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Second US university offers pan degree

By TERRY JOSEPH

ALTHOUGH it is still not yet possible to read for a music degree with pan as a major in the land where the instrument was invented; a second American university will, from next spring, offer such courses.

The Florida Memorial College (FMC) joins Northern Illinois State University (NISU) in offering students a chance to read for a degree in pan. Local virtuoso Liam Teague is currently reading for his degree at NISU, which will be the first such accolade in the history of the instrument; but by January, five more Trinidadians will have the opportunity to read for their pan degrees at FMC.

Dr Alfred Pinkston, who heads the department of music at FMC has engaged Dr Dawn Batson to organise and teach the pan degree course. Dr Batson, a Trinidadian, has herself turned out several pan scholars, including Arddin Herbert, a former arranger for the Woodtrix and Petrotrin