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In reply to
Pete Simon

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The outcast myth

SIR : I've just read Pete Simon's article (January 27) 'Privy on Pan' and in response would like to point out a myth within that article and disagree with him on another point.

First, there is the myth that steelbandmen were disowned by society because they were steelbandmen. What in my view, society wouldn't stomach was the other interests of the bandmembers—the inevitable gambling, the occasional fighting and the rampant loafing.

My own experience I know is not unique to many Trinidadians where an eldest brother in a family, which virtually had no adult male leadership, either moral or financial, supplied clothes and food for the whole family including a younger brother who allowed his love for pan to rob him of all perspective and priority, so much so that he never understood how totally unacceptable to our family and, in effect society, his crude act of accepting the situation where I alone, met the family's needs while he spent his days in the 'yard' and continually refused to get himself a job which, then, was for the taking.

A job, the earnings from which would have meant so very much

to the family consisting of four boys and three girls — five of the younger ones being at school.

What was so disgusting was this blatant disregard for everyone and everything—and very crucial things they were, too — except his love, his pan.

No sane person hates a musician because he's a musician. One, though, will hate a musician because he's singularly self-indulgent and hopelessly parasitical.

This is something Pete Simon must acknowledge. When he does this he'll perhaps do a little anthropology — always bearing in mind that in the days of the disowned steelbandmen, it was not necessary to have whole day attendance. Indeed many had full time jobs.

OUR POINT of disagreement is his belief that an outsider can't do a better job than a local, where pan festival judging is concerned.

What we must first understand is that what is being judged is the band's rendition of a peice of classical music—European classical music—I have to chokingly point out.

This is where the trouble lies. Why not have the bands play their very own composition—in or out of the classical mould, as preferred — placing a minimum of, say, seven minutes on the piece which must have no repetitions.

This together with a fairly long and involved test tune should do the trick.

This may well force out even more of Trinidad's inexhaustible creativity. We can do it and we can do it better.

The old oil drum is now quite definitely the world's most versatile musical instrument and, as we know, its potential, judging by the last few years, will blow the mind.

What we must tell the world now is that the man whose music surpasses that of the great European composers comes from Rio Claro, John John or Cumana—not to mention, Barataria.

COMING back to the judging I'd say that the advantages of having a foreigner are numerous. To start with you have an event where all mention of bribery and boboll are still-born.

No adjudicator with a reputation to defend, not to mention his very ability to practise his profession will risk getting involved in something which is not quite above board.

What is to be understood is that the prizes to be won are big, as they should be, and where this

In an event so dear to our hearts we must not risk disaster or distrust or a "bottle and stone samba." What's more, a local judge, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, will have a favourite band or two.

If Pete Simon can find me a man in Trinidad or the West Indies for that matter who won't give Jack a whack for \$2,000 then I personally will give them an all-expenses trip to Norway and a chance to bathe in any of her beautiful fjords.

To sum up, I'll say that we do ourselves and our society a disservice by vaunting the doubtful fact that our society disowned our musicians because, simply, they were musicians. This is a gross and totally inaccurate oversimplification of the case.

Secondly, I'll say that by all means we ought to develop fully our native culture but while doing so let us acknowledge our own shortcomings and navigate around them.

I won't make many friends for saying this but I do believe the strong-point of Trinidad society, and any other capitalist society, is not sheer honesty and self-denial. I know, I was the wayward panman.

RAY NICHOLS

Oslo, Sweden.

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What is to be understood is that the prizes to be won are big, as they should be, and where big money is concerned, as we know from Watergate, there's no telling which, honourable gentleman will not "go low for glow and doe."

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