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# Invaders toast Chaconia Gold

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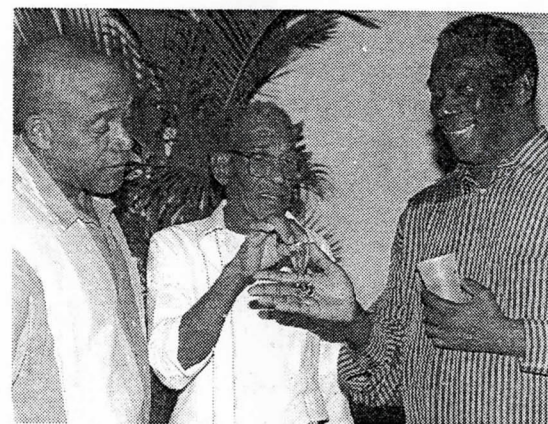
DESPITE the graphic account of this event, set to music by calypsonian Blakie, founders of the Petrotrin Invaders Steel Orchestra argue that their band never did clash with Tokyo on Park Street.

It was a good time to set the record straight too, as several young players were mingling with the pioneers as the Petrotrin Invaders Steel Orchestra held a get-

together on Saturday night to celebrate the band's being awarded a Chaconia Gold medal.

Although the function was designed to celebrate their national award, the party soon turned into a forum for the band's pioneers to share some history with today's players.

The function was held at the Petrotrin Club on Queen's Park West and attended by a cross-section of the bands membership.



Youth and experience mixed well in the club's parking lot and the short ceremony, ostensibly organised just to toast the achievement, quickly became a kind of tutori-

al, with eager young members glued to the words of three pioneers selected to speak on the evolution of the band.

Vernon "Birdie" Mannette, Francis Wickham and Norman Darway each took turns at the microphone to explain the route by which the Petrotrin Invaders came from being the Oval Boys to the formidable steelband that it is today.

Mannette's brother Ellie, together with Stanley Hunte first talked about forming a band back in 1937, in the very front yard of the family home, opposite the Queen's Park Oval on Tragarete Road in Port of Spain. Today, the resulting Petrotrin Invaders is one of very few steelbands which still occupies the spot on which it was born.

The band and its original leadership has been credited with a number of innovations (some of which remain contentious); but pan as we know it today, is indisputably due to Ellie Mannette's idea of sinking the 55-gallon oil-drum, rather than attempting to tune notes on the convex surface of biscuit tins and dustbin (as was hitherto the style of tuners nationwide).

The pioneers on Saturday night all paid tribute to this signal departure from the norms of the forties and hailed Ellie's radical approaches in his continuing quest for perfection of the crude instrument.

Before the pioneers could speak on Saturday night, though, Cuthbert George, the band's vice-captain asked the audience to observe a one-minute silence in respect of the passing of Alfonso "Custer" Job, one of the earliest members of the band, who had died earlier that week.

Birdie, making clear that he was no speaker, chose to spend his short time at the podium in clearing up a major misconception about the band; an error immortalised by Warlord Blakie in a calypso called "Steelband Clash".

"Invaders was not the band which fought with Tokyo on Park Street in 1950, as described in the Blakie calypso," he said. "Blakie made a mistake in the song and now everyone has the history wrong. Invaders fight with Tokyo during the same Carnival, but our fight was at the corner of Duke and Charlotte Streets. It was another

# The Harps, not fighters

band 'Five Graves to Cairo' that was in a battle with Tokyo on Park Street that year."

Francis Wickham, in his turn at the microphone, warned that no history of the steelband can be written without the name Invaders appearing regularly in the document.

"We were originally the Oval Boys," he explained, "but in 1940, there was a movie showing at the Roxy cinema called Night Invaders and we took the name from that; eventually dropping the Night and becoming just Invaders."

"You have to understand it was not like it is now. It's not that all the members of the band went to see the movie, but the show was popular and there was a big gambling game every day and night outside the Roxy, so enough of our boys knew about the movie for us to change the name."

