

A MAN OF STRONG WILL, COMBATIVE MIND AND UNQUESTIONED INTEGRITY

By JOHN BABB

THE STEELBAND movement is much poorer today having suffered the loss of George Goddard — one of its pioneers and staunchest believers.

Over the years, I have heard many people, some of them panmen, hurl all sorts of adjectives of dislike at Goddard, yet no one could point an accusing finger at him, for George Goddard — a man of strong will and combative mind — was a man of unquestioned integrity.

Significant Treasure

Normally, because of his approach and talkativeness, George rubbed the wrong side of many, including some of us in the pan movement, but he knew exactly what he wanted for the panman.

Almost singlehandedly, although he never admitted it, George Goddard in the 1950's and 1960's, gave this country a very significant treasure — a truly representative National Steelband — which could and would have done so much to propel the development of pan forward.

During the period of its survival, the band did much to promote Trinidad and Tobago abroad whenever it performed overseas at engagements organised by a non-profit organisation, Moral Rearmament.

The band, which comprised selected players from various steelbands throughout the country never got the governmental support it deserved, and as such went to waste.

But Goddard had envisaged that just as there was Boston Symphony Orchestra, or a London Philharmonic Orchestra, here was the base for Trinidad and Tobago to have its own symphony, of its own music — the only significant musical discovery of the 20th century.

Several Years Back

As a panman, my association with George Goddard goes several years back, when the steelband was going through its roughest era — the period of the "badjones" and gang wars. It was indeed a testing time for all panmen, who as Sparrow later sang in Calypso, were outcasts.

He was a panman during the period 1941 to 1949, but it was when he became an administrator in the Movement in 1950 that we became closely associated. I guess because we were on the same wavelength about the development of pan.

After a attorney-at-law, (in those days he was called a lawyer), Lennox Pierre founded and was advised by the first steelbands' body, Steelbands Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Goddard became president in 1957, succeeding Nathaniel Critchlow, a position in which he reigned almost without question.

He was president until 1959 when he gave up the position to Albert Jones, but Goddard was back as president again from 1962 to 1971.

The first association existed from 1950 to 1962 when its name was changed to the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandsmen (NATTS) which existed to 1972, when again the organisation underwent a name change to Pan Trinbago — its present name.

Dramatic Strides

It was during the period of Goddard's reign between 1962 and 1971 that the Steelband Movement made some dramatic strides.

Apart from establishing a National Steelband, the organisation, after being dropped by the Music Festival Association from the Biennial Music Festivals after that historic night at Queen's Hall, organised its own Music Festivals.

Patrons who then usually best patronised the Festival session in which the steelbands took part, would remember the occasion when they had to sweat it out at Queen's Hall for almost two hours before the show got underway, not realising what was going on at the back of the hall.

The incident occurred when Invaders Steelband members and some of their supporters tried to gain entry at the back of the hall. Festival Chairperson, May Johnstone, would have none of it. She insisted that only players would be admitted, but then there was the threat that if some supporters were not allowed in, the band would not perform.

Goddard, who was then president of the steelbands body was in the thick of the quarrel, but with the interjection of some pacifiers Mrs Johnstone gave in, and the show went on. But that brought the curtain down on all steelband participation in the Festival organised by Mrs Johnstone's association.

However, like the Music Festival Association, the steelbands' body under Goddard's leadership also brought down music adjudicators from London to adjudicate at its festivals.

The association, through Goddard, negotiated a loan from the Government, which helped to put the steelband festivals on a sound footing.

I can easily recall that at the close of the 1966 festival which was won by Anthony Williams and his Pan Am North Stars, playing "Intermezzo in E Flat".

Go in peace, George Goddard

and "Poet and Peasants," in a very unsung manner, the Steelband Movement, unknown to many panmen, repaid every cent of the loan it got from the Government. In fact it was the only voluntary organisation, during that period, that had paid back its full due to the Government.

Just as there is much to be written about the steelband, so too there is much one can write about George Goddard. The two are synonymous.

Just as the steelband struggled, he too struggled to gain recognition for it, and that involved getting into many a quarrel with almost any and everybody from the late Prime Minister Eric Williams, and former Carnival Development Committee chairman, Ronnie Williams, down the line.

Write A Book

On one occasion during a discussion on pan he walked out of the living room of the Prime Minister's residence because of disagreement on a point with Dr Williams, then came to the Press with his side of the story. His heated run-ins with Ronnie as head of the CDC were regular.

But it could be said that whenever he waged a verbal battle, it was not for George Goddard, it was always on behalf of the steelband.

Some years ago, when he decided to write a book about the steelband movement, George came to me and asked to help. I willingly agreed. But our approach to a subject differed.

My approach was that we would quietly and unceremoniously list all the old panmen; get hold of



GEORGE GODDARD

them and interview them. I would do the transcribing. The next thing I heard from George, following our talks, was a Sunday morning meeting he called at the NUGFW Hall on Frederick Street. He turned up with all he could have laid hands on in connection with pan.

But it was only talk, and talk it remained with no positive action.

Yet, I knew George was determined to get on with the job when the Guardian granted him the opportunity to use its Library to do his research.

Two days before I took off on vacation last year, George called me at home and asked if I could help with the editing of his manuscript. I willingly agreed, telling him if he could get it to me I would check the manuscript while on vacation.

After my return with the corrected version, he promised to call on me again. He said that writing a comprehensive history of the steelband was difficult, since this entailed drawing on the personal histories of people who were in some way or another involved in the steelband at some stage of their lives, and some of those people were dead.

Gomes' Initiative

They included Albert Gomes, who many regarded as Chief Minister between 1946 and 1955, and on whose initiative the first Government-appointed Steelband Committee was set up in 1949.

Then also there was Anglican clergyman, Canon Max Farquhar, who was chairman of that committee, and also folklorist, Andrew Carr.

As an alternative, George said he preferred to write about "Forty years in the Steelbands; an account of its origin, and his (Goddard's) involvement and participation."

He left a copy of the first chapter with me for checking, and was to have called back for it, but after speaking to him one day, the next news I heard of Goddard was about his death on Monday last.

Let's face it. As the old people would say, "you never miss the water till the well runs dry." And this usually happens to us in Trinidad and Tobago. We are a society that seems to take everything for granted. We then awake to the realisation of the importance of something when we no longer have it.

It is a burning shame that a man such as George Goddard, an institution as far as the steelband is concerned, could have lived amongst us all these years, and no better use was made of his resources to help properly establish the steelband — our own art form; our own big discovery of the 20th century.

John Babb has a copy of George Goddard's book!