

'Dus in yuh face' wows them in Colombia

JAN WESTMAAS reports on visit to Cartagena, Colombia recently where Shades in Steel Orchestra, runners up in Pan Around the Neck 1996, performed at the 15th annual Festival of Caribbean Music.

IT HAD not yet dawned on the crowd in the bull ring — the Plaza Monumental de Cartagena — that the sounds they were hearing — nitido (neat and tidy) and pegajoso (catchy), according to one commentator, were indeed coming out of the steel drums when Shades in Steel struck up a cumbia — Colombia, Tierra Querida (Colombia Beloved Land), in calypso tempo. Curiosity turned to pandemonium as a masterly interpretation of what may be called Colombia's second national anthem drifted from the stage across the arena.

The two opening numbers, "Heal the World" and "Dus' in Yuh Face", had received mild applause from a crowd that had not been quite sure whether the pans were props and whether the music really had been the synthesised sounds from an organ, a piano or a clarinet. The Cumbia rendition arranged by Kenneth Guppy Brown put paid to that. A roar of excitement accompanied by gentle and rhythmic swaying of hands and nips spoke a thousand words. A tourist from the Colombian Andes, a world away in culture and geography from Cartagena, hummed as she swayed her hips "Tu suelo es una oracion y es el canto de la vida" (Your Land is a prayer answered and is the song of life).

In its 15th year, the Caribbean Festival Committee, headed by Antonio Escobar Duque, "El Mono", to friends, needed a zip and decided to break new ground. Pan had never been featured in a festival whose avowed aim is to showcase the musical talent of emerging ensembles of up-tempo and new wave music of the English, French, Spanish and Dutch-speaking Caribbean region. "At the end of the day, however, the aim is to fill the Plaza Monumental, and generally we invite bands whose names are already on the lips of melodramas (music lovers) from Cartagena and beyond", said one committee member. "Shades in Steel is indeed unknown here, but so is Steel band music on the whole so we thought this a golden opportunity to expose Latinos to the vibrant rhythms of pan and you certainly have done so", he added.

As for exposure, Pan Music and Shades in Steel, interpreted as Silhetas de Acero by the MC and, as Rostros de Acero by *El Heraldito*, a Cartagena daily, certainly got a fair share. The band performed on two consecutive nights for a total of seventy minutes, including in their repertoire their prize winning Panorama 1996 interpretation of Rudder's "The Secret Life of Plants" and grabbing lead stories in local newspapers and radio and television stations.

To many, journalists included, the name of Trinidad did ring a bell, but little was known here of our location, our language, our culture and our music, except that ours was a tiny island somewhere in the Caribbean. To-ba-go, on the other hand echoed loudly, and in the minds of more than a few Cartagenos, the sister isle, assumed far larger proportions than Trinidad. In the light of this it was refreshing to see a national daily, *El Siglo*, published in Bogota, devote an entire supplement in Spanish to Trinidad and Tobago. Largely the work of Lucho Tarra, a journalist from Cartagena who paid a visit to Trinidad late last year, this TT supplement of a prestigious Colombian daily would have gone a long way in lifting the veil of ignorance about TT in a fellow ACS member nation.

If Shades teased the audience with the original, melodic and compelling sounds of steel from Trinidad, Krosfyah from Barbados set the stage alight with their brassy fast-paced soca renditions.

Of their six selections, Chris Garcia's "Chutney Bacchanal" and Nigel Lewis' "Movin'" made the bull ring look like the dance floor of a soca festival in Port-

of-Spain bodies abandoned to the frenzied call of the music. Edwin Yearwood had them moving a la derecha (to the right) ending with "see-you-later", to add some impromptu lyrics to his rhyme. It was Carnival in Port-of-Spain all over again.

To wind up the performances from the English-speaking Caribbean was the widely-travelled Jamaican Reggae band, the Mystic Revealers. Fresh from a two-week stint performing in-house at the Caracas Hilton, they had earlier created quite a stir at the musicians' beach Hotel, The Cartagena Plaza, with their dreadlocks and the two corpulent Venezuelan belles clinging all over two of their leading players. Great communicators they were, engaging, entertaining, winning friends in their inimitable rasta style. Pity we couldn't hear them as they were due to perform in the early hours of the morning, by which time we had been heading back to the hotel.

We had hardly settled in to our hotel around 9.30 pm when our guides shepherded us to the Muelle de Pegaso to get on board a pirate cruise on the bay of Cartagena. We got to the docks but were content to take in activities on land as we waited to make the symbolic peregrination — pilgrimage — that marks the official start of the festival.

In the meantime a brief but intense fireworks display lit up the sky line of this charming, history-laden walled city. Old Cartagena, declared a heritage site by UNESCO for the benefit of all mankind, was being transformed for a few days from a city of elegant, old colonial buildings to a city of end of 20th century fun and music.

Pelvic Movements

After the fireworks a DJ struck up some music from Krosfyah prompting a posse of Cartagena young beauties into the most outrageous pelvic and belly movements imaginable. Earlier on I had remarked to Susan, second pan player from Shades, on what I thought to be the subtlety of their pelvic movements. I had clearly spoken too soon.

It was now pilgrimage time — Peregrination Afrocaribena as it was officially called. Cartagena's strong African presence is not difficult to detect. While the pure black may be in the extreme minority, a significant number of Cartagena's population has some African ancestry. In colonial days Cartagena probably had the largest slave market in the new world and on its outskirts a commune of runaway slaves — the Palenque — established what is thought to be the first colony of free blacks in the New World.

The African drums had now struck up and the comparsas (bands of costumed dancers) danced a choreographed dance as they moved along past the muelle (jetty), turned into the street adjoining the Paseo de Los Martires (Martyrs' Boulevard) in the direction of Getsemani, the old artisan quarter, located outside the city walls. The crowd moved and danced along with them, clapping and shouting as they passed Cartagena's ultra-modern Convention Centre, where only the night before Minister of Trade, Mervyn Assam, had attended a meeting of Hemispheric Trade Ministers. In the melee the Shades posse split up but regrouped an hour and a few beers later at the square just in front of the church of La Trinidad.

Cartagena, the old and the new, was brought home clearly to me as I returned to the hotel that night in Boca Grande, a spit of land on which the modern face of the city, like Miami Beach, is indelibly stamped. A skyline of high rises overlooking a long beach seemed that night a life time away from the old world from where I had just come! Cartagena is, without doubt, my favourite city.

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SHADES in Steel Orchestra performing in Cartagena.

Valsayn teachers assist St Saviour's in drama

TEACHERS at the Valsayn Teachers College and students of the Holy Saviour Anglican School in Curepe got together during the last school term during which the kids got practical drama lessons.

The classes were conducted by lecturer Cyril Collier and co-ordinating teachers Marion and Dansele Browne with the participation of a number of student teachers.

The group members from Holy Saviour comprising students from different classes, were able to learn quite a few things during the year with the first term of activities focusing on values, building relationships, co-operation and other skills. That term culminated with the students staging their version of *The Wedding of*

Cinderella. During the second term they dealt with issues arising from the African cultures and in the third term, the students were exposed to a variety of dance steps. Those terms ended with the re-enactment of an African wedding and a skit involving various dances.

According to some of the students, they were very happy to have been a part of the drama club saying that they learnt many new things and enjoyed the time they got to spend with each other.

The organisers of the classes stated that the main objectives of the sessions were to develop self confidence, openness, alertness, and appreciation and tolerance of different cultures, values, customs and traditions.



OTHER students enjoying an African dance. Photos by ERICA RAMJASS.



SOME OF the students doing an East Indian dance.