

OUR OPINION

Make Carnival an enjoyable festival

ENJOY. That's the one word of advice we have for everyone, nationals and visitors, as Trinidad and Tobago celebrates two days of its annual Carnival festival.

At 4 a.m. this morning, the event that thousands have been planning and working for for months, officially got underway with its usual euphoria. Most mas' players no doubt enjoy the two days of street parades, but there is something special about J'Ouvert, and anyone who took in the spectacle that was J'Ouvert this year will appreciate its special quality.

Now, however, we move on to big mas'. Never without controversy, this Carnival sees the noted bandleader and designer, Peter Minshall, out of the race with both his king and queen. Open to Minshall, however, are the prizes of Band of the Year and People's Choice — and Minshall has an uncanny way of recouping just when everybody thought he was down and out.

But the other bandleaders whose names are synonymous with our Carnival — Edmund Hart, Stephen Lee Heung, Irwin McWilliams, Raoul Graib, Max

Awon, Neville Aming, Stephen Derek, Jason Griffith, Ivan Kallicheran — have put no less effort into their bands this year. One thing this Carnival will not lack is participation and creative expression.

Enjoy. But as with all things, do so with moderation. We invite the visitors in our midst in particular to join in this national festival, which is basically a festival of joy. What they will be witnessing over the next two days is how Trinidadians and Tobagonians can throw their cares and woes at least temporarily away, and do it with a fervour that is truly remarkable.

This is not to say that we do not have cause for anxiety. The rift in the ruling party may have been somewhat muted in the last week, leading up to Carnival, but we expect it will be right back on the public platforms immediately the festival is over. And this at a time when a precariously placed economy continues to contract, with almost no relief in sight.

And yet we can still enjoy the festival that is Carnival. It is our annual rite of release, and we certainly have a right to it.

Congrats to Phase II

WE WISH to congratulate Phase II, and arranger Len "Boogie" Sharpe, for a really outstanding performance at the Panorama finals on Saturday night. Our congratulations go to the runners-up, and indeed to all the bands who once again demonstrated that the steelband has certainly come a long way from where it began.

Tough luck, Clive Bradley. We know you had your heart set on winning and those young panmen and women in Pandemonium gave it all they had. It could not have been easy for the judges to place Pandemonium in second place. But Bradley and

Boogie know the score. They have competed like this, neck and neck, for years, and no doubt will continue to do so. Without the slightest rancour.

The steelband is the real beneficiary of this rivalry. Year after year, the instrument is honed to the point where its musical range has grown by leaps and bounds. Our arrangers continually demonstrate the amazing qualities of this unique instrument, a Trinidad and Tobago invention. Our congratulations go out to all our panmen and women whose contribution to Carnival, and to our culture, is immeasurable.