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By PETE SIMON

Adjudicators in a strange musical world

THE first Steelband Festival, it must be admitted, really set the pattern for subsequent festivals.

This happened at a point in time when the steelband movement was waging a battle on two fronts — the technical and the social.

Panologically speaking, the steelband then still had a long way to go, and the panman was looked upon as a social leper. At best, he was merely tolerated. There are, still however, some pockets of social resistance. But that's another story.

Social recognition and acceptance was, therefore, — panology apart — the main pre-occupation of the Steelband Association or, to be more precise, of the irrepresible and vocal standard-bearer of Pan, George Goddard.

Dr. Northcote, most popular of festival adjudicators, had then recently sent Musical Festival patrons into realms of ecstasy as he enraptured with his individual assessments.

George Goddard wanted to show the world that "panmen was folks too." And so he decided to match strides with the Music Festival by staging a Steelband Festival and using the same format.

It was a case of "follow-fashion," but with a purpose. He, therefore, arranged to have the self-same Dr. Northcote do the same job of adjudicating at the first Pan Festival ever.

One has, perforce, to be sympathetic with Goddard. His intentions were honourable.

How can we then defend our claim to being culturally unique — as it should be — when we have to depend on a total stranger, a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist, a man whose musical formalism is his main claim to distinction, who operates strictly on the rule of Book and Thumb, to settle questions relating to our own native culture?

How can the revolutionary musical departure of the century be judged by hide-bound traditionalists, using criteria which have been in use over centuries ago?

It is the greatest anomaly — a stranger dictating the pace in our own native culture!

Unwittingly we are telling the world that, after having reach such giddy heights in panology, we do not have the wherewithal to critically assess our achievements.

INVOLVEMENT

But such heights were not reached by the panmen alone, for had it not been for the heavy involvement of the top musicians of the nation, such heights would never have been possible.

Doesn't the fact that such high standards would be reached prove the point that we have the sensitivity and capacity to adjudicate?

At the beginning we might not be able to "speechify" like Massa, but this facility only comes with the passage of time.

But we have never given ourselves a chance to prove how good we are. We have outstanding native musicians here with the needed cultural empathy. But we continue to make them feel inferior and unwanted.

Simon, "Andrew Pan" La Bastide, Eli Manette, Tony Williams, and Bertie Marshall etc., calculated to win the patronage of Massa? Surely not.

On the contrary, open defiance of all that Massa stood for, panwise, was the launching pad for their every action.

And what about those so-called "ignorant" others — the hooligans and the ruffians, — victims of police raids under Massa's punitive laws?

And the vast army of adherents who were socially ostracised, simply because they expressed their liking for pan?

On the groans, blood and tears of such people was laid the cornerstone for the lofty edifice of Pan as we know it today.

Don't we owe such people a big debt of gratitude?

Music is music, to be sure. But when it relates to the steelband, there is such a thing as a "responsive chord," a certain deep-seated, indefinable something that creates an affinity and a sort of contiguity in space and time — something that Massa adjudicator, seasoned



NEVILLE JULES



ELI MANETTE

We are not scrunters, panologically speaking. As a matter of fact, we are at the top of the world in this respect.

Public memory is notoriously short; but not so short that we can ever forget that it was one of those self-same Massa adjudicators who was so vehement on the point that the panmen should stay in their own backyards — stick to the Calypso.

He went out of his way to discourage panmen from trespassing upon the preserves of the Great Masters! Remember? His approach to the matter implied that this was tantamount to blasphemy; to sacrilege.

But did we get the message? Of course not. We were not sensitive and sensible.

We, however, paid no heed to his advice and so went on to greater panological heights! Yet what do we do? We still went on to invite others of his kind to adjudicate at our Steelband Festivals — in other words to tell us how well we can play the Great Masters! Funny eh?

COURAGE



formalist that he is, could never feel.

Who vex, vex! But I state categorically that every step of the road leading to Steelband glory — and what a rocky road it was — should, and must be controlled by us, the natives of Trinidad.

And so was set the pattern for all future pan festivals — a Massa adjudicator was the indispensable factor for success.

But there is quite a big difference between a Music Festival and Steelband Festival.