

The Story of Pan, Part II

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HE IS one of the few survivors of the original panmen. And even though he is now living away from the home of the steelband, ELLIE MANNETTE still has aspects of our history to relate. In an exclusive interview with American pannist ANDY NARELL in New York, Mannette continues to trace the evolution of the steelpan.

AS I said, in 1946 I came out with the big drum in the contest for the first time. We never had a bass line, we had the bass kittle, the flat boom, the one note boom, the tune boom and other lines like alto, but all still in the small pan then.

When we went to the United States, we had all these accompaniments for this one big pan and I played these things on stage. We had a band and solo contests, so the band played with me and then I played my solo. That was in 1946 and in 1947, Neville Jules took what they called a caustic soda drum and he made the four note bass. Jules brought the caustic soda and as the big drum came in, I decided then to make an accompaniment for the leader. I made a single second and still we wanted a deeper sound and then I made a single guitar.

Now '47, '48 and '49 went by. In 1950 and we started having several bands of that nature across the country - with caustic soda drums, with single guitar, single second and what we called the ping pong. We abandoned the bass kittle because we had the four notes

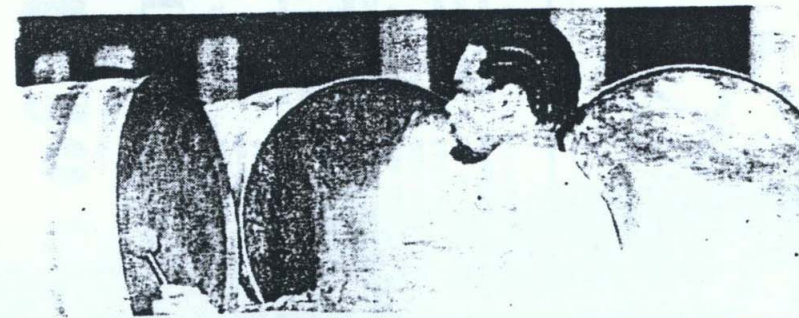
caustic soda drum done by Neville Jules.

In the latter half of 1950, we were preparing to go to the festival of Britain and they brought a gentleman by the name of Lt. Griffith to organise and form a band to go with us to London. So he came as the conductor and said: "Hey, you are supposed to be the foremost tuner in the island because you have created the first big barrel. I want you to build most of the drums for me to go to the festival and I want you to build chromatic."

I really did not know what chromatic was. So he said: "Well, you have to have all half tones and whole tones and half tones, you know. You cannot miss any notes so." And then we checked our drums and we hold a number of notes on each barrel. I cannot say exactly what we had, but we had a lot of notes missing like flats and sharps here and there throughout the orchestra. He instructed me how to build them and we built the second with chromatic; the guitar with chromatic. Now, we had the bass caustic soda drum. We say that we must have a bass line to go to London. What we had to do was build the steel drum basses in a chromatic pattern and we cannot do it on one



ELLIE MANNETTE talks to Andy Narell about the birth of the cello, tenor bass and double tenor



drum. Therefore, we have to use three drums to get all 12 notes.

I said to him: "Look, I cannot tune the bass because we never tuned those big steel drums before into a bass, and, therefore, I don't think I can do it." He replied: "You do what I tell you and I think it's going to work." And he gave me the instructions.

I built the basses according to his pattern. He said: "Okay, now we have single second and single guitar. We want something a little bit lower in range and something between the guitar and the bass line. We should come up with two drums patterned from what we call the tune boom."

At the time, Tony Williams was also a

good tuner. He built his own drum and cello because he played the cello. I built the other cello. A guy by the name of Dudley Smith played the other cello that went to London. He turned around and built the basses for a guy by the name of Davidson. He played the bass line and I built my own. I also built the lead for a guy named Belgrave Bonaparte who also

And in building the drums, I did not have too much of a musical background. So I was doing everything from what I heard in my mind and I envisioned it by how I should play it. I moved my hands in certain ways and, as a result I laid the notes out accordingly.

I more or less fashioned them how I pictured it with the movement of my hands. I laid out a cello and shortly after that I decided I was going to triple the guitar as well. I abandoned the double guitar and I brought in the triple guitar exactly the same pattern as the cellos. I still felt that we should have had more, and I added the number of basses and I put five instead of three.

In the latter '50's, we had five basses, three cellos, three guitars, double second and the single lead. Also Tony Williams brought in the cycle of the fifth double ping pong, a cycle of fifths which is today the same thing we use except that I think we have less notes on it because he had as many as 36 consecutive notes. How he had it patterned and I will not say the notes were two in any way but there were 36 notes. Perhaps in the same year, Bertie Marshall brought in a double tenor. It was something like the second pan but it had its own pattern of arrangement and, during that time I had my double second notes curved and Marshall had al-

most the same level of notes but he had them square. As a result of the squareness, it accommodated a different tonal quality. He created what you call the double tenor. Youngsters started changing up patterns and trying to make them around to do whatever they can do to create a better sound. However, they could never realise they cannot get anything better without what we originally had.

In 1962, I created my last accomplishment in the art form - the tenor bass. I still felt we were missing a line between the bass line and the cellos. For some reason, I came up with the augmented pattern. I do not know how it came. I just had it in my mind that I wouldn't put certain notes on one drum. I never thought about it being augmented and I put it as it was. After checking it musically with other people, I realised everyone had the same identical pattern and I really cannot say how I accomplished that formation of notes.

In 1964, a gentleman named Chapman brought in the high tenor which was established in the same year. Hardly anyone used it. Everything went back down to the low tenor notes from the low C. But Chapman brought that in '64 and he started from the E flat going up. I don't think it was very significant but it had a different tone.

'Instead of making two cellos, I built three cellos and in 1956 to 1958 I decided to add three drums instead of two for the cello. So I built what we call the diminished cello today'