

OUR OPINION

A victory for the panman

OVER THE weekend Panorama — except for the Tobago leg — went through its initial phase. We have heard the pan-round-neck sides, the steelbands from the South/Central and North/East zones and we have begun to get answers to some of those burning questions that always arise at this time.

Those questions begin with the basics. What will this band or that band play? Which calypsonian after hearing the run of things will be licking his "road march" chops, so to speak, and how, given the performances in the preliminaries, will the bands "run down" when we reach the final phase.

There are those brave souls who, even now, will be willing to put out hard cash on their calculations as to the eventual winner and runners-up, but they would be wise to tread carefully because we suspect that this particular Panorama is going to have an unusual share of surprises.

It is, we believe, a crucial Panorama coming as it does at a time when, on the surface, the steelband, outside of this all-consuming competition, is in its most dire straits ever and if evidence is required it surely must be the fact that steelbands are not even being hired for Carnival fetes any more.

What this means is that the steelband has dropped even further on the national barometer — where once the chagrin was that steelbands did not seem to have a place on the two Carnival days, themselves, now they do not have a place even in the pre-season build-up with the glaring exception of the

weekend.

And that is also true, but only so far as it goes.

We propose to take another approach to the discussion. That approach begins by suggesting that we are looking at the problem upside down, and in so doing, we are unable to come to grips with what is wrong and, consequentially, what must be done to make it right.

From that premise, we move forward to put into the public thinking this possibility — it is not that the steelbands put so much into Panorama that there is nothing else, but that so much is put into Panorama because there is nothing else.

And that leads us immediately into the second fashionable argument — that Panorama so consumes the population's aural sense that after Carnival Saturday there is, to put it strongly, a revulsion against "pan." And to extend that argument, further, using the same strong terms, that distaste for "pan" continues during the year until the next Panorama competition comes around, when "panomania" rides again.

The truth is that over the years the steelband musical revolution has stumbled. In the face of the technological revolution that has taken place in popular music, at large, the steelbands have been displaced by the young music bands with their ton loads of stereophonic equipment and by the disc jockeys with similar equipment, and more.

But there is more to it than that. In the face of that technological onslaught, the steelbands gave up. They stopped

ing competition.
Panorama competition, itself.

And therein, we argue, lies both problem and solution.

It is the fashion of the moment to blame the Panorama competition for the displacement of steelband in the ongoing cultural life of the country. The argument is that the steelbands themselves are a victim of the competition, that so much of their efforts is devoted to "Panorama" that they have little time for anything else, participation in "mas", for example.

And that is true, but only in so far as it goes.

It is also argued that by the time the Panorama competition is finished, the public has had its full of pan, so much so that they do not care for more pan after the finals on the Saturday of the Carnival

playing dance music, or perhaps, more accurately, they found themselves unable to fill ever larger dance halls with the music that they were playing and left out of the party mainstream, they had nowhere to turn but to Panorama, where they held centre stage, where given the sound system that goes with the competition, even the smallest among them were able to fill the Grand and the North Stands with sound.

We suggest that the next steelband breakthrough will be a technological one. Notice the emphasis; already the perceptive steelband minds are turning in that direction and while we admit that the movement has a fight on its hands, we are certain it is a fight which, in time, it will win simply because it must.