



Richard Tangyuk wanted to stretch the imagination of the Trinidadian audience in this recital. PHOTO: KEARRA GOPEE

## Granding the Pan

SIMON LEE

Last Sunday's Piano and Pan Recital at Queen's Hall, reintroduced both pan aficionados and those with a classical taste to two Trini-born maestros, who have successfully carved out international careers in the highly competitive field of classical music, from their stateside bases.

Conductor, pianist and choral director Richard Tangyuk joined steelpan (and sometime violin) virtuoso Liam Teague for a recital as eclectic as the programme notes were amusing, informative and just a touch irreverent (a generous gesture aimed at deflating any of the pomp some may associate with such circumstances).

It's obvious that the same kind of thought which went into the jointly composed programme notes was also employed in selecting the compositions played, which ranged from the Baroque of Vivaldi and Bach, to the intricacies of Chopin, the impressionism of Debussy, original compositions from Teague and the world premiere of a piece for pan and piano, he'd commissioned from one of his students at Northern Illinois University.

Under cover of total darkness the recital aptly commenced (it being Epiphany Sunday) with the Winter movement of Vivaldi's Four Seasons Concerto, Teague's melodic tenor riding over Tangyuk's staccato piano chords.

While some sceptics still question

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the steelpan's ability to match the sustain of the violin, the principal instrument in Vivaldi's score, Teague's speed with his ebony sticks, matched with his finesse of touch expertly captured the shimmering lights of snow and ice.

Following in the Baroque mode Tangyuk soloed on the magnificent Boesendorfer grand, with a JS Bach French overture, the lingering notes languidly evoking an almost architectural soundscape.

After the order of Bach came Teague's descent into the chaos of Hell, a musical inferno in four parts (inspired by a dream) which matched all the controlled comfort of the Baroque, with satanically manic menace.

In delivering his own composition Teague, particularly in the opening

Funeral Music section, gave a lesson to pannists still locked into the steel drum mode, who restrict themselves to a percussive, rhythmic style, ignoring the melodic possibilities of all drums (whether Indian tabla, Cuban conga or Senegalese sabar).

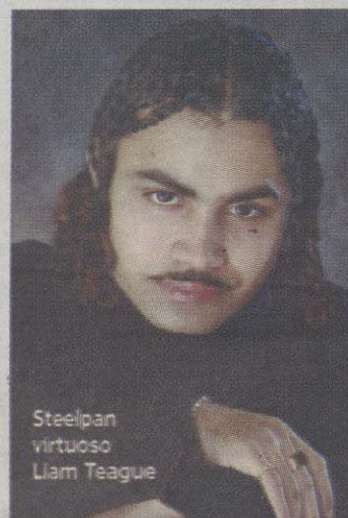
It took intense listening concentration to follow the muted intro before infernal pomp and scurrying of imps erupted.

Impeccable programming juxtaposed the frenetic pace Of A Visit to Hell, with Tangyuk's sedate rendition of a Chopin nocturne, before Teague reprised his teenage composition Raindrops (replete with swirling gusts and flurries); Tangyuk paused the tempo with a Schubert serenade and the duo crescendoed to a first half curtain with Paganini's technical teaser for violin Moto Perpetuo, the programme notes advising: "...please do not hold your breath for the entire piece, you won't make it, and we have no stretchers on hand to carry you out."

The second half opened with a poignant address from Teague, who admitted that while "It's a true blessing to be playing here...it's also very intimidating."

If his humility was as disarming as his talent, his gratitude at the help he'd received 20 years ago when he was attempting to fund studies abroad served as introduction to Jenny Lee of the Trinidad Music Literacy Trust, to which part proceeds of the concert went.

The Trust will be offering two scholarships for 14-18 year-olds for



a three-week intensive workshop with Teague in Wisconsin later this year.

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Then it was Tangyuk's turn to shine on Fritz Kreisler's Liebeslied and Liebesfreund, the compression

of these two pieces balanced by the mellow mood of Debussy's impressionistic Arabesque, which followed.

If the duo were unsure about the reception the concluding piece, the world premiere of Ben Wahlund's Grottesque, would receive they need not have not worried.

Specially commissioned by Teague as part of his deliberate policy to expand pan horizons beyond the perception that it is still "a novelty and almost associated almost exclusively with a dated style of indigenous Caribbean music" Grottesque was indeed very different from anything else on the programme.

While some may have initially been uncomfortable with the Stravinsky influenced rhythmic complexity, the minor key, the dissonance, fragmentary and even strident delivery, the ovation which followed, vindicated Teague's commitment to developing "our own original repertoire."

That young composers outside of Trinidad are trying their hand and very different sensibility with an instrument which began as industrial waste, must surely be a cause for pride.

That Tangyuk and Teague return home from their relentless international schedules to nurture future generations of musicians and entertain a loyal local audience, stretching their musical horizons beyond the comfort zone of the familiar with the genuinely challenging and innovative, can only be another blessing we look forward to more of.