

Steel Band - TT

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LORD KITCHENER

THE first time I heard the word "scrutting" it was being used by the Public Relations Officer of Curepe Scherzando to describe the economic state of the average steelband musician in Trinidad and Tobago for a visiting journalist's enlightenment.

The plight of the panman has not changed much since that day, some ten years ago when some local media people the British journalist and officers of Pan Trinbago met at Peter Aleong's home where the interview was being taped.

In 1946 Aldwyn Roberts, fresh from "...de country..." but visionary enough to recognise the power and potential of this indigenous artform, sang the very first calypso in praise of the steelband.

Even then, the problems of the pan musician took priority over the power of the music and young Lord Kitchener felt obliged to relate

"...Booboolops, de flag in she hand

Begging de police doh stop de band..."

Since then compositions in

praise of individual pan musicians and steelbands or critical of public and administrative attitudes towards the steelband movement in Trinidad and Tobago have been produced with unfailing regularity.

In fact, the only people who come out with positive and persistent support for steelband musicians are their fellow sufferers in the artworld-calypsonianians.

It is a sad reflection on our society that the only response to such relevant calypsoes as Black Stalin's "The steelband gone but the panman stay" and Singing Francine's plea that "...no other panman woun' dead like Spree..." has been "Kaiso" shouted enthusiastically in the tent.

If everyone who emerges as a partisan supporter of the various steelbands during such

times as Festival and Panorama competitions, was to stop giving "Mouth" support and pledge to give just \$1 a week towards a National Steelband Foundation, the plight of the pan musicians in Trinidad and Tobago could be at least partially solved.

Steelband music, like jazz, was born in humble circumstances.

Unlike jazz, the steelband is yet to have its "Preservation Hall" where nationals and visitors can go and view old photographs, newspaper clippings, "longtime" steelpans and other evidence that this great and wonderful music was born and is appreciated here in the land of its birth.

The sudden evacuation of Pan Trinbago should serve to create awareness among all these people who have at some

THE PANMAN'S

NOW IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THE TUNE

time come to near blows while arguing about the superiority of, for example, Catelli All Stars as against Laughlin & De Gannes South Stars, because what is needed is financial backing for national Steelband development.

Trinidadians and Tobagonians must become mature enough to recognise that this kind of vocal support does not help a steelband when it is handed a "quit" notice, especially since there is no band in this nation that does not live with the fear of being asked to vacate their pan tent by land-

owners.

Nationals must accept that a champion steelband cannot emerge "...jes' so..." but as the result of several hours of regular practice, even when this means an infringement of the right to enjoy peace, television and radio programmes, and conversation by people who live in close proximity to panyard.

When Pan Trinbago ask for an increase in appearance fees and other financial assistance for steelbands, Trinidad and Tobago, some nationals argued that the popular bands should not be given as much money as the "prestige" bands.



This argument ignores completely the fact that it costs as much to acquire steelband instruments in the country as it does in the town.

The excellence of a steelband is often dependent on the ability of its tuner and arranger. In Trinidad and Tobago 1981 a tuner is a high-priced technologist who cannot be expected to "chinks" on a bill because one band is from Belmont and another from Claxton Bay.

All steelpans are made from olddrums, for which suppliers charge one flat price. Some steelbands may have to pay more than others for transport and this is in fact, the only difference in expenditure that steelbands may have.

The accessories that are required by steelbands—stands, paint, material for the construction and maintenance including electric lights for the pan tent, all cost the same