today.

And the band's strategy is simple. "We have by far the best music, the others are Christmas-tree music, the best execution is what we are looking for now," Mohammed told the Exodus players.

Goddard is preparing his players for the Panorama Finals, there is no hesitancy here.

"We stand a good chance as anybody," says Goddard, "performances may be different, sometimes it is the luck of the draw that really makes the difference."

"Bands inside the 5-9 playing slot stand a good chance, a band playing last has to play exceptionally well." Whether the band pulls a lucky number or plays last, fate is running second to practice in Exodus' quest for its Panorama title.

"It's a big, hard battle" Mohammed told his players, "to win we have to be prepared, sharper and on top of what we are doing, we have to execute, execute, execute."

"All we are looking for now is execution, on Sunday we have to win," he said. Sunday of the Semi-Finals and of the Finals.

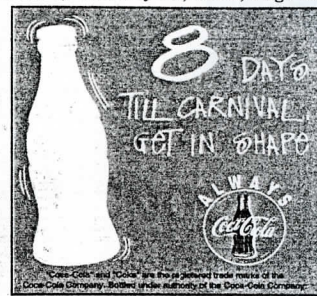
Even though the band's performance may be near perfection by the semi-finals, this doesn't stop Renegades from continuously polishing

and even re-arranging its tune. The chances of Jit Samaroo sweating among the shining chrome pans is hardly likely though.

"There is a hard-core of players who get the music scores to distribute and work with the band," says Dunca. Jit does his work, the players do theirs.

The Renegades style may be different from Exodus', but the focus is the same: to get panmen staying faithful to an arranger's intention, and executing the music to perfection.

Coming out of the preliminaries as the two top bands, the race is on — the melodies of nature versus Carnival bacchanal. A judge's job is never easy.



Roots of pan

THE bamboo-bamboo band came into existence to celebrate Carnival. This band was a purely rhythmic ensemble comprising various sizes of bamboo joints beaten together. The cutters, the smallest pieces, gave the soprano pitch. Then there were the chandlers, larger bamboo pieces representing alto. The fullers were the tenor and the bass bamboo.

A chorus group, led by a Chantwell, completed this ensemble.

The John John Tamboo Bamboo band which became the Noble Hill and River Lady Biscuit drum bands, was later led by Winston Spree Simon when it evolved to Destination Tokyo.

Spree Simon is given the fame of being the inventor of the pan — first the ping pong and then the melody pan.

World War II apparently interrupted work on the development of the pan. To celebrate the end of the war, hidden bamboo instruments, falling to dust, were replaced with pots and pans and dustbins and whatever a man could lay his hands on.

After the war, bands began sprouting up again, their names reflecting the other passion of the time, the movies — Casablanca and Destination Tokyo, Rising Sun, Desparados, Invaders, Five Graves to Cairo, Bar 20.

Eddie Mannette of Invaders was the man who presided over the period of the pan when soda biscuit drums were cut in sizes and shapes, beat into a convex shape, grooved, tempered and tuned into the musical instrument — the ping pong, seconds, tenor bass — and played with two sticks wrapped with rubber tuning at one end.

The introduction of the 45 gallon oil drum later gave better tonal quality and new innovations.

Trinidad All Stars Percussion Orchestra, comprising members of various bands, went off to England in 1951, making it the first overseas tour by a steelband.