

commentary

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# Pan: The search for sponsors

## **panchat**

PAN is Beautiful VIII is over and the critics would say that it was not an overwhelming success. The fact is that the format of our steelband festivals sorely needs a drastic restructuring. When the present format was instituted in 1980 to restart the festival after a long lapse, the Kirpalani Group of Companies was the main sponsor and absorbed the losses.

The festival quickly gained in stature and Pan Trinbago was even able to go it alone in 1986 and register a profit. The satellite festival for the schools also saw a full house in 1987 for the finals and a profit margin also was established without full corporate sponsorship. Since then the festival has been going downhill, in fact the last three editions of Pan is Beautiful have all landed the organisers in the red.

We at Pan Trinbago recognise the need to host these events, especially the schools' festivals where we nurture the next generation of pannists but the cost is too great. Corporate sponsorship is dwindling while State financing is a farce. People are always quick to suggest that the steelband movement must become self reliant and there have been many newspaper editorials that suggest that we are a mendicant organisation always going about cap in hand.

The fact is that running steelband affairs is expensive business. The final figures are not yet in but a conservative estimate is that the festival cost

approximately \$540,000 with a projected loss of some \$180,000. The major sponsor, The Royal Bank of TT, put in \$150,000 while there were smaller amounts of between \$50,000-\$25,000 injected by Unit Trust, Clico, TIDCO and NGC. TSTT also put in some \$9,000.

The Government's contribution was a measly \$10,000 which represented the offsetting of payments for the venue, safety and security, boat tickets for the Tobago band and lights. The steelband festival is a national festival with international connotations, yet when compared with other recent national festivals, the support given pales in comparison.

The recently concluded Pan Jazz festival is run by a private company which receives a large subsidy from the State.

In fact we understand that this amounted to some \$200,000 last year and the event still was run at a loss. People refuse to put their money where their mouths are when it comes to supporting the national instrument. I still have people who are vex with me because I couldn't give them a free ticket to come to the festival.

This attitude is not confined to scrunters, many are the well-to-do pan lovers who feel that they must attend all pan shows as guests of the organisers. No wonder the Panorama competition would never realise a profit. The same pseudo-economists who lambaste Pan Trinbago for its perceived lack of good business sense are the ones who refuse to support us financially in our ventures.

This extends to the business houses.

Alcohol is closely associated with steelband shows (rightly or wrongly so) yet our major producers could not offer us financial assistance nor even a small newspaper ad, claiming budgetary restrictions.

Alcohol consumption and entertainment go hand in hand, this must be reflected in the producers putting something back. Where have you gone Nicky Innis and Dennis Ramdeen?

People keep castigating steelbandmen when we ask for increases in the panorama prizes and appearance fees which are subsidised by a State agency. No one takes into account the amount of money generated by this event that goes directly into the national coffers.

The Swiss national steelband made an appearance at the festival for the first time. The contingent comprised

a total of 120, 69 players and 51 supporters. The contingent arrived in Port-of-Spain via BWIA between October 17-19 and departed between November 3-10. They spent over \$3 million of our currency during this trip. We have compiled an expenditure sheet which shows that \$180,000 was spent on air fares, \$108,000 on hotel accommodation and \$120,000 on meals and related expenses.

Phoenix, Arizona is planning a World Steelband Festival in 1998 and expects to get entries from Germany, Sweden, England and Canada, along with the large steelband community in the USA, from among the Caribbean diaspora and the University circuit. We intend to beat them to it but the national consciousness must be awakened to lend support to the venture.