"There are many more stories that you can get from the older guys who were with the band from early, but tonight I want to pay some attention to the youth and to let you know that it is the policy of Petrotrin Invaders to introduce new ideas and in this case, the youthful face of the band means to us that the name will carry on for many more years to come."

"It is this youthful side that returned the entire executive in our election two nights ago and it is the same group of young people that made us proud with the completion of the bands first compact disc and on our recent and very successful tour to Brazil. Let the youth take over and guarantee Invaders forever," he said.

Darway traced the history of the band from its inspiration, which was Alexander's Ragtime Band, which practised at the Woodford Street corner, just two shakes away from the Mannette house on Tragarete Road.

"The band was properly organised by 1939 and we played in 1940 Carnival, but in the following year, there was no festival, but there was a pan contest at the Oval and we performed there along with Alexander's Ragtime Band and The Boys from Hellyard."

"It was for the allied Victory over the Japanese (VJ) Day that Ellie brought out the 18-note pan, which he called the Barracuda."

"It took town by storm and made all the

other bands very jealous.

The boys from John John stole the Barracuda pan and when they were finished studying it and copying it, they hung it on a tree and said that Ellie had to come for it. He went.

"It was in 1945 that Ellie first produced the big pans, from the 55-gallon drum and we played Kitcheners 'Jump if You Like' for the Carnival. Again the Behind the Bridge boys were jealous and gave us trouble, but Invaders was one of the better fighting bands, so we were not easy to contend with. If they came at us in the day, we went back for them in the night."

"But Invaders was more interested in music and invention to do with pan, so we became

known more as the Harps than as fighters.

Ellie was busy working on new pans, introducing the second pan and the guitar pan, cellos and double-guitars. In 1963 he gave us he tenor-bass.

"People do not know that he used to go up the hill to tune pans for then the Gay Desperadoes.

Once he spent a full three days up there and Rudolph (Charles) gave him \$100, which was plenty money at the time.

"When he left his country in 1967, he handed over the band to his brother Birdie and Emmanuel 'Cobo Jack' Riley, but Birdie lived in the shadow of Ellie, although he himself tuned pans for Renegades, Starlift and Desperadoes too. In 1992, Birdie's era as boss of Invaders came to an end, but we must remember the man who was there in 1940 and lasted for 52 years with the Invaders Steel Orchestra."

The audience spontaneously gave Birdie Manette a standing ovation at this announcement.

In closing, Wickham called on the audience to acknowledge Hamill Jones, one of the early members, who celebrated his 76th birthday the day before the function.

George Commissiong spoke on behalf of Petrotrin, the band's sponsors, calling on the band to recognise that the public acclaim and state endorsement of Invaders, through the award of the Chaconia Gold medal was as much an accolade as it was a responsibility. "To whom much is given much is expected," he said adding "the company is therefore looking for successes in both the upcoming Steelband Music Festival and

Panorama 1997."

Nervin "Teach" Saunders, the band's captain and arranger, reminisced about the early days too, telling the story about the first time he heard the band on the radio

beating "Mambo Jambo" in 1950; which formed his decision to join Invaders. He called on three-time captain Trevor Cooper to come up to the podium as well and be recognised for his efforts to bring and keep the band together and Ricardo "Bachac" Herbert for his work in managing the operations of Petrotrin Invaders.

Herbert took the opportunity to announce

the formation of the Petrotrin Invaders Youth League, which had been inaugurated only the morning before.

The overwhelming presence of young people all stood up then and gave themselves and their elders a most lusty round of applause, bringing to an end what was truly an evening of celebration of both self and contribution by Petrotrin Invaders.

**INVADERS  
beating sweet,  
Coming up  
Park Street,  
Tokyo, coming  
down beating very  
slow  
Mama when the  
two band clash  
(Mama-yo)  
If you see cutlash!  
Never me again  
to jump in a  
steelband in  
Port of Spain  
—Warford Blakie**