

Cassanovas looks back at golden days

By PETER BLOOD

TO MANY of us within the 30 to 40 year age range, the name Cassanovas still brings back fond memories. Memories of a golden era for music in this country. Unquestionably one of the three best music aggregations to ever come out of Trinidad and Tobago, Cassanovas ruled the entertainment roost during the sixties, right up to the turn of the decade.

One of the more popular members of Cassanovas — Raymond Reid — migrated to the United States some 15 years ago in search of fame and fortune. Bass, as he was fondly called by the many fans of the band — because of his wizardry with the bass guitar, has returned to Trinidad with a burning desire to resurrect the band and restore it to its former glorious self.

Raymond "Bass" Reid began his music career in 1963, playing with the San Juan-based band Super Tones. Primarily through his ability to improvise with amazing speed on his instrument, and because of his imposing stage personality, Bass was soon being rated as one of the most exciting stage performers in the land. By the time he teamed up with the deceased Monty Williams and Cassanovas in 1966, his reputation had preceded him, automatically making him an attraction in the band.

Upon playing with Cassanovas until 1969, Bass left to join Michael Boothman and his Rockerfellas Combo, another of the popular bands in the city. He stayed with the Rockerfellas outfit for just two years and departed Trinidad for North America.

Currently back home "for an indefinite period", Bass plans to make Trinidad his base from where he hopes to project the music of the land on the international market. "I figured that after spending 15 years away, learning stuff and making a name for myself, the next best thing I could do was return and give something back to my home."

Among Bass' plans is a wish to utilise his experience with calypso, and rhythm and blues from the United States, fusing both musics and marketing the hybrid sound abroad. "I hope to sell this abroad and hopefully bring foreign revenue to Trinidad and Tobago, while at the same time rejuvenating the local music industry.

"In spite all my plans, my first objective is to revive Cassanovas. Plans are already in motion for this dream to become reality. The band is to be called 'Cassanovas II' and I hope to attract a complement of nine good players." Bass intends to launch Cassanovas II in August, for Independence.

Asked about having any of the band's former members in the new group, Bass replied: "I only know of two guys from the original Cassanovas that live in Trinidad at present. They are Junior Byron and 'Ming' (Keith Agostini). If they are interested, that's alright with me. The important thing is for Cassanovas II to have the same excellent tonal quality as the original band."

Another of Bass' dreams for Cassanovas II is to have the band play on the road for Carnival 1987. He still cherishes fond memories of the original Cassanovas playing on the road at Carnival. Bass is also negotiating with the prestigious Polygram-Mercury company, in Los Angeles, to record the band, once it's formed.

"I left Trinidad in July of 1971 to further my experience and ability in music and entertainment," says Bass of his migration 15 years ago. "I've definitely found what I went there to seek. Now is the time for me to come back and share that knowledge."

When Bass arrived in the United States in 1971, he spent his first year in New York feeling out his new home. "After my first year, I went to Los Angeles where I teamed up with Trinidadian Vin Cardinal. We performed in Las Vegas, playing a mixture of calypso and popular music." Subsequent to that experience, Bass was enlisted to Ike and Tina Turner's band. He stayed with them for one year.

World renowned Taj Mahal was the next band to

'Bass' plans to rebuild the band



Entertainment Reporter PETER BLOOD interviews Raymond "Bass" Reid at the SUN office.

benefit from Bass' skills. He stayed with them for ten years, the longest he has played with one aggregation. "I did five albums with Taj Mahal, the last being one we did just before I came home. We recorded that one in Kauai, in Hawaii, one of the most beautiful places in the world."

Asked about Monty Williams and his untimely passing, Bass' countenance changed to one of sadness. "Monty was like a brother and still hurts when I speak about him, so I don't really like to speak about his death. Anyway, Monty's death, back in 1973 hurt me a lot. It affected my music, in that I had problems finding another keyboardist with whom I could relate to the way I did with him. After some time I came to realise that time and life had to continue. I don't really want to talk about that."

In comparing the music of the sixties to that of today, Bass feels that "there's a vast difference between the structure of the music in the '60s and now. The music back then had an easier flow, especially in its background. Now, it's a more sophisticated sound, providing room for incorporating more foreign formats."

Continuing on the same question, Bass added: "From the little I've seen and heard, the musicians of today compare favourably with their North American counterparts. I think that that high degree of discipline possessed by the professional musicians of America and Europe also exist among the musicians in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been hearing some people bad-mouthing the local artistes, but I don't think you can take the behaviour of just a few to judge everybody in the business."

Asked to compare a local band of today with Cassanovas, Bass disclosed, "I've only heard Charlie's Roots since arriving here, and I'm impressed. In comparison to Cassanovas, Roots has a similar spirit and energy. However, there could be a little more movement and colour on stage when they're playing."

In closing, Bass mused, "If Cassanovas was still around, with the kind of equipment Charlie's Roots has..." He got up to leave the room with a knowing smile on his face.