

OF TWO ARTISTES



Boogsie is boss

"ALL OF THEM who were doubting me...I come and I prove them wrong." This was Boogsie Sharpe, reclining on his favourite couch, reflecting on the awesome achievement of having arranged for seven steelbands in the Panorama competition, and seeing six of them win their respective zones.

By the time the final night had arrived, the words were on everyone's lips — even his detractors. The people who felt he had taken on too much, had to eat humble pie. Boogsie is boss.

Some people might think that the story began last year when Boogsie arranged for Our Boys (Tobago), Siparia Deltones (South), TCL Skiffle Bunch (Pan Round The Neck), in addition to his band, Phase II. The latter was joint winner of the North zone, and won the national title. The other bands won their respective zones.

But the story really began in the late 70s, when Boogsie, wanting to try out the endless music in his head, left Starlift with several other members and formed Phase II. In the early part of that decade, Ray Holman who was then Starlift's arranger had fired the imaginations of players like Boogsie when he took the band to the Savannah with his compositions *Pan On the Move* and *Pan On The Run*. So, unsponsored, but with a hard core of fiercely loyal members and supporters Phase II and the music started coming. In those days a panman couldn't play his own compositions in Panorama and expect to win. But Boogsie's winning roll did start in 1985, the year of Phase II coming second with *I Music* in the national finals.

And then Boogsie arranging a Ray Holman composition for Starlift this year was a story all by itself. Starlift had not even made the finals since 1978 when it won with Sparrow's *Natasha*. This year Boogsie put Starlift back in the Savannah for the National finals. It was like going back home in a way, and in an interview with the *Express* last year Boogsie had described it as "giving back some of what I got".

Other bands were also looking at Boogsie as a man who could bring back a band, and when Scherzando approached Boogsie to arrange, that rift which had resulted in Sforzata years ago was healed, making it once again a single unit. Potential Symphony from San Juan was another band which had not gotten beyond the preliminaries for many years, and it was while Boogsie was on a trip to the States that a friend of his called Delamo asked him if he would arrange for the band.

So there we were looking out at Boogsie's perfect view of the sea, and houses perched on the surrounding hills and Boogsie was smiling with just a hint of mischief as he described how he organised the music over the season.

He had started in December. When other people were concentrating on sorrel and ham, Boogsie went to Potential for several mornings and worked with a small side. Incredibly what we all heard at the Savannah from Potential was first taught to two players from each section.

Trintopec Deltones got four straight days from Boogsie in January. After that Terry Wallace of Deltones who had a tape of how Boogsie wanted it, drilled the band. If there was trouble Wallace would

phone Boogsie, and he went back once after that to "put on a dressing."

Tobago's Our Boys got some weekends, and then members like Holly, Stanis and Bert St. Clair were responsible for practice sessions.

When Boogsie could not be with Starlift, captain Emile Charles and vice captain Franklin carried on the practice sessions.

His own band Phase II he left for last, but it is Junior Regrello's Skiffle Bunch who perhaps best exemplify Boogsie's exciting, unorthodox approach to pan. Around Christmas he had given the band an arrangement in three keys. As defending pan round the neck champions Skiffle did not have to play until the National final night at the Savannah.

According to Boogsie: "That night down by All Saints Church we fixed up the tune. But you know those players are very good. You could give them a tune now for now."

With the exception of Skiffle Bunch, after that for the other bands as the season progressed Boogsie would "make a rounds."

Boogsie admits that his style is different. But it is a style to which Phase II players have become accustomed. By January he had put down the flat melody, verse and chorus, after that (and again the mischievous grin) "the different little arrangements, the pretty parts."

The truth is that Boogsie's players never really know what next he would come with. Like the night

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when he told his frontline tenors to play any two notes they liked. The result when it was played at the Savannah, had commentators at a loss for words.

He explained: "It was just the vibes I had that night. I did not really go to the yard with that intention, and when I said what I had in mind, the reaction was Boogsie man, you crazy or what. Certain announcers said afterwards that it was not music, but I want them to know that music has no limits."

Maybe it is his jazz leanings which makes Boogsie's music so open to arrangement. "But my players are good, and they learn things in no time," but here is an arranger who can literally change a tune overnight.

Phase II has now done a hat trick with the North Zone finals. Boogsie is hoping to do it next year with the National title. He had a lot of praise for the Phase II players — "all kind people, and all very nice" — his section leaders — "priceless people" — Dougie Redon who "tirelessly" drilled the band — Roland Harrigan who blended the pans — and finally all the supporters.

Would he do it again next year? Yes, now that he knows he can do it successfully. But there was a price, his family hardly saw him, and the last time before Ash Wednesday that he got eight hours of sleep was just before Christmas. Five of the bands for which he arranged made it to the National finals, and Boogsie the boss is happy. Now it's on to the victory celebration.

