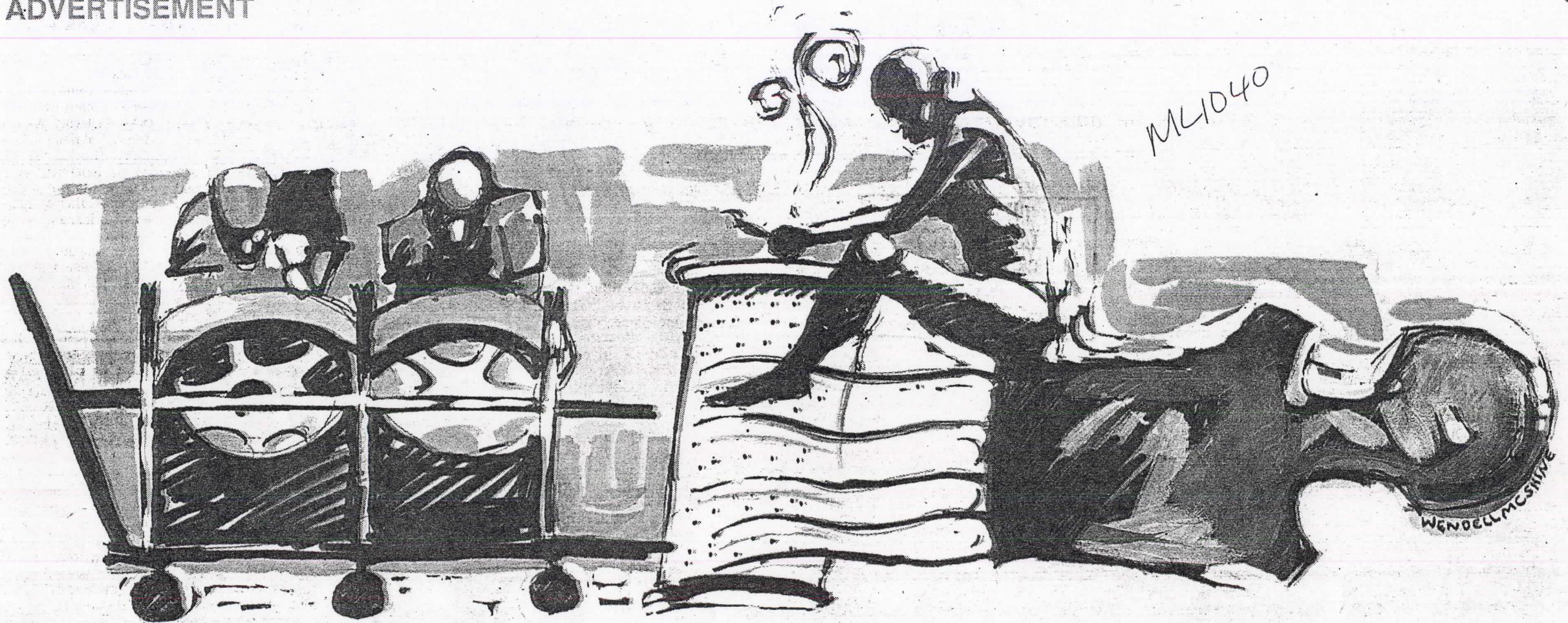


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The Panman's Lament

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The Panman's Lament

PANORAMA to some is an occasion for fete and bacchanal...a chance to show off their worse behaviour. But to the panman it is a time for sacrifice, seriousness and devotion. Long before dusk on Sunday both the North and Grand stands were packed with people who really couldn't care less about what was happening on stage. Not even the disc jockey, whose business it was to announce the arrival of in-coming bands by playing the selections of their choice. Instead, he had to be reminded constantly of his duty as band after band awaited the queue to enter the stage, while he, carried away by the party atmosphere, played some of the popular tunes making waves at the parties. There were unruly sections in the

North Stand, who even had their own banners and flags, playing their own rhythms to band after band, whether their clanging coincided with what was going on on stage or not! They were completely unaware, or maybe not caring, that this was the preliminary round of the most serious annual competition for the pan men. This is what many panmen lived for...and gave their lives for. It certainly is nothing to be taken for granted. Not getting beyond this stage of the competition could break the young, unsponsored, or even seasoned, sponsored steelband. Many sponsors have been known to pull out because their band did not make it to the Panorama finals on a regular basis...business is business! And

yet, many of these same businessmen, decked in their "Get on Bad" outfits, behaved in a manner which put bands at a disadvantage and in the process could cause the withdrawal of their financial support. Have a ball by all means, enjoy the carnival, but also respect the panman's effort. After all, the only thing he gets out of it is the fulfilment of haven given it his best. He has made his contribution and it is up to the rest of us to make it the greatest show on earth. It's close to 60 years since the invention of the steelpan and the entire world has started to take notice. Music students from other countries use this Panorama competition as part of their educational process. A few years ago noted jazz pannist Andy Narrell

was a regular visitor to Trinidad to play in this competition and learn the proper art of playing the instrument. That Savannah stage is what brings these international pan men and women to Trinidad at this time of the year. It has a special significance. It is of such importance that Narrell wanted to apply for dual citizenship so that he would be allowed to arrange one of his compositions for a local band at Panorama. The Queen's Park Savannah stage on a Panorama final night therefore is the pinnacle for a pan man, whether he be from Trinidad, Tobago, elsewhere in the Caribbean, United States, Canada, Timbuktu, or anywhere else in the world for that matter. A few years ago a German steel-

band came here just to witness the Panorama competition. They had learned to play pans from a Barbadian citizen, who lived in Sweden, just on the border with Germany. This is just an example of the impact Panorama and the steelband has made on the rest of the world. It does not end there. Carnival has also migrated and taken root throughout the Caribbean, North America and Europe. To those who would think the steelband has no part in carnival...think again! If it was not for the steelband mas as you know it now would not have existed. The steelband man has always been innovative. The art of wire-bending came through the steelband system in the early 1950s. Desperadoes changed the headmas

sailor technique from long nose with their portrayal of "Crab" around that era and that introduced a whole new artform. By the middle 1950s Fascinators had taken over and guns, tanks battle ships and any thing imaginable were being carried on the heads of sailors. A man named Martin Sampson of Rising Sun in Belmont, also started specialising in American Indian mas, which saw the use of feathers and beads apart from more wire bending. George Bailey emerged from Invaders and Cito Velasquez from Casablanca to take the art forward. In fact, what we have today is just a continuation of the past and if we were to go back in time, some of the portrayals of yesteryear can still stand out and

have not been surpassed. Two which come to mind are Terry Evelyn's "Jewelled Peacock" and Cito's "Cockfight". The steelband also added variety to the mas and portrayals by Despers, "To Hell and Back" in 1957, and Primitive Man and the Animal Kingdom in 1958; plus Starlift's 1965 production: "Of Feasts and Festivals" followed by "A Feather Fantasy" in 1966, also stand out. Thus the National Carnival Committee's move the get the steelband back into mas by offering special incentives to bands which participate in all four of their street competitions, should be highly commended and supported by the bodies involved, if only to save the overall carnival which had started to show signs of dete-

rioration. Despite the fact less people play mas with steelbands now than they did in the 1960s, the steelband movement continues to grow. A total of 45 traditional bands entered Friday's "Pan Round Neck" preliminaries; 15 played in South's zonal conventional prelims on Saturday; 35 played in the North/East on Sunday, and Tuesday 12, six traditional and six conventional played in Tobago. Quite a few youths were involved over the weekend. If the weekend's action is any indication of pan's future, all past stalwarts need not

worry. The youths will take it forward. Almost every one of the traditional bands had a 50 per cent representation from youngsters under 16. Some were as young as nine, while on Sunday the sight of these youngsters pounding out Cary Condington's arrangement of "Yes Iwer" was enough to bring tears to an old panman's eyes. The music continues to grow and the involvement of the youth will mean fresh brains with fresh ideas taking pan well into the next century and, if NCC's plan develops, Trinidad and Tobago along with it.

