

The Rising Popularity Of Steel Percussion Orchestras

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When one has sinned, and the realisation has been brought home very forcibly, it seems to me that the proper course to adopt is to cry "peccavi" and proceed immediately to make amends—if such amends will contribute towards a complete atonement. The trouble has been all about steel bands and the latest craze in musical entertainment.

It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention, and here now is a form of entertainment, each day growing more popular; and which can be truly said to have emerged through the force of sheer necessity.

I understand that the first idea was born when an acute shortage of strings for the orthodox instruments was being experienced through war conditions.

A Serious Matter

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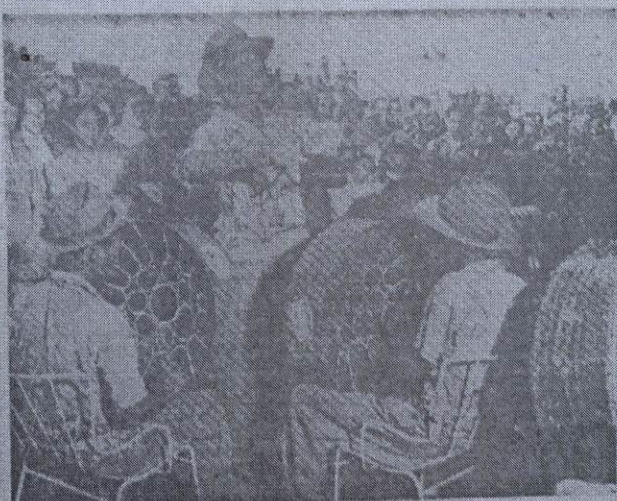
size of a cement drum, and all gaudily painted.

Looking at the instruments was sufficient to inspire in the mind thoughts of the kind of din one was to expect that evening, and the anxiety was not lessened when it was disclosed that the performers for the evening on those tremendous percussion instruments were all teen-age boys.

Imagine what unalloyed pleasure teen-age boys would derive from knocking hellish sounds out of those gaudily-painted pans! But I consoled myself with the reflection that I had survived the horrors of the first world war.

Startling Revelation

Came the evening and the arrival of the invitees—a very pleasant company of nearly all ages, and it seemed a pity that in the midst of such charming



TASPO, conducted by Mr. Griffiths, playing to visitors at the Festival of Britain Exhibition in London (recently). This is the first Steel Band to visit the United Kingdom.

the orchestra that has so impressed me, but I have resisted the temptation because I do not wish it to appear that I am using this column to advertise any person or persons.

To me they are so very good that I have no doubt they will be advertising themselves by the wealth of their combined talents.

The information was imparted to me that the sisters and other female relatives of the boy-performers are now busy practising on the pans, and it will not be long before Port-of-Spain will be hearing the All Girls Steel Percussion Orchestra.

Some old-fashioned men have been complaining that the proper place for women is among her pots and pans. Well, they are getting there by easy stages.

'All Girls' ...

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'All Girls' ...

But although these youngsters were a revelation to me that evening, there is something even more startling in store—not only for me, but for all others who are now evincing such keen interest in the new form of music. If what I hear is true, there will soon be an orchestra the entire personnel of which will be young girls.

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To return to the boys, however; to my mind, those that I heard recently are already an asset to the tourist attraction of this Colony, and when we get another steel orchestra comprising the daughters of respectable families, we shall have something that the other colonies will envy but may not be able to emulate.

— *By* —
Ralph E.
Vignale

company there would be the strident beat of steel band music.

And then came a startling revelation—the first piece on the programme: *Begin the Beguine*—What is this, am I dreaming? This is unusual! I got up from the chair in the corner where I had been sitting and trekked towards the dining room so that my eyes should be able to corroborate for me what my ears were trying to convey to my senses. Well, I'll be, er—surely this is quite different from what I had heard before. Here were ten boys between the ages of 16 and 18, but with the serious faces of men performing on their instruments and producing soft, rhythmic and pleasant music.

A Serious Matter

This was a serious matter for our musically-inclined people, who regard Carnival as their greatest festival; and who seize upon every conceivable occasion wherein rhythmic emotional sounds can be indulged in with gay abandon.

Let me confess right now that I have never been able to react sympathetically to the new fad. To me the steel bands did nothing but produce a cacophony of sounds; although I could not help admitting that the crude instruments have been the result of great patience and ingenuity. And because I was not able to thrill to the performance of the bands, I have never put myself to the trouble of seeking the venues where the best "orchestras" might have been heard.

My only experiences were those within hearing in my own neighbourhood, and on a few isolated occasions when the sounds would reach me from the radios of one of more of my neighbours.

However, I have always desired to be fair and broad-minded. I did not like that form of entertainment; but there appeared to be an ever-growing crowd who responded emotionally to the beat of the "pans."

Well, *chacun a son mauvais gout*, was my attitude. Others liked it, and it was not for me to condemn what was so popular.

Denied Myself

Whether or not I had deliberately denied myself the opportunity of hearing the better class of performers, I am unable yet to determine; but, as the result of a recent event, I find myself becoming—not a red-hot enthusiast but a fit subject for speedy conversion.

It has happened like this:—

During the past fortnight I received an invitation to attend a party; and, by a strange circumstance, I found myself near the front gate of the house of my host and hostess on the very afternoon when a truck arrived conveying the instruments of the full orchestra that was to provide the music for dancing that evening.

Pans, pans, and more pans! of all sizes—one or two the full

No Dream

Not a wrong note, nothing harsh or jarring on the nerves. Perfect tempo and perfect harmonising. But it was no dream, although it sounded like the stuff of which dreams are made.

Nor was what followed a dream—although, if I had been fully awake, I may have considered that the settled course for me that evening was listening, looking on, sipping an odd drink at intervals, and accepting a pie or bouchée to act as a buffer for the spirits with which the soda was adulterated.

Yes, I did more: I walked out of the dining-room, headed towards a young lady who, perhaps fortuitously, was walking towards me, and from whom I asked the pleasure of a dance!

I danced—to the mellow tones expertly produced from the pans of these clever teen-agers.

This was a birthday party for a teen-ager, and I realise now that I should have contented myself by listening, looking-on and taking refreshment from time to time; but, for me, the occasion was unique, and I hope that by participating in a few dances I did not encroach upon the pleasures of the young people.

Since I began writing this article I have been tempted once or twice to disclose the name of