



RAF ROBERTSON ...tour

STEPHEN LEUNG
...costume

BYRON LEE ...organiser

Mint in exporting steelband music

Govt should play leading role setting up an agency to use this national resource

SELWYN TARRADATH, Education Officer of Pantrnbago, continues his series on steelband. Next week he will focus on standardisation.

RENEGADES have just returned from a very successful tour of Europe and the Middle East, and the best part is that Government had no direct involvement with it. The promoters came to this country at Carnival time requesting a top steelband, and as such they contacted Pantrnbago.

Officers of the organisation met with them on Carnival Tuesday afternoon and recommended Renegades they being the Panorama champs.

BWIA was approached to assist with tickets and air freight, and a deal was struck whereby the band would offset costs by performing in London for promotional gigs organised by the airline.

The band was a big hit in Germany where they received countless offers for further contracts.

Desperadoes, on the other hand, are still guessing about the status of their trip to France. They were invited by the French Government since last year to participate in the Colours Of Liberty Parade in Paris on August 26. This is in celebration of 200 years of the country being a Republic.

Similar Requests

The French, through their Embassy in Port-of-Spain, specifically requested a 50 member Desperadoes band to appear in the parade with the possibility of additional concert performances. They offered to pay a *per diem*, provide transportation of the orchestra from London to Paris and back to London, and to take care of all other necessary arrangements while the band was in Paris.

Our Government was left with the responsibility of getting the band to London.

Each year at least 20 similar requests are made for steelbands under the aegis of cultural exchange. The Government obviously cannot satisfy all these as it would be putting an unreasonable burden on the public coffers. The agencies to which these applications are made are many and varied, and herein lies the root of the problem.

The buck is usually passed to and fro between the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism and the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Finance also comes into the picture, not to mention the Tourism Authority and BWIA. Many of the requests are not even enter-

tained because some public servant does not see it as important business, and allows it to remain unattended on a desk.

The recent Renegades trip confirms the escalation in the demand for steelband performances internationally. We have only touched the tip of the iceberg, sending steelbands to North America and Europe. We have not really touched South America, Australia, Africa and most of Asia as yet.

A random survey would show that if we had the marketing expertise of the countries with established entertainment industries, we would not have enough steelbands here to service the demands of the world market.

Our Caribbean neighbour Jamaica has shown us the way with their reggae. Our steelband excites and captivates a more sophisticated audience than does reggae music, and has the potential to be just as big a money spinner.

Added Bugbear

Pantrnbago realises that we cannot depend on any Government to promote and develop the marketing of our indigenous music. The whims and fancies of politics will always dictate priorities.

We, however, must always remind them of their responsibility in the national interest to work together with the people with the knowledge of the various art forms to expedite their development.

The formation of a "National Policy On Pan" that my organisation has been asking for years, appears to many to be just a hollow call for action. We cannot operate in a vacuum, and the lack of policy is what causes the chaos that manifests itself every time the Government has to organise a foreign steelband tour.

The various agencies do not have the expertise to deal with the matter, and there is the added bugbear of beaureaucracy which cramps effective organisation. The Government should play a leading role in setting up a single agency for the export of our culture, which is our most valuable natural resource after petroleum.

Artistic Field

Such an agency would put an end to the hopeless meandering between Ministries and enable us to approach the exercise in a commercial way. The commodity is too much in demand to be exploited only as a political convenience. It would mean that we have to obtain the services of the professionals, training them where necessary from among people in the field.

A pool of impressarios, agents, promoters and other entrepreneurs in the artistic field should be gathered together to work with officials of the agency who would have the necessary training in arts management and related fields.

Our key embassies abroad should have a detailed cultural attache to laise between the entrepreneur and the artiste. So that we are not subjected to humiliation as is currently the norm.

We are the land of Carnival and all the other islands are striving to import our culture as a boost

to their important Tourist economies. Barbados has set up a national steelband which is being prepared by Trinidadian musician Raf Robertson to tour the Far East, as part of their ever-vigilant tourism drive.

The biggest shocker is the news that the Government of Jamaica is planning to introduce a Trini-style Carnival after Easter next year, and Byron Lee has been given the task to organise it. Al-

ready, Stephen Leung has been approached to provide costumes for the event.

We have passed the stage for the introduction of the type of Tourist Industry that the present Tourism Authority honchos are advocating. Sun, sand and sea, beach boys and prostitutes are just not our bag. We have many of the things that they are willing to pay for and that we can export to them.

Steelband music, if promoted properly as an export commodity will not be able to keep up with the demand in a very short while. That could mean the employment of thousands of our artistes and the inflow of vast sums of foreign exchange. We are sitting on a gold mine as if it is an ant's nest.

Next Week — A Look At Standardisation.