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NEWS

UWI TAKES PAN TO USA

By SEAN NERO

SEVEN PERFORMANCES and four tutoring workshops will make up the itinerary for the UWI Festival Ensemble's maiden eight-day tour to the United States of America, which the steelband embarked on yesterday. They are scheduled to return on March 16.

The two-year-old UWI Festival Pan Ensemble is an entity born out of the Centre for Festival and Creative Arts.

Under the direction of Jessel Murray and Nervyn Saunders, the 14 pannists, all students of music, will travel to Massachusetts, Hartford, Connecticut and Salem North Carolina.

According to Murray, the tour was a result of two happy events. One was the success of the band in winning the ensemble category of Pan Trinbago's 2002 World Steelband Music Festival.

The other was Murray's relationship with a Massachusetts

steelband, which he helped to form in 1999 while he was teaching at Amherst Regional High School.

"When I got the news that Douglas Purcell, the person I had trained to take over the Massachusetts Steelband was retiring, I grabbed the opportunity," said Murray.

"The idea came to me to take the steelband and honour him and at the same time build a tour around it."

The first performance by the band is scheduled for today at Amherst Regional High. Other performances will be at Amherst Regional Middle School and Westfield State College, Westfield tomorrow; the Fort River Elementary School on Thursday; and Elms College, Chicopee on Friday.

In Hartford, Connecticut the band will perform at the Artist's Collective on Saturday before wrapping up the tour on next Monday at Winston-Salem State

University, North Carolina, an historically black school, which had members of its faculty visit Trinidad a year ago.

For Murray and Saunders, the benefits of this tour will be to "educate and entertain."

Murray said: "Many of the schools have never heard a professional steelband play. I want them to recognise that pan is not something to play only when tourists come. This is a serious endeavour of committed young professionals."

"I want the students going on this tour to see that there are graduate programmes in pan abroad, which they can access. Since many in the group are teachers, I would like them to see the types of music education at the schools we'll be visiting."

Already, Winston-Salem has signed a memorandum of understanding with UWI, S Augustine, for exchange programmes.



THE UWI Festival Ensemble.
Photo courtesy Jessel Murray and the UWI Festival Ensemble.