

Casablanca prepares for historic tour

SUNDAY GUARDIAN WRITER

THIRTY-FIVE members of the ISCOTT Casablanca Steelband Orchestra, under the musical directorship of Anthony Prospect, are gearing for their historic tour which will see them performing inside St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican next Easter Monday.

At the Mass which will be held at 10 a.m., on March 31, Juliet Eckel, one of this country's top classical singers, will perform as guest soloist.

She and top tenor Patrick Flores also will sing the famous and much-loved Latin piece, "Panis Angelicus".

Courtenay Rodney, coordinator of the tour, which will take the band, and possibly a calypsonian, through London and Rome for about a month, is working vigorously to have everything in place.

Rodney is due to visit Rome next month to continue preparatory work.

The tour is being undertaken with some assistance and the blessings of the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor de Castro, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of External Affairs, and the Tourist Board.

According to Rodney, Italy's Vice-Consul in Trinidad and Tobago, Mrs. Dolores Bonberis Bartolusso, has expressed interest in the band's visit to Rome, and has indicated her desire to assist.

Mrs Bartolusso, who attended Casablanca's recent concert, said she was highly impressed at the performance.

Rodney said BWIA is also chipping in with 15 free return tickets on the Port-of-Spain to London route and has also agreed to transport the band's instruments free of charge.

PERFORMANCES

Prior to spending six days in Rome, Casablanca is scheduled to perform in London. On March 7 the band will appear at the Royal Albert Hall with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and on March 27 at the opening of the Caribbean Arts Festival at Westminster Abbey.

Casablanca leaves London the next day, March 28 (Good Friday), for Rome, where, on special invitation from the Vatican, the band will perform in the Basilica.

There are certain outstanding performances at Steelband Music Festivals that remain indelible in the memory, starting with the very first festival in March 1952 held at the Globe Cinema, Port-of-Spain.

The performance that stood out then was the rendition of "You Are My Heart's Delight" by winning the band, Boys Town Steel Orchestra.

And from then down through the years there has been a number of memorable performances, a few of which have been "Anna" by Southern Symphony, "The Breeze and I" by Katzenjammers, "Estudiante" by Dixieland, "In a Monastery Garden" by Invaders, "Intermezzo in E Flat" by Pan-Am North Stars in 1966, "Voices of Spring" by West Side Symphony, "Poet and Peasant" by City Syncopators, "Morning, Noon and Night" by Catelli Trinidad All Stars and "Grand Overture Solennille 1812" by Casablanca.

Since winning the 1982 festival at the Jean Pierre Complex, the "1812 Overture", as it is popularly called, has been Casablanca's passport to fame.

It is obvious that, in addition to the religious pieces which the band will perform at the Vatican, its "1812 Overture" will be the hair-raiser on the programme.

According to Rodney, members of Casablanca are due to have an audience with His Holiness Pope

John Paul II on April 1, and the Pope is likely to attend a performance by the band the following day.

In preparation for the tour a number of fund-raising ventures has been planned, the highlight of which is a raffle in which the first prize is a Sunny car, courtesy Neal and Massy. Other prizes include a television set, a washing machine, and a four-burner stove.

Certain voluntary organisations are being asked to assist with the sale of the raffle tickets. Anyone interested in assisting can contact Miss Sharon Fouchon at 624-7242.

There are shows scheduled for November 1, 2, 3 and a matinee on November 4 involving Casablanca and Fireflight at the Astor Theatre.

FAREWELL CONCERTS

On November 9, there is to be another show entitled "Callaloo and Steel," which will include various calypsonians and a Syrian dance troupe from the Syrian/Lebanese Women's Organisation.

Other ventures, Rodney said, will be a bingo in mid-December, a Christmas barbeque and three farewell concerts at the Astor on January 21, 22 and 23. The drawing of the raffle will be held at the final performance.

Rodney added that the travel agency, Lazzari and Sampson, through BWIA, will offer 100 seats in a package deal for anyone wishing to "take in" the band's tour from March 26 to April 13 — from Port-of-Spain to Rome return.

The package will include accommodation in Rome and one night's stay in London. Also tickets for the open-air Papal Mass, special reserve places in the Basilica for the steelband Mass on March 31, and an audience with Pope John Pal on April 1.



ABOVE: Casablanca in concert under the directorship of Anthony prospect.
LEFT: JULIET ECKEL.

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