



*THESE young lads, part of the Belmont New Dimensions, were the youngest to enter the Panorama preliminaries. They play the "Bore pan", invented by Denzil Fernandez.*

## *Un-sponsored steelband struggles for survival*

From Page 10

Some of these boys had fathers in the band. And it was always a favourite pastime for them to head to the pan yard where they would listen to the men practise. Sorry to see the much loved band fall apart, they approached Prince and asked if he would teach them to play.

They were a new spark of life for the old pan yard and Prince and Valla were willing to teach them all they knew. Their average age was about 15, with the youngest a mere 10 years old.

The number increased from 12 to 30 enthusiastic lads who proved to learn much faster than the old timers— "learning off the music like home lessons"— and enjoying it. And Prince took on a new father/hero image in their eyes. He and Valla got very involved with the boys, despite the jeering from some of the people around.

They took the boys on hikes, bought them a table tennis board and kept them out of trouble. They were training for Panorama '86, seven months away, practicing on afternoons between home lessons and at 9 p.m., bedtime curfew. They worked with the "bore pan", a new innovation in steelpan designed in 1984 by Denzil Fernandez.

From all around people laughed at them, saying: Carnival '86 was the "hat trick" year for poor old Dimensions, they were bound to come dead last again, for the third time in a row. The youth, faced with a challenge, vowed otherwise. Urged on by Philbert Alexis, their 16-year-old captain, they practised hard at the piece to be played that fateful night "Too Young to Soca".

When the time seemed right, Prince and Valla arranged a show—a "Shoot Out"— guest featuring Boogie Sharpe and Witco Desperados. They promised the boys a trip to Tobago with the show's proceeds, but—the show was a failure and the boys had their first taste of disappointment, until Panorama time arrived.

When that day came, they were nervous but ready. On stage, the youngest member, Justin Thomas could barely be seen above the tenor bass he played. The crowd and the other bands were receptive. This was the youngest band to enter the panorama preliminaries, even if they were doomed to make the "hat trick" before they started. Some of the original members like Foots, Dimes, the Byer boys, were in the crowd; forgetting old tiffs they'd come to lend support.

But at such a high-pitched time like Carnival, one wants to read about the big guys—the winners...Right?

Well, Belmont New Dimension won. They broke the "hat trick", beat five bands (all big men) and placed 29th. It was a personal victory for the inexperienced Belmont boys and it equalled winning any panorama.

Losers? Some perhaps would rank them there. But one has to be selective when writing a story...one has to choose only the winners.