

# Time's ripe for a steelband institute

**A**NOTHER MAJOR aspect of any development plan for the steelband must be a concerted effort to reverse the trend of decline in the number of conventional orchestras. The goal must be to raise the standards of the struggling orchestras and to have established (and in many cases, re-established) at least one conventional steel orchestra in every community in Trinidad and Tobago. The biggest constraint to any such initiative must of course be the high costs involved.

A campaign directed towards corporate Trinidad and Tobago for a scheme for the sponsorship of steel orchestras, has to be aggressively pursued. This campaign must include a package of generous tax incentives.

An attractive inducement donation, both financial and material has to be made in order to enable "Pan-Round-The-Neck" orchestras, to make the transition to conventional orchestras.

**(vi) Panyard Development**

This area of the Plan requires the early establishment of a high-powered committee, including officials of the government ministries involved in state lands, community development, planning, housing and works, to assess the state of panyards/theatres throughout the country. Out of this assessment must come the following:

(a) Security of tenure for all panyards.

(b) the development of panyards including the provision of income-generating facilities; labour to be supplied from the steelbands themselves.

(c) the selection of various panyards and sites of historical significance for further development as "steelband shrines" with facilities for tourism and research work e.g invaders, desperadoes, highlanders, free French panyards.

(d) the commissioning of our most capable technocrats, to design a panyard model, which would reduce, if not eliminate the problems of noise-pollution etc., and which will satisfy ideal acoustical requirements and space for recordings and other activities.

**(vii) Tourism.**

A clear link between steelband development and our tourism thrust has to be established. This has to go much further than the \$2,500 "wharf appearance" of the orchestras, when a tourist boat docks in Port of Spain. It must include (a) a hotel policy which would define the acceptable level of steelband appearances at all the major hotels, particularly in Tobago (b) promotion of a planned itinerary of visits to designated panyards by tourists and visitors (c) an electronic media policy which will define the acceptable quantum of air and screen time to be allocated to steelband music (d) a designed package of promotional material to accompany all steelbands/solo musicians while on foreign tours (e) the marketing of steelband recordings at all outlets exposed to visitors.

IN THE FINAL instalment of their dissertation on the steelband, Nestor Sullivan and Ian "Teddy" Belgrave examine the decline of conventional steel orchestras and other matters pertaining to the dilemma in which the local movement has found itself in relation to the development of the steelband as an art form and an industry in other parts of the world.

(viii) Mass production support and expansion.

There are three areas of support needed in this new but fast-growing industry of steelpan manufacture. These are (a) research and development (b) international marketing and (c) development of a clientele of technicians to service the instruments abroad. The entrepreneurs currently engaged in this sector, have to be consulted so as to determine; the nature of support which they require, so as to make these businesses more competitive internationally.

Additional investment and expansion in this sector will need to be encouraged, if we are to capture a larger share of the international market. Investment also has to be located for the steelpan accessory industry, in products such as steelpan toys, souvenirs, etc.

A strategy to lower costs of imported materials used in steelpan manufacturing and the steelpan accessory production e.g. steel sheets, steel rods, pan-stick rubber, pan-case material etc. has to be pursued, looking both at import duties and import-substitution.

**(ix) Scholarships**

A developing steelband industry will obviously demand a continuous supply of expertise to lead in the various sectors of this growth process.

A properly worked-out scholarship programme directed at securing expertise in a number of related areas is necessary e.g. music industry, international marketing, electronics, acoustical engineering, metallurgy etc.

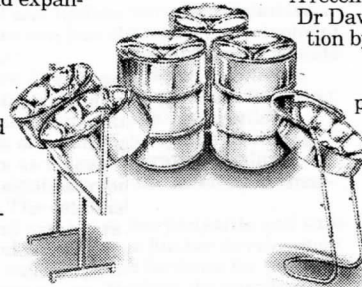
**2. Steelband institute complex.**

From what we have seen in Section A and Section B, there is urgent need for the establishment of a steelband institute, here in the land of its birth; an institution where not only the skills of pan-tuning will be transferred from the masters to the young, inexperienced technicians, but also an

institution which must become the international centre of steelband development and establish Trinidad and Tobago's authority in the world steelband movement.

Such a centre must have the following features:- (a) Tuning room, (b) archives, (c) library, (d) research department, (e) marketing outlet, (f) conference/seminar/workshop facilities, (g) historical display and productions, (h) hall of fame, (i) demonstration room, (j) classrooms and (k) recording studio.

A recently detailed submission by Dr Dawn Batson for consideration by Pan Trinbago of a



"Proposal for a Trinidad and Tobago national panservatory" has as its mission statement "To prepare pannists to take their place in a professional orchestral, studio or band setting as performers, teachers, arrangers or leaders". This is an excellent complimentary institution which easily

could find its space within the walls of our steelband institute. There are quite a few citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are eminently qualified to play major roles on the Board of such an institution; Dr Batson, the ethnomusicologist, Mervyn Williams and Dr Ann Marie Osbourne, readily come to mind. The long-awaited steelband concert hall could also be a part of a major national steelband complex, which would house the institute and panservatory. Colin Laird, almost 20 years ago, designed such a home for

steelband performances. All that is now required is a revival and update of these plans.

Then, we can face the world, as the true mecca of pan.

**3. Other developments.**

There are a number of other developments which we expect to naturally flow from the momentum of a national steelband thrust. Some of these are as follows:

(i) The establishment of an association of tuners; (ii) The establishment of an Association of Steelband arrangers and composers.; (iii) A documented written and videotaped, official history of the steelband; (iv) An upsurge of steelband recordings; (v) The establishment of Trinidad and Tobago as the international steelband conference centre. The first such gathering of persons involved in all aspects of the steelband industry internationally, should be organised before the end of 1998; (vi) The unemployed or underpaid steelband musician becomes a thing of the past, as the society at last embraces him/her, recognising his/her worth to our country. A good place to start of course in this recognition is the total rejection of the nominal fees/prize monies which orchestras (and therefore musicians) receive in local competitions.

**4. Cabinet responsibility.**

With due respect to the present Minister with steelband responsibility, who everyone agrees has been doing a more than satisfactory job, the time has clearly come for an un-shared portfolio at Cabinet level for steelband development and international marketing.

Such a ministry can lead in the five-year development plan for the steelband. Such a ministry is destined to bring eternal glory to T&T.