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Doubt of origin is not stopping steelband

ONE of the pioneers of the steelband movement George Goddard was lost to the country just a few weeks ago. Goddard at the time of his death had just completed documenting the history of the steelband, which no doubt, must be a comprehensive analysis of the growth of Trinidad and Tobago's musical invention.

True Story

One waits with interest to see what comes out of Goddard's effort, as the true story of the steelband is yet to be fully written.

Several local scribes have attempted, in some way, to trace its development over the years and there have been many debates as to who was really the person who started or "invented" pan music.

There are beliefs that pan was invented by Winston "Spree" Simon although many others have contributed in various forms such as bandleaders, tuners, arrangers and players.

Among these are Ellie Mannette, Anthony Williams, Sonny Roach, "Mando" Wilson, George Yeates, George Beckles, Bertie Marshall, Neville

Jules, 'Fisheye' Olliviere, Austin Simmons, George Goddard, 'Ziguili' and Patsy Haynes.

In actual fact, the tamboo-bamboo can claim to be the foundation upon which steelband music was based. It enjoyed close to 50 years until in 1934 when pan made a daring move to displace it.

One of the stories is that one night in 1934 the Newtown tamboo bamboo band was coming along the steets playing when a bottle with rum fell and broke as a player was passing it to one of his friends.

Many of the revellers started to run, thinking that a fight was about to start. When they realised that this was not so, they re-assembled. One of the players, "Mando" lost his cutter during the flight so he took a paint pan from in the canal and started beating.

Many of the other players were so intrigued by the sound, that they took turns at beating it. The following day they met at their headquarters and decided to substitute "pan" for bamboo.

The following year, carnival 1935 saw the emergence of the Alexander Ragtime band of Newtown with their "Pans" and so the world got its first taste of the only musical invention of the twenty-first century.

By 1941, there were many more steelbands on the streets and in the early days, the rivalry amongst the bands was very keen and on many occasions spilt over into fights and gang warfare.

But the scene has completely changed with a much more organised and peaceful approach to carnival where fights have now been replaced by a determined and combined effort to ensure that the movement gets its rightful place in the society and internationally.

And if one wanted to see the extent to which pan has developed, one simply has to be at the Queen's Park savannah during the preliminary round of panorama- the major pan competition in the island where thousands crowd the venue from early morning and go on into the night to cheer on "their" band.