

PHASE II ON U.S. TOUR

FEW MORNING bustlers have the time to view the "Daybreak" programme of the CNN Cable Network that is shown throughout the week on Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT).

Most people, however, know that CNN is one of the major networks through which TTT receives and channels satellite coverage of news and events taking place around the world. Yesterday afternoon a

group of 20 Trinidadians had the opportunity of performing outside



Nylah Ali

the CNN Centre, head offices of the network, in Atlanta, Georgia.

They were members of Phase II Pan Groove which is on a two-week long engagement in the United States.

Phase II was one of the many international acts contracted to perform (a contingent of Aubrey Adams' Ambakaila is also there at present) at the 150th anniversary of the City of Atlanta which was observed yesterday. The sesquicentennial celebration which involves music, dance, marches, floats and all the items that make a successful parade is supposed to be the Atlanta equivalent of a Trinidad Carnival Tuesday. It is also claimed to be the largest Independence Day parade in the US as the city and the country commemorate anniversaries on the same date. Last year it was reported that 300,000 spectators lined the route of the parade and even more saw it on national and international television. It is expected that the numbers will increase this year which means that Trinidad and Tobago's indigenous art form would be seen by hundreds of thousands worldwide.

The champion steelband was scheduled to be placed on a sponsored float like the majority of performers and play a repertoire of selections along the 1.4-mile parade route. Of the 40 selections the Phase II stageside orchestra had been practising nightly at the band's panyard at Hamilton Street, Woodbrook, about 20 were expected to be played, ranging from top calypsoes (which the organisers specifically requested) to ballads, reggae and original compositions by the band's leader Len "Boogsie" Sharpe. Included in the Sharpe compositions are classics such as *Dance of the Douens* and cross-over jazz pieces like *Moods I and II*.



Boogsie Sharpe

The band will also play that immortal song *Summertime* from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* which is a fitting tribute to the southern US city.

As stated above, the band was expected to begin playing at the start of the parade route at the Omni Hotel at the CNN Centre at 1 pm and then proceed through downtown Atlanta on such main streets as Techwood Drive, Marietta and Peachtree Streets. The television station WSB-TV was designated as the official station of the celebration and had titled the event "WSB-TV Salute 2 America Parade".

While the Atlanta appearance is Phase II's main engagement in the US, the group will go on to Miami, Florida, for further performances before returning home July 13. According to band spokesman, Errol Skerritt, the stageside orchestra will play at a fete and other events organised through national airline BWIA's Miami office which sponsored the band's airline tickets to Miami and back. The group had travelled by bus to Atlanta and the band's instruments which were transported to Miami courtesy Caricargo, were freighted to Atlanta by the

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city's anniversary organisers.

Unlike other "big" tours, what has been unusual about this one for the band is the absence of its leader "Boogsie" Sharpe. Unfortunately, the Atlanta invitation and an invitation for Sharpe to attend the Berlin Jazz Festival in West Germany came simultaneously, but it was felt that Sharpe should not miss the latter offer so he is in Europe on a two-week engagement, while his band fulfills its obligations.

In Berlin, Sharpe will play with internationally acclaimed Jamaican jazz pianist Monty Alexander whom he met in Jamaica earlier this year. According to Skerritt, Monty, who is now based in Miami, had been hearing about Sharpe for a while and always wanted to perform with him and perform in Trinidad.

"We hope that this marriage will result in an appearance by Monty with Phase II at its concert later this year," said Skerritt. Without Sharpe, Douglas "Doug" Redon has assumed the duties as musical director of Phase II with managerial duties being handled by Skerritt. The 20-member group consists of Noel La Pierre, Michael Gabriel, Gary Pena and Thomas Graham on tenors; Redon on double-tenor; Peter Mollah and Anthony "Castro" McQueen on double-seconds; Edward Nathan and Kamau Ojo Falouke on quadrophonics; Anthony Franklin and Skerritt on guitars; Charlie Pinder and Anthony Gomez on cellos; Ladislaus "Zoot" Alcindore on tenor bass; Ancil Boxhill and Dennis Drakes on bass; Colin Huntley, Randy Gabriel and Kevin Herbert on percussion and tuner Roland Harrigan.

For the future, Phase II, which has had non-stop gigs since winning the Panorama competition, has several overseas tour offers, including invitations to Grenada, Indianapolis and New York. The band went to Martinique a few months ago and also has a request to return there.

However, the band has not made any final commitments as it is concentrating on staging its first grand concert at Queen's Hall in mid-October. Besides the probability of Monty appearing on the show, plans are also underway to have some of the top pannists in the world make guest appearances, said Skerritt.

In addition Phase II is looking at the feasibility of doing an album this year to be launched at the concert and possibly the scheduling of another concert at the Central Bank Auditorium at year's end.

Then of course, there is next year, and the defence of its Panorama title.