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STANDARDISE PANS

BY JUNIOR POUCHET SILVER STARS STEELBAND

UNFORTUNATELY recent incidents in which two prominent pan tuners, both members of TRINBAGO, failed to complete the tuning of some pans for my band after having received monies for same has prompted me to draw your attention to this matter.

It is by no means the first time that my band has suffered at the hands of pan tuners who fail to meet deadlines, do rush jobs that produce second rate instruments and as in the above case, do not keep their end of the deal.

While this is not an attempt to discredit all pan tuners, whom we are aware, the most gifted members of the steelband movement, these inconsistencies that have been a chronic part of the steelband scene through the years should, I think, be spotlighted by your executive and ways of eliminating such practices be brought about.

DISADVANTAGE

Maybe it's unfortunate that like hundreds of other steelbandmen, I do not possess the talent to be a pan tuner of any note, and as such must depend upon the skilled craftsmen of this art.

This fact should not however, prove to be a disadvantage to those like myself who play steelband instruments and are unable to fashion them ourselves.

To those who might suggest this factor to be a shortcoming on our part, may I point out that local gifted musicians like, Mr. Vernon Evans, Miss Joycelyn Pierre, Mr. Art Carrol, Mr. Andre Tanker and even Supt. Prospect and members of the Police band cannot fashion their instruments either, and it's doubtful if this fact has prejudiced their musical careers in any way.

I maintain it is the privilege of fellow pan-men to do as they please in this respect and if some tuners limit their best abilities to a given band, then that also is their prerogative.

However in the same vein it is only fair to assume that if these same tuners accept pan tuning contracts from other bands, there should be no room either for the production of inferior quality instruments or tardiness in completing such contracts, after all the fees paid out by one band is just as good as any other.

I feel that the steelband movement has matured enough now as to facilitate through TRINBAGO's auspices, the innovation of a steelband music shop or hops where the best pan tuners in the land can put on sale, hether to other steelbandmen

The full text of a letter sent to Pan Trinbago highlighting some of the problems facing the steelband.

or for that matter any interested man, woman or child of this country, the best possible tuned instruments.

"Pan," which has made the most exciting entry into the world of music during the last thirty years still unfortunately retains the distinction of being about the only musical instrument unavailable over the counter.

In every other musical field artist can, whether it be Mantovani, Isaac Hayes, Byron Lee, or Vasco Defreitas simply order from a catalogue or music shop, the musical instruments of their choice. The fact that other musicians play identical brands does not in any way diminish the outstanding musicianship of these individuals.

While I in no way presume to link myself with any of the illustrious musicians previously mentioned in this letter, I feel that as a steelband musician in my own right, I must lay claim to be able to have these same privileges in the pursuing of steelband instruments.

I would like to suggest that Trinbago's executives take the initiative and encourage pan tuners willing enough to market their instruments in a more constructive manner to come out and open shops, or negotiate the opening of an office where any individual or group, if it be "Tanty" Merle's son or Tranquillity School's music class, can negotiate a proper transaction over the buying of pans minus the usual hassle of looking around for pan tuners and at the same time having no guarantee of getting the best possible instrument.

POOL BRAINS

While on the topic of pan tuning, I would also like to suggest that your executives make a greater effort in pooling the best steelband brains in the country towards accomplishing the much elusive standardisation of pan.

The fact that the musical notes on our pans carry no one universally accepted pattern makes this system the greatest natural drawback to the steelband.

This call for standardisation which has been echoed time and time again by musical advisers is a "must" for your agenda.

Now is the time, I think for steelbandmen to cast aside any existing prejudices or "get on with it." It will be our

greatest gift to future generations of pan players.

To those who might hold the conviction that standardisation of our instruments and the availability of the best "sweet pan" to everyone would destroy the originality and styling of individual steelbands, can take note that at all piano Festivals, contestants use the same grand piano provided on stage and adjudication is not based on who plays the best piano, but who plays the piano the best.

In the same criteria steelbands should in the future, be able to be judged not on who has the best pans, but who plays the pans best. And the only way to achieve this important step in steelband music is to standardise the instruments.

SOBERING THOUGHT

A violinist can play any violin, a guitarist, any guitar, yet today our pan players are restricted just to the set pans of their particular band.

If TRINBAGO were to purchase a complete set of pans for Queen's Hall stage now, almost all the steelbands of Trinidad and Tobago, regardless of their individual repertoires, could not come up on stage and render a single tune.

It is quite a sobering thought, sir, when we realise that an average six year old child who has had piano lessons can play any piano in the island, or anywhere in the world for that matter.

To the pan tuners, standardisation should not spark the fear of identity, for just as Steinway, Yamaha, or Baldwin offer different tonal qualities to a standard piano, we can assume with confidence that Williams, Gervais, Marshall, or Wallace can offer the same with a standard pan.

While competition has proven to be the major ingredient in the improvement of the steelband movement, both musically and socially, and should be continued, I think, sir, the time has come for us steelbandmen to project ourselves a little beyond the boundaries of close rivalry and harness our know how, into projects as suggested above, which I humbly think will prove to be of tremendous benefit to the movement as a whole.

Finally, it is also my humble opinion that the coming of age of our movement cannot be fully attained without these inevitable steps, and sincerely hope the Executives of Trinbago, and fellow steelbandmen view my comments and suggestions only in the light of us achieving these goals.