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ML1040

Pan Ramajay winners...

Homeless but harmonic

By TERRY JOSEPH

A STEELBAND which has from its inception existed through the sheer benevolence of its landlords, on Saturday night ran away with the \$20,000 first prize at the Pan Ramajay.

Lincoln Enterprises Pan Ensemble was, at the end of the competition, a clear 11 points ahead of second-placed Earl Brooks and Friends, with more than 50 points separating them from last-placed San Juan All Stars.

"All of the attention that the band is now getting is very nice," said band official Oscar Roberts at the draw for playing positions on Tuesday evening last, "but any minute now the band could be out on the pavement again."

For the last six months, the band has been rehearsing under a party tent in the backyard of the Pan Trinidad headquarters on Edward Street in Port of Spain. The ensemble has been forced into a kind of nomadic existence ever since its inception. At first they rehearsed on an empty plot adjacent to their pan store on Ariapita Avenue, but soon enough, the City Corporation asked them to move.

Robert Amar allowed them to use a warehouse in Cocorite for two years, but then asked them to move again. Then, he finally offered them another warehouse space in Long Circular Road, but soon enough, it was time to move again.

From there they went to a location in Morvant, but that was even more temporary than any of the previous panyards, so they ended up begging Pan Trinidad to rescue them.

Pretty soon, they may be called upon to take up even that tent and walk again. Their attempts to have the Ministry of Culture secure tenure on state lands for them, met with rebuff, according to the band's assistant manager, Oscar Roberts.

The band has had its own share of troubles too, with personnel and sponsors. They once carried the logo of the



FORMER soloist champion **Duvonne Stewart** (left) and the ensemble's arranger **Sydney Joseph** get into their song at the Ramajay Finals. *Photo: STEPHENSON WESTFIELD*

Caribbean Satellite Network (CSN), but that went off the air and consequently, the logo came off their pans. Some of the members were also sacked recently, when a meeting of the band's management felt that indiscipline was creeping into the organisation.

In place of the undesirables, the band hired Clive Telemaque and Sydney Joseph, two of Trinidad's best loved tenor pan players to fill the breach. Already they had the 1995 champion Ramajay Soloist, Duvonne Stewart and other key players in the ensemble.

Ken Thomas, who together with Larry Largen leads the band, told the *Express* that the addition of Telemaque (who played with the band for its first

year and always returns for the Ramajay) and Joseph certainly provided the band with the kind of boost that was bound to leave its competition wanting.

Joseph's treatment of David Rudder's "Calypso Music" included solos which utilised melodic lines from some of the better know calypsoes, infused into the ramajaying of various pannists. So inside the concept of calypso music came bars of Sparrow's "Rose", Shadow's "Bassman", Boogsie's "Mind Yuh Business" and Brother Marvin's "Jahaaji Bhai".

Coupled with another Joseph arrangement of the Herbach & Kerg standard "All the Things You Are", the

band was destined for the top and, playing at position four, set the benchmark for the bands which followed.

Perhaps being the only band in the finals with pans tuned by the legendary Bertie Marshall, the Lincoln Ensemble already had a headstart, but even so, they extended the lead through sheer performance.

It was the kind of quality performance that led the band, in less than five years, to make several visits to the US and Japan and to record a compact disc, which is to be released locally (it has already been released in Japan and Atlanta).

Only the performance of Luther Francois could, by the end of the night, be compared to the work of the

band from the pan store. Francois played the tenor saxophone and flute, for just three songs, at the end of the Ramajay competition.

He opened with Sparrow's "(Good Morning) Mr Walker", then went onto the flute for Bob Marley's "Redemption song", closing with "Mercy, Mercy", the Joe Zawinul composition made popular in the sixties by Cannonball Adderley (and later King Curtis).

Backed by the Pelham Goddard trio that had earlier supplied chords and rhythm for the soloists, Francois captured the spirit of the Ramajay in a way that many of the solo and cadenza players that night failed to deliver.