

This is the first part of what I sent you titled "Carnegie Hall, classical music 'tailor made' for pan"

28.7.89 Despers' moment in the magical kingdom

SELWYN TARRADATH continues On Tour With Despers. Tarradath is the Education Officer with Pantrnbago, and recently returned from touring with Desperadoes.

KEN GORDON hosted a cocktail reception at his posh Essex Hotel suite from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm after which we were to walk over to Carnegie Hall to witness the concert. I entered the suite along with Farida Kerry, Winston Munroe, the chairman of Pantrnbago North America and Anthony Mc Quilkin the

leader of Desperadoes.

We had no idea as to the purpose of the reception but on arrival we discovered that it was for the benefit of cruise ship operators whom Ken Gordon wished to woo.

We were welcomed by Gordon, Rousseau of the TT High Commission and Jasmine Garraway the one and only Tourist Board representative for the whole of North America. Jasmine introduced us to Ms Susan Melnik who functions as the PRO for the TT Government in North America.

My first reaction to this

information was antagonistic, after all, how could this Canadian woman be representing my country? I was soon rid of my prejudice after conversation. She certainly knows her job, although between her and Jasmine I don't know what impact they could make in the vast area to be covered.

Magical Kingdom

Ms Melnik has the correct instincts to promote this country's Tourism thrust, in fact more so than most of the people who are busy in the fore-

front making bold statements. Imagine she as a foreigner from an advanced country could see that our society is too sophisticated to sell off as the sand and sea, native culture stereotype.

Meanwhile Ken Gordon was busy zeroing on his cruise ship operators, selling them our culture via a tape of Anise Hadeed playing at the Jazzance show backed by conventional musicians. He even tried to convince us that this was the type of group that will sell the steelband.

So much for the fifty man bands that he had

promised to send all over the world at the launching of the last steelband music festival at Royal Bank's headquarters.

Carnegie Hall has always been a sort of magical kingdom to me; I was thrilled at the thought of being in the audience of the world's most prestigious concert hall, especially when the steelband, my greatest passion, was about to explode in all its glory.

I was dressed to kill; me, the detester of formality; and I thought I looked much better than most of those filthy rich people

who patronise the arts.

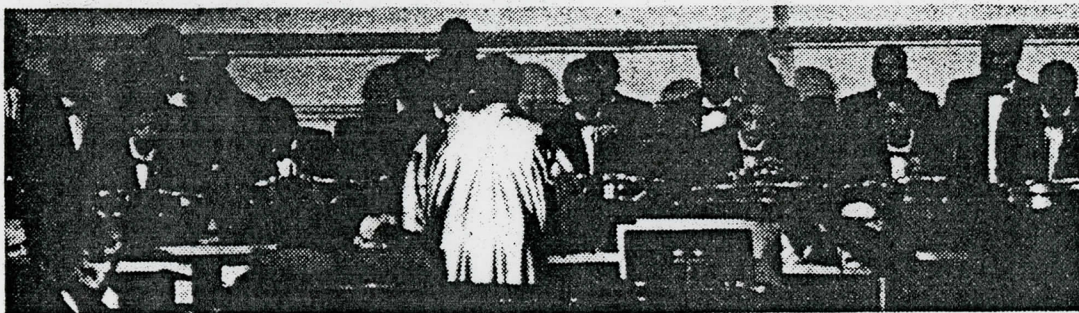
I exchanged seats with Ms Kerry's brother-in-law so that I was not in the official party, but just three rows away from the stage, this suited me just fine.

Rhythm Section

There was a bit of melodrama before the performance which fortunately was not very noticeable. A beautiful Trini young woman dressed in carnival costume was progressing up the aisle from stageside,

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MAGICAL KINGDOM: PAT BISHOP conducts Desperadoes through one of their fine performances at the Carnegie Hall. Photo by Roger Hayden Celestin.

Carnegie Hall, classical music 'tailor made' for pan

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distributing promotional material for the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Board.

Jasmine Garraway had cleared this move with the Carnegie Hall Management, but lo and behold, Don John Campi arrived on the scene and ordered her immediate removal. No protestations from our officials could prevail as Campi maintained that it was his show, and he did not want that.

The officials of Pantrnbago, North America, had encountered the same kind of reaction earlier when they approached Campi for permission to present a bouquet to Pat Bishop at the concert. He advised them to do it at Prospect Park.

The show was about to start and I experienced a strange excitement. The New York Pops Orchestra filed onto the stage strings first, woodwinds, brass and finally the rhythm section, slightly more than a hundred musicians.

Last Time

Conductor Skitch Henderson mounted the podium and the customary tuning check began with each musician holding a note which my ears and solfa training indicated was 'A.'

The orchestra went into some light classical selections from musical Broadway productions to the sustained applause of the audience. The Mistress of Ceremonies was Liz Smith the celebrated syndicated columnist, and she introduced the artistes

who included GOP Committee Chairman Lee Atwater, the man who was in charge of President Bush's successful election campaign. He appeared with his Rhythm and Blues aggregation, Red Hot and Blue.

Other artistes on the show included Priscilla Baskerville, Judy Carmichael, Jerry Herman, Karen Mason and Regis Philbin. The act everyone waited for, however, was our own Desperadoes steelband, who had brought down the Hall the last time they appeared on the show two years ago.

Skitch Henderson was not going to allow someone else into his Kingdom to steal his glory without a fight. He strengthened his band considerably and the increase in numbers led to them taking over most of the front of the stage, leaving Despers to be literally squeezed into the back section.

Sweeter Sound

This not only left the band cramped and partially blocked from view of the audience, but severely affected the acoustics. The band opened with a calypso 'Party Tonight' and the sounds were just bouncing off the wall all over the hall. It sounded rather disjointed, but when the steel orchestra struck up their next number 'Die Fledermaus' Carnegie Hall and classical music seemed tailor made for pan.

Angels could not have produced a sweeter sound, and before it was over the entire audience rose in tribute to the in-

strument that people like 'Spree' Simon, Rudolph Charles and Allan Gervais lived and died for.

I am now convinced that the steel orchestra is equal, even if different, to the conventional orchestra in reproducing the music of the masters.

That moment was the highlight of the whole evening. I was a bit uncomfortable after this as my mind kept wandering back to the events of the past few days, where we had to fight to preserve the dignity of these same performers, who now were the subjects of adulation by the most high in society of the world's most cultured city, if only for a brief moment.

The band played one more tune, and made way for the other acts to do their thing; but everything else was an anti-climax, even the finale with Despers and the Pops performing 'Barodin' together, did not rise to the heights of the earlier magical moment.

Pat Bishop and the band accepted their well-won kudos and hustled off to get some urgently needed rest, not at the Barnard College dormitory as Campi would have them, but in the comfort of their Five Star hotel where artistes are supposed to be housed.

We chanced on an amusing charade as we made our way back to the car park of the Essex Hotel. Senator Gordon was hosting an after show party in the lobby of the Hotel. Drinks were making the rounds, and the same lady in the carnival costume was the centre of attraction as she posed for pictures with the Minister's guests. A far cry from the embarrassment in the lobby of Carnegie Hall.