

OUR OPINION

Our pannists have shown us the way

ALL THAT IS good about Trinidad and Tobago was on display at the Jean Pierre Complex when "Pan is Beautiful V" came to its glittering conclusion. The organisation was superb. The crowd was widely representative — old divisions of race and class made meaningless by the indisputably Trinidadian-ness of the event the thousands had come to celebrate. The behaviour, including even the bits of spontaneous theatre without which no local occasion is complete, was exemplary. The mood was both formal and festive and the music, well it forced you to dwell, as great art is always supposed to do, not on problems but on possibilities.

At the end of the performance by Solo Harmonites, such a cheer went up that one might have been forgiven for thinking that the Barataria band had seized the championship. In the end, however, Harmonites was placed seventh of the eight bands and this is not so much a reflection on the quality of that band's playing as it was on the bands that came between them and the announcement of the final placings.

This point can best be made by considering, as well, the fortunes of the Chaguanas giant-killers, Tropical Angel Harps, who finished the festival with the glory of having headed all the other bands in the preliminary and semifinal stages of the competition but whose fifth placing is an indication of the quality brought to the final night by the three giants of the steelband movement.

WITCO Desperadoes, Amoco Renegades and Neal and Massy All Stars occupied the top three placings, in that order, and while nobody would want to begrudge the first band the championship, the truth is that, except for the

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expectations of fans and supporters, this Steelband Festival was not so much about hierarchy but about the level of musicianship that steelbands have now acquired.

It was a stunning exhibition of genuine class. This was the fifth Festival in the decade and the steelband fraternity have come to take splendid performances in stride. But the music affected even the jaded who opted to stay at home and a lot of the post-Festival talk was being conducted by many who remained riveted in front of their radios and television sets, rueing their decision not to suffer the crush of the crowds and the length of a show that finished just before dawn.

Those who fearfully look over their shoulders at the giant of the North and mutter darkly about cultural imperialism must have breathed a little easier last Saturday night. For all the inescapable penetration of the Michael Jacksons and the Whitney Houstons, "Pan is Beautiful V" was carried along, in large measure, by the wrists of teenagers and pre-teenagers, all admittedly drilled by experienced arrangers and conductors who have assured us of another generation of disciplined steelbandmen and women.

Between one weekend and the next, Trinidadian hearts have been lifted, first by the national footballers who have filled us with renewed hope for our football future and now by our precious and precocious musicians. Both have reminded us that whatever the darkness of the political and economic hour, there is enough native wit and intelligence, even dedication and commitment, to save ourselves if we could only find the measure to bring it all together.



THE TRINIDAD EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS LTD was started on June 6, 1967. Its registered offices are at 35 & 37 Independence Square, Port of Spain, and 30 Penitence Street, San Fernando. Telephone: 62 31711/8 and 652 2900, 652 2875. Telex: 22661. Fax: 627 1451.