

# Pan reaches the White House

ML1040

TG 991003 p.8

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VIDIA NAIPAUL wrote in *The Middle Passage*, published 37 years ago (how time flies!), "is music - not the music played by well-known bands and nowadays, in the modern way, tape-recorded - but the steel band."

Our pan players, when they shout or plead, depending on the circumstances, that "pan is we culture" probably have never read Naipaul's comment on the special place these instruments and these orchestras enjoy in the hearts and minds of our people, especially J'Ouvert morning. This appreciative response to something Trinidadians created in their own backyards, however, hardly extends to beyond noon Carnival Monday when the big trucks with amplified music from standard instruments take over for the rest of the festival. Nor does attendance at the biennial Music Festivals, or the Normandie "Under the Trees" concerts which without the impressive presence of visiting "yachties" would go bust, or any performance that is not a pan yard freeness draw the sort of crowd that would make the event profitable.

Fifteen thousand people will go listen to foul-mouthed American singers, or the rubbish purveyed by visiting dub, or reggae or so-called rap artistes bearing names and accents that proclaim their ignorance of true lyrical content and melody and harmony.

Pan is not so lucky. The only time steel bands bring out the masses is for Panorama, the concert that lets us know the annual Carnival is just around the corner.

But these fans, especially those who favour Carlos John's North Stand, go not so much to listen as to cheer their favourite orchestras from first note to last so that the only sounds an independent ear can savour are those from bands somewhat down the line or the newcomers when they reach the stage. Even then this is time for pelau and a drink.

Twelve years ago in London I attended a schools' pan festival. Young England joined the descendants of migrants in a display of pan virtuosity that indicated Trinidad would have some competition claiming the instrument as our own.

And five years or so ago, I came across a Swiss steel band pounding away in an open-air con-

cert outside a plaza in one of Bridgetown's more popular locations during the week before Kadooment.

Last week pan strolled through the doors of the White House, the official home of American Presidents, through the genius of Ellie Mannette, the septuagenarian from Tragarete Road, Woodbrook, whose Invaders pan yard stands right across the street from the Queen's Park Oval, where cricket has ruled for so long.

"Nothing," Naipaul wrote in his entertaining documentary which has angered so many people of this country, "pleases Trinidadians so much as to see their culture being applauded by white American tourists in night-clubs."

What happened in Washington last week was no night-club act. It went much further. For the words of somebody named Bill Ivey, described as chairman of the Endowment of the Arts Committee, and of First Lady Hillary Clinton, placed Mannette and pan in the hallowed pantheon dedicated to the glory of American art.

Mannette was among the 13 Heritage Fellows who heard Mrs Clinton say: "You are the great American. You represent the traditions, the cultures, the diversity of who we are as Americans."

To use an Americanism, we should put that in our pipes and smoke it. For while we are subject ourselves to silly arguments by racial bigots that "pan is African," that it ought not to be taught in schools, that tenor pan or the bass pan is on the same level as the harmonium, the Americans have come along and in tribute to our own Ellie Mannette claimed it as their own.

Ellie Mannette fully deserves the recognition the Americans have given him. Home, in Trinidad he would have lived, as Naipaul put it, in a society which denied itself heroes, a truth that has remained steadfast in the nearly four decades since he wrote the book.

We only have to look at the foolishness surrounding the operations of Pan Trinbago, the constant begging by panmen for money they claim the Government owes them, the disregard, the scorn with which authority considers them, the saving graces of sponsorship without which pan sides would collapse and die and we see why the Mannettes, the Boogsie Sharpes, the Rudy

Smiths, the Othello Mollineauxs and their fellow exiles prefer to show their talents abroad, except for the occasional visit home.

My hope is that on J'Ouvert 2000 as all those dedicated Invaders fans move on to the street from the Tragarete Road panyard to dance down town and back, one of the panmen in that respected panside will be its creator, Ellie Mannette himself.

It would be the best tribute Trinidadians who love and honour the tenor pans, the guitar pans, the bass pans, the double seconds and the men and women who play them can pay Mannette, a musical hero of his time in much the same way that Adolphe Sax, the Belgian-French inventor of the saxophone, and Antonio Stradivari, the great violin maker, were heroes of their period.

The death of Victor Stollmeyer, the Trinidad and West Indies cricketer, marks the end of a significant period in sport, a time when the cricket season lasted from January to June and the soccer season from July to December. Victor played for Queen's Royal College that great year, 1933, when the school won both the first class cricket and soccer championships in North Trinidad. He went on to play for Queen's Park at cricket and Casuals at soccer.

This was the time up to the 1930s and 1940s when club teams were colour-coded. Queen's Park those days was nearly all-white with the occasional brown skin. Someone of Stollmeyer's complexion played soccer for either Casuals or Shamrock. The better educated brown skins, college graduates, played for Maple.

The others represented Sporting Club or Notre Dame. The blacks played for Everton and later Colts. Times have changed. Casuals and Shamrock no longer exist, nor do Sporting Club and Everton and Colts. Queen's Park sports players of different races and skin colours.

Stollmeyer was a creature of his time. A fine opening batsman, exceptionally strong on the leg side, though not as creative or as stylish as his brother Jeffrey. And at soccer he played left wing while Jeffrey was positioned on the right.

Victor Humphrey Stollmeyer was a splendid sportsman and an honourable man. Those who knew him will miss him.