

CARNIVAL

T'dad may lose 'steelband world' to N. York

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STATEMENTS made by people in Trinidad and Tobago have always been taken for granted by the entire population — perhaps with few exceptions.

Regardless of what topic is being discussed and to what degree it is being dealt with, the same response comes from the masses. Now, I hope the same treatment will not be given to charges that the steelband world will be New York and not Trinidad.

This is, to my mind, a dangerous threat to our national heritage, if this should happen.

My reason for hoping that something tangible be done vis-a-vis more encouragement and meaningful recognition to the steelband movement, is based on the fact that two top band leaders share almost identical views on this subject.

ADVERSE

Simple as it may sound, any such move to bring the steelband to New York will obviously have serious or maybe adverse effects on the country.

Ellie Mannette was the first to forecast that in about five years New York will have some 500 steelbands and he further added: "This will mean the people who travel to Trinidad for Carnival and to hear the steelband will have it at their doorsteps".

The next optimistic viewer on the topic is the leader-manager of West Indian Tobacco, Gay Desperadoes, Rudolph Charles. He sees the steelband as no longer the music of Trinidad and Tobago, but "of the world".

He too is confident that "pan will be swinging up here in time to come".

REWARDS

Personally, I see benefits coming to the individuals who venture into this "culturally tragic field". Firstly, our steelbandmen are mostly unemployed and as Rudolph said: "Everybody is concerned with survival".

So naturally migrating to the United States will produce financial rewards, but it will not come without a lowering in the standards of performance.

It is definitely the scuse enough is not of the steelband in this part of the world thus affording full-time employment for all at the present moment. As a result of this, the

players will positively have double interests and then the same problem our artistes suffer at home (working and performing) will come to life here. In that bands will be unable to spend six and seven hours practising their bombs or what have you.

In fact there is at the present time, the absence of any competition among steelbands here in New York.

While the United States, or particularly New York is regarded as the "Cultural Centre of the World", the range of music played by bands up here is limited, compared with performances by bands in Trinidad, which is much smaller.

DISASTROUS

It would mean any move to transfer our culture into a foreign land is bound to be disastrous.

To support my point, here is what an American steelband lover has to say on the subject. He is Dr. Nelson Foote, Community Development Adviser with General Electric:

"That rigorous competition is not here in New York. It is only in Trinidad. There is no hope for the steelband movement here — at least not now."

Dr. Foote has had the opportunity of hearing steelband music in Trinidad and is assisting Despers up here and he is still opposed to the idea of steelbands leaving home and migrating to the U.S. He has strong feelings about Ellie Mannette.

TEMPTATION

Said he: "Ellie Mannette may be a genius but he is wasting his time up here".

Seeing that our steelbandmen may be tempted to leave the country permanently and set foot on foreign soil, the steelband association should now show its usefulness. You may ask how?

Perhaps Mr. Goddard and his officers believe they have done all they can for the movement, but there are some more that must be done, such as:

- Get the Ministry of Education to include the teaching of steelband music in every school of the country;
- Encourage its members to equip themselves for teaching positions at

- schools; and
 - Stop being a "Panorama Association" and become a business body thereby creating employment for its members.
- People will never be fully satisfied with what-

ever they have, but if the association sees it fit to embark on the aforementioned tasks, this could be a way of solving this culture threat.

It is time that people — EVERYBODY — regard steelband men as musicians and not panmen. Slade Hopkinson once told me that a good West Indian artiste has to be recognised by foreigners first and his countrymen last. He said: "The reason for this is

because we are so accustomed to belittling ourselves." This could be identical in the case of the steelband especially when one considers the remark of an American musician about the steelband:

"A great many symphonic orchestras I have heard with conductors, have played with far less quality to what I have heard tonight".