

JEREMY TAYLOR, EXPRESS music critic, listened to Catelli All Stars play a variety of classical tunes at Queen's Hall on Wednesday and Friday night but is not convinced that the steelband really does justice to this sort of music.

STEELBANDS have been playing classics for a long time now; but in the past month there have been two major presentations entirely of classical music, the first in Trinidad and Tobago. In October, the Samaroo Jets, sponsored by the Recital Club, gave a concert of complete, mainly chamber, works at St. Joseph's Convent, and now the Trinidad All Stars have followed up at Queen's Hall. (they move to the Naparima Bowl on November 26)

The AllStars' programme was more spectacular than the Samaroos, using vocal soloists, a visiting choir, and an energetic conductor (their musical director Jerry Jemmott), and tackling work for full orchestra; though this had its drawbacks as well as its attractions.

## Fantastic

One has to admire the sheer labour that goes into a performance of this sort: the long months of rote-learning and memorisation mastering music which orchestral musicians would simply read from a score (it's a pity the programme didn't elaborate on the "novel approach to sight reading" used by the All Stars).

That alone, whatever else happens, is a fantastic achievement.

One has to admire All Stars' tone and technique though this is no less than we expect from a group of such long standing and consistent success.

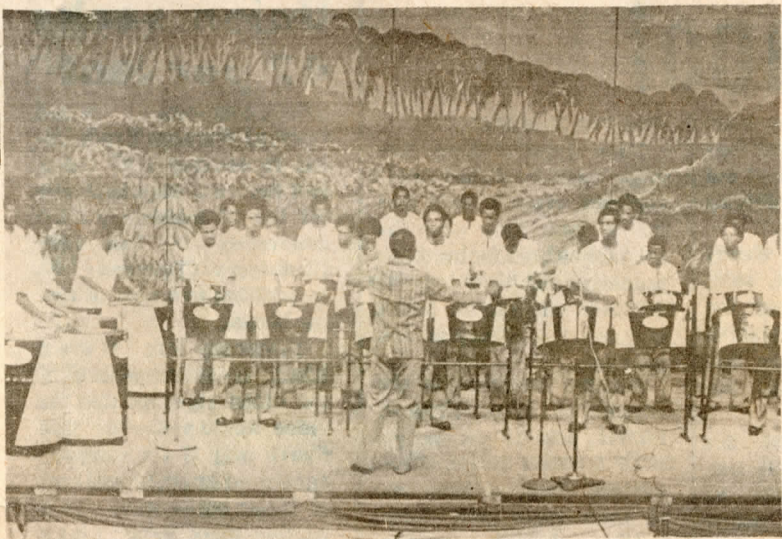
At certain high points, like the end of the "1812" and "Barber of Seville" overtures and sometimes in the Dvorak "New World" movement, they produced a really thrilling sound, precise (except for the cannons) and vital.

## Exciting

The parts which came over best were the parts for full orchestra, fortissimo, with the melody pealing out clearly from the front row of tenors, and solid harmonic accompaniment from the rest.

These were the straightforward exciting bits that got the audience on their feet shouting for more.

The real difficulties came in the other, usually quieter sections, where orchestral instruments played in the



Flashback: Catelli Panmen in action

# Panmen can't cope with classics

I would have liked to hear the All Stars tackle a more substantial complete work instead of doing single movements from "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and the "New World", and in the latter piece a lot more flexibility was needed in the interpretation, particularly the several tempo changes required to deal with the contrasting themes.

Soloists Pat Flores and Ken Oxley sang with their customary distinction, but the San Fernando Chorale nearly came to grief in the middle of "The Heavens Are Telling" in spite of the reduced speed, even venturing for a while into bitonality.

The "1812 Overture" was a good choice to close with, though musicians in the audience will have been

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variety of their tones and the clarity of their interweaving lines for the overall musical effect.

The variety of tones available to the steelband

is much less than in the conventional orchestra, and I sometimes wonder if the lower-pitched pans are capable of sustaining polyphonic parts with any clarity.

Called upon to provide a contrapuntal melody in, say the Dvorak movement, the lack of definition caused a sort of pleasant rumbling, like trying to shape a tune

out of distant thunder.

I found it hard actually to hear the middle and lower parts; and the bigger the work, the more difficult the definition.

# Pan must get own classics

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startled by the claim that Tchaikovsky was "the world's greatest composer."

But "classics on pan" will always, I think, have an experimental, occasional flavour to it; I'm not convinced that the instruments can cope with the music, any more than a string quartet could really do justice to "Miss Mary."

The experiment is admirable, except where the aim is prestige, the working out of a dark compulsion to master "massa's" music.

I can understand the technical challenge, being perpetually told that a good player can do a new calypso with his eyes shut in an hour; and, though the steelband's folk roots will never disappear, I can understand the tendency towards sophistication, reflected in those fantastic runs and spectacular modulations we hear for Panorama, but seeking something more substantial to absorb all that virtuosity.

The whole history of music has followed that pattern.

## Example

But can we expect the whole steelband movement to turn to the classics to sharpen its technique?

I think not; the classics don't really suit it as well as all that, and nor do pop or soul.

I would have thought that a more fruitful advance would be to follow the example of jazz into an area unburdened by laborious memorising, and affording much more improvisation and experiment.

It would mean a drastic reduction of numbers, down to one player to a part (as the Samaroos have now), and correspondingly more groups each with more creative freedom than the present huge bands can offer to the individual player.

A basic knowledge of chords, such as jazzmen have, would be enough to open up a whole new style, a West Indian answer to American jazz, but with a different root and sophistication.

Panmen, let's face it, must create their own classics.