

THE COLOURFUL DAYS OF 'PRIMITIVE PAN'

AN Arima steelband - Colgate's Melodians - is making preparations to celebrate their 20th anniversary this year.

Among the things planned is a brochure which will relay the history of the panside which was founded by Ivan Henry whose involvement with the steelband movement goes back to the days of "primitive pan."

Guidance

Henry, who has now retired from pan beating and tuning, started the band in May 1953, and under his guidance Melodians was one of the first steelbands to be contracted by a hotel-Pan-Am Guest House in Piarco. There, they played every Wednesday and Saturday for about two years.

Henry's reminisces of steelband involvement includes the time when, as a youth from the Port-of-Spain eastern sector, he became a member of the band now called "Carib Tokyo."

"I will never forget the day that Freddie Simon surprised and delighted

everybody who was in the square near the Besson Street Police Station, by playing 'I am a Warrior' on a pingpong."

At that time, he said, the pan was held up in the air and played with one stick without a rubbertip.

His first sight of rubber-tipped sticks Henry said was on "V-E Day." "It was two days after I first arrived in Arima," the man who is also called "Skull" and "the Colonel" said.

Hearing that the war in Europe, had ended he came into Port-of-Spain to join his friends who were celebrating by "making mas" on the city streets.

Impressed

"Just as I landed in Port-of-Spain I saw 'Savoys' the band from Laventille, going into town, and their pans were being beaten with the rubber-tipped sticks. I was amazed, and I was impressed too."

He had been at one time a member of this band, Henry said. This was after he had dropped out from the band then known as "Destination Tokyo." He later left "Savoys" to take up residence in the south and was involved with Belgrave Bonaparte in developing "Southern Symphony."

"When Bonaparte was selected to go to England with Taspo," Henry said, "I captained 'Southern Symphony' until he came back."

After this Henry returned to Arima, where he helped found "Crossfire" Steelband.

This was the first steelband in Arima to play actual tunes. The other bands of that time were just "keeping rhythm."

Under his guidance as tuner and arranger Crossfire was the champion steelband for several years.

Fascinated

Henry also was involved in the founding of "Harmonisers" an Arima band that only lasted one year, and Laventille's similarly shortlived "Gay Cabelleros."

Since his retirement from the steelband movement (in 1966) Henry has continued to maintain an interest in "Colgate's Melodians" which is now under the captaincy of Frank Bernard.

His modest home in the old Malabar area is always filled with youngsters who listen fascinated while he talks of the old days when pioneer panmen such as "Spree" Simon, Neville Jules, Allan Gervais, Belgrave Bonaparte and Ellie Manette experimented, most times using such crude equipment as the ordinary claw hammer.