

IT HAS taken all of six years to reach where I am with the Bertfone. So, much more. For my affair with pan began some 18 years ago. If, then, I did not conceive the 'Bertfone' I nevertheless was after something better than the pan we had then.

While I have made some contributions, I feel that it will take me another 18 years to be satisfied. In my life I have been many things — solder, cinema operator, printer, worker, all for brief periods, all necessary diversions, but diversions none the less.

INVENTOR

As a panman, itself, I have seen many things — beater, strainer, taser. But above all I have seen myself as an inventor, looking for inadequacies and working to devise something that will fill the gap. Much remains to be done and I am disturbed over the lack of steelbandsmen prepared to experiment, of people willing to strike out and establish rather than to follow and conform. Take rhythm in steelband, for instance.

I am dead set against 'iron.' But we have to stick to it until somebody comes up with some way of maintaining rhythm that gets away from the harsh unmusical sound of old pieces of iron beaten with a rod.

This idea will not find favour with many. I have heard it argued many times that we long to have iron in steelband as if the two go together like crab and callaloo. But if 18 years ago fellers were beating iron to keep time merely be-



Many times champion steelband North Stars in the days when they were sponsored.

NO LONGER OUTCASTS BUT STILL...

cause they worked in the Slaughter next to the railway station where pieces of iron were handy it doesn't follow that the best thing for keeping rhythm in steelband is "iron."

Indeed over the years we have had to supplement "iron" with drums, scratchers and lately with cowbells and even bongo drums via some bands. Clearly "iron" is inadequate.

PROBLEM

But it takes a special kind of curiosity to invent. Simply to amplify steelband was for me a problem. When amplifiers are built abroad, they certainly are not built with steelbands in mind. So it is not a simple matter of plugging in.

I spent years experimenting with different kinds of microphones, before settling for contact mikes which enabled me to amplify sound without

picking up rattlings caused by the vibrating of the metal.

And when it came to the Bertfone, still an incomplete instrument, I had to experiment with all kinds of things before reaching where I have today. I had to find out what kind of springs to use and after finally opting for the tautness of springs used in body-building strands I had to keep shifting them to get the best effect.

BULK

And my work continues. I have not yet achieved the totally controlled sound and the instrument remains bulky. Ideally, I suppose the thing to do would be to keep it in cold storage and then spring it on the public when it is complete.

But I have spent more than \$5,000 on the Bertfone already and to get the further funds needed I have to project what I have been doing through the band. Or to put it another way—to develop the 'Bertfone' I have to project it undeveloped as it is.

Why worry? people ask me. And some seem to think that all this inventing on my part is a kind of personal quirk that has no bearing on the needs of the steelband world.

DIFFICULTIES

But those who clamour that there should be no changes forget that changes are being forced on steelband. In the 40's it was all right to have a few men beating pans strung around their neck, but coming into the 50's steelbands became larger, so large that today the very size presents all sorts of difficulties.

is an invention of the outside world and therefore should not be applied to pan is to me a kind of old-fashioned nonsense. Electronics is part of the twentieth century in the same way that the motor-car is. Is the argument, therefore, that we should abandon motor-cars?

I prefer to look at the scene somewhat differently and to argue that what our electronic engineers should be doing is adapting the traditional amplifiers to meet the needs of the steelband here. What I cannot understand is why our university engineers cannot come up with an inter-connected set of amplifiers that would amplify not simply the tenors but bass, cellos, double-guitars and the rest.

CONSERVATIVE

The answer may well be that engineers here are as conservative about pan as everybody else. Sometimes I wonder whether this conservatism is not simply an attitude that says 'steelband has reached as far as it can, steelbandmen must now know their place.'

And about this I will have a lot to say in my next and concluding article. True, in a sense we are no longer outcasts but there is still a kind of discrimination that seeks to set limits on what we can do in the country.



CHAPTER 9

Unless the society changes drastically, steelbands will have to earn money to survive. Nobody, not even the most radical politician has proposed a society where every steelband will be paid by the government—so steelband will have to earn their keep in the normal way—by beating for entertainment.

Because of the size of the average band this has been limited to appearances on stage and in large public fetes. Surely we should be thinking of smaller steelbands of say 10 to 12 men which could perform at small house parties, weddings, christenings at an economical fee and occupying a much smaller floor area than is the case at present.

To argue that amplification