

"Portrait of a Panman." The Nation 15 Mar. 1963: 13. Print. (part 1)

"National Pan." The Nation 19 Apr. 1963: 113. Print. (part 2)



P.M. with Steel- bands- men

The Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, the President of the National Steelband Association, Mr. George Goddard and others stand to attention in front of the Community Centre, La Brea while a St. Patrick steelband plays the National Anthem.

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way both the Police and the Regimental Band would be equipped with "pan". And they

also suggest that each secondary school should have its own "pan" band, and "pan" music should become part of each school's cultural activities, taking its rightful place in the schools among other forms of music and other cultural pursuits. This opens naturally into their other idea that "panmen" should be employed as cultural officers by the Department of Culture to teach "pan" in the schools.

They say that steelbandmen have far more honour abroad than at home. Ellie Manette, the official pan tuner to the band, goes abroad about four times a year to make and teach pan, chiefly in the USA. He has so far declined several offers of permanent jobs abroad. The latest came recently from California. But Ellie prefers to remain at home where he is seen merely as a feature on the landscape and not as the excellent craftsman and artist he is in pan.

He and his three assistants — Emmanuel Riley, Earl Zephyrine, and his brother Vernon Monette will be paid \$1,500 to tune the national pans; but if Ellie accepts the California offer he will make as much in US currency in two months in the permanent job he is offered there and much more in the "pan" business, the more important sideline.

Portrait of a Panman

PART I

A few men are born to leave their particular field of human endeavour greater than they find it. Such a man is Anthony Williams, leader of the Pam Am North Stars Steelband, pan tuner, pan musician par excellence.

He is quietly experimenting — seeking ways and means to improve both the pan and the music. His success so far is written into the success of his band. But this is only the beginning of his dreams.

The NATION reports

The champion steelband in the country today is Pam Am North Stars of St. James. They earned the title twice, winning first in the 1962 Music Festival and in the Steelband Association's Carnival Fiesta this year.

Last Saturday morning I had the privilege of interviewing their leader, Mr. Anthony Williams, a carpenter. We talked for two hours at his home on Nepal Street, St. James.

We talked about his art and his craft. Not the craft of carpentry. Williams merely earns his living by it. And by it he is building single handed a new house. Not that craft. His art and craft are bound up in "pan."

Williams is the complete steelbandman. He can read music. He plays the pingpong. This is his art. He is a tuner of pans. This is his craft. Ellie Manette and invaders is another such.

In the steelband world, the pan tuner is the instrument maker. Like Stradivarius. Even those outside the pan world must concede that it is something to be a pan maker, a captain and leading ping pong man.

Williams' dual work reminds one of the complete man of medieval Europe — craftsman, poet in one person. But

the reference may be misleading. History invests men of that age with swagger and flamboyance. Williams has none of this. He does not even fit into our popular conception of a "panman".

He is a quiet, self-effacing, almost humble man, deeply devoted to pan. The president of the Steelband Association once said

"If you saw Williams among his boys he is the last one you would pick for leader."

It is probably true. I did not see him among his mates, I saw his sincerity and his faith in the steelband, his eagerness for its future achievements. It is the inner structure of his life. He told me a story of experiments and failures with "pan" from 1950 till the band's first success in 1962.

He told me about men who "threw away their sticks" in frustration when the band was eliminated in preliminaries. They couldn't take failure, he said. Each time his men left he was forced to get new men to beat.

All the time he was experimenting with pan — experimenting with his craft to make a success of his art.

Moderately, he admits he has achieved a little. His pan styling is unique in the country. It is known as the "spider web". His band has a new sound. People call them "piano pans".

But Williams thinks experiments in pan have just begun. He says he has only arranged the notes on the pan in a definite order and has perfected their tone. He has used, mathematics to perfect his music.

To make a ping pong he measured the circumference of the pan and divided it into 12 unequal but accurately measured arcs, giving more space to lower notes and less to higher ones.

He said he observed that the bass strings of the piano are longer and thicker than the treble strings, and this influenced his pan experiments.

With a protractor he drew three gradually smaller circles within the pan's circumference; then he drew straight lines from the measured points on the outer circumference to the circumference of the innermost circle.

The area of the pan surface is thus divided into 37 parts, 36 segments and the inner circle. The segments are divided into three parts; each the octave of the other; the deepest note being the one nearest the rim of the pan.

The straight radial lines are sunk into grooves to cut off vibration — prevent the notes mixing.

The face of the ping pong is not flat but hammered a deep concave giving the pan the look of a scooped out drum. Sinking the metal to breaking point, but this thinness is just what produces the highest notes.

I thought 37 notes on the pan

Portrait of a Panman

PART 2

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Concluded from last week

He talked about metals. Not all pans are of the same metal. Some are hard, some are soft and different techniques have to be used on them in tuning. He would like to get a metal which would stand up better to the strain of tuning.

The tuning technique, turning the pan and hammering it, is slow and cumbersome and has its defects. The pan surface is unevenly sunk and there is illimitable tapping with the hammer and testing with the tuning fork to perfect the notes.

Williams is thinking of some mechanical device to sink pans and tune them more effectively and quickly. He may one day get his new idea. He has patience, skill and courage enough.

Turning to the music, I asked the band manager to do so and with the Festival piece "Voices of Spring." He fetched two scores — one for piano, one for orchestra. He bought one from a local shop and sent one to London for the other.

He said: "The boys make the mistake of using only the piano score. But they can't give you everything. You need the full arrangement for the band."

it was calypso but it wasn't. The tempo was different. But we had to try to arrange it like calypso."

People who heard his band during carnival fiesta will know what he means by doing something with calypso.

I enquired about the band. Their yard is 59 Bombay Street. They practise two hours each night except on Sundays. The roll is now 69 names, but not all good players. The "stage side," the best men, numbers 30. Not all men who like to play are really good. Not all are interested "to that extent."

But Williams hopes to increase the number of good men this year. Now that the band has known success more men want to join it. But new men have not experienced failure. They do not know the discipline of hard work which makes success, he said.

There will be a lot of hard work this year. The band has engagements for dances and recordings. There are festivals to look forward to. There are experiments to be made with the pans. —the better the pans, the better the music.

So far PanAms have cut a few small records and one LP. The LP was flawed in recording. But, perhaps because of the flaw, it may well become a pan collector's item. Another LP with RCA is in the offing.

The flawed LP has reached Hawaii. A member of the USA Consulate who was a pan enthusiast in Trinidad, wrote to Williams telling him he is making efforts to get a few members of the band to play out there.

But this is incidental. It concerns neither the development of pan nor pan music — neither art nor craft. Williams said:

"Pan Am was the first to put the "stage side" on the road. We

"Does that mean you don't care much about the calypso?" I asked him.

His smile made me see that I had been naive. He said:

"The best music comes from simple folk tunes. We have to take the calypso and make it great music. And we have to write down the music like other people. That is how we will get Trinidad music."

While I was thinking this out, he added:

"When I listen to Beethoven and other great musicians I get ideas and I try to use them on calypso. I feel sure what the great musicians did with their folk songs we can do with ours."

This man never boasts. He speaks with a simple quiet conviction.

He said:

"We tried something on one or two calypsoes already. We tried it on Miss McShine's test piece for the music festival. We had to work hard with that. They said