

We must respect our pan artists

THE EDITOR: Kindly permit me a few lines in your newspaper to redress a certain view which has been expressed in letters to you sometime during the last week or so, deploring the fact that the super arrangers of steelband music in our midst sometimes arrange for more than one steelband for the Panorama competition.

The tenor of that argument to my mind is highly disrespectful and scandalous and is clearly based on a false promise.

It was stated for example, that Clive Bradley, Len Sharpe and Jit Samaroo will be arranging between themselves in the 1988 Panorama for some fourteen steelbands.

The impression given was that these are men who are only interested in money with no real feeling for the art. But in my view, nothing could be further from the truth. It is clearly not the case, as a little reflection will show, that any band is obliged to accept the services of these men.

National Treasure

The fact is that in the fifty odd years since the beginning of the steelband, there has emerged amongst us certain persons, "Sugar" Ray Holman, Clive "Brados" Bradley, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, Jit Samaroo, Leon "Smooth" Edwards, Beverly Griffith, Earl Rodney, Ken Professor Philmore, to name the cream, who are to be regarded as nothing less than genuine national treasures.

Between them there is at least one hundred and twenty years of experience and knowledge about the possibilities and limitations of the steelband.

How many of us have seen these men



Boogsie Sharpe



Clive Bradley



Ray Holman



Jit Samaroo

at work? Holman and Bradley are natural born teachers! To see Bradley work is a show all by itself! All of these men are great inspiration to the growth of the steelband.

The plain fact is that these men are fervently pursued by various steelbands who know that they are committed to other bands, but who still believe that they will benefit from the "help" they receive from these masters.

I am willing to bet that the resident arrangers in most of these, are usually willing and thankful to step aside and allow these masters of the art to arrange for their bands, because they know that everyone in their band — player and would-be arrangers alike — stand to benefit immeasurably from the talent and skill of these very gifted sons of ours.

Superior Knowledge

They know that these men are in possession of certain "secrets" — technique and sheer knowledge.

Any dispassionate observer knows that these men are capable of taking a band with average instruments and improving their performance tremendously.

Why? Because of their superior knowledge.

It may be a matter of choice of key in which a tune should be played based on the available instruments together with their superior

talent for arrangement of steelband music.

Why then should these men not help those bands who ask for their assistance? And why should they not be compensated for their time, skill and labour? We pride ourselves on being an informed and enlightened country as nations go, but aren't we being narrow-minded and unfair to these men who have nurtured their God-given talents to quarrel with their perfectly lawful right to contract for their services?

Let us grow up and be fair to these men and recognise them for they are and the tremendous contribution they make to the enjoyment of thousands in our society.

Who would dare to quarrel with Quincy Jones because he arranged for several performers?

Is the winning of a Grammy a coveted thing amongst singers? It is absurd to say that a performer shouldn't hire him because he arranged a song in a particular year for some other singer.

You see the absurdity?

The problem is that many of us fail to recognise the steelband Panorama is not merely a competition. It is a marvellous and exhilarating concert.

I might add that it is shameful and scandalous that we show such little respect for the above-named men, who are in fact the greatest arrangers of pan music in the entire world, our own sons and brothers.

It is often the case that it is the visitor to our country at carnival time who truly applauds their achievements.

One further observation please.

In the Sunday Guardian of January 17, 1988, you carried a letter captioned "Exodus took a courageous stand."

Now, no one in his right mind would deny that any band may reserve the rights to insist on the exclusive services of a particular arranger.

However, if a band has entered into a contract with a particular arranger and the contract does not include the term of exclusivity and the arranger has performed a substantial part of the work the band cannot "axe" him without paying damages.

My information concerning the "axing" of Ray Holman by Exodus is this: it was agreed that Holman would arrange for that band for the 1988 Panorama.

Exclusive Arranger

After he had arranged about 50 percent of the tune, it was discovered that Carib Tokyo asked him to arrange for them also.

He began to "help them out" i.e. Carib Tokyo. Holman's agreement with Exodus did not stipulate that his services would be exclusive to their band.

When the Exodus leadership discovered that Holman was helping Tokyo, they gave him an ultimatum, although it seems that they had no intention of re-negotiating their contract with him to include and bargain for exclusivity.

They fired him. And now Tokyo has welcomed him with open arms.

I defend the right of Exodus to have an exclusive arranger but in the circumstances of this case, considering the calibre of their leadership, it is my respectful view that Holman has every right to sue for breach of contract or alternatively for the reasonable value of his time, skill and labour.

We must grow up. Contracts as it is sometimes said, are made to be broken. What is not often stated is that "he who is in breach had better be ready to pay damages for his breach." We must respect our artists.

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