

*THE actual making of a steelpan instrument is described by pioneer in the art form ELLIE MANNETTE to acclaimed American pannist ANDY NARELL in this continuing series on the evolution of pan. The exclusive interview was conducted at Mannette's pan laboratory in New York.*

# EIGHT STAGES TO A PAN

## STORY OF PAN, PART IV

Q: If you could describe, if you could imagine the early 40s when you were playing biscuit tins and things...if you had tried to describe what the steelpan would have been like today, what would you have said?

A: There is no way you could have. You were just walking along and working but you could envisage way up ahead and we could not picture seeing chromatic pans. We could not picture seeing cellos. All we knew was that we were trying to build more and more and trying to get a better sound each time. But we could not picture seeing anything as compared to what we have today.

Q: What did people think of panmen in those days?

A: Well they called us vagabonds, outcasts, bad boys, hooligans, whatever the term. It was every imaginable name you could think of. That is what we had to endure and it was really an obsession and dedication to people like myself and Tony Williams and who the creators were to actually endeavour to continue because of the obstacles against us. So we definitely had a very bad name and if we didn't endeavour to...were not obsessed with the idea of doing something creative, I don'tk-

now if the steeldrum might be where it is today.

Q: Do you think the attitude of society, people on the whole had an effect on the art form?

A: The attitude of society against the art form has slowed down considerably from the past. It probably could have developed much faster because in the early stages when we were building drums and trying to accommodate something relatively good, you know trying to get something out of nothing, the police will take the drums away and then you would take a long time to start again. As a result, it slowed you down a lot. Little things that you may have put into the pan, you lost when the police took it away because you probably would not put it back into the other one. But you kept going over and over each time. So that alone hampered the quick development of the art. But I also have to say that although it hampered, it also was a challenge. We said 'okay if you want to stop us from doing something, I want to show you that I am going to do it.' It was good and it was bad.

Q: Can you think of a single factor that you would say helped to gain acceptance for the steelband?

A: Acceptance? Well, I think the major factor is when we entered the music festival. Okay if you want before that I would have to say that

the major factor that put steeldrums in a little threshold of society was because of a place they called the Little Carib. A lady by the name of Beryl McBurnie who dealt with all the societies around the country had a dance troupe and we were the first band to start playing at the Little Carib. So that whenever they had dance performances and different theatres around, my band would perform and there would be people like senators, lawyers, doctors, the governor general at times. So little by little, the people started to accept that kind of a dance with the steelband. Then I got a scholarship and my name flashed all over the the newspapers about ELLIE MANNETTE was accomplished in the steeldrum and that gave me a little lift. But I think the Little Carib was the most effective thing that ever happened to the steelband.

Q: What do you think about the international organisation of pan...of people from all parts of the world beginning to participate in this art?



Beryl McBurnie

A: Well, I think that is the best thing that could have ever happened for the art form. Other people accepting and playing the steelpan as well as or even better in some cases than the boys at home. I always say that it does not profit a man to keep what he knows for himself. And if for any reason, we were not exposed to the pianos and violins, we would never know what those instruments are like today. So they spread it around and it benefited the art form and if Trinidadians and Tobagonians decide to keep the art form right here and nobody else play it, no other country, the art form would surely go down. It would die because is only Trinidadians then and how many people are there. They really cannot spread the art effectively enough. So due to the Americans especially and the English people who are really accepting the steelpan a great deal, the art has done remarkably well. It has spread across the country and across the world. It should be an art to spread around and

to live. It should not be kept to yourself in any way.

Now we have not touched anything about the making of the drums and we have to go into a little of that. We have stages involved in the making and regardless of the instrument, there are eight stages. For that matter, I had to say this is an Ellie Mannette design; an Ellie Mannette way of making his drums. In 1987 I will be at it for 50 years because I started in 1937 and it was nothing as it is today. However I started to jump around and parade in 1937 when I was 11-year-old. Now I have devised and developed patterns of my own and it is known worldwide.

In my way I would select a barrel and I would beat the top down and that is the first stage. Then I will beat it into the respective depth if it is a lead, a bass, a tenor, whatever I am going to make. In stage two, I would lay it out with a pencil and divide a segment of whatever measurements the note required. In stage three I will take something like a nail with a blunted end which is known as the punch. There are various sizes of punches. There is three-sixteenth, quarter, three-eights - different sizes to accommodate the different drums you are making. However you use a punch to cut the lines you have marked out

with the compass and pencil and that is done preferably with a 24 ounce hammer but sometimes you don't get a 24 and you use a 34 ounce hammer to dent, to cut into the groove lines with the punch and hammer.

In stage number four, you cut the barrel to various lengths. It could be a cello 27 inches long because you cut the bottom of the barrel out. In the second pans my specific lengths are eight inches and the double tenor is six inches. Of course, there are other boys who would have different measurements. But this is my design I am talking about.

In stage five, I would flip the drums over and I would bubble them from inside, I would push the notes upwards and it every note has to be done the same way. So then you would have a new barrel all grooved and all cut and all bubbled up - it would look like a finished drum but there would be no tone in it.

In stages six, I would put the drum on fire and give it an entire burning and then take it off the fire and clean it but I won't call that a stage you know. The next stage is the preparation of that metal, tighten all the lines, do whatever is necessary and shape it back.

In stage seven, you get everything back like stage four and you start to use the finished product which is stage eight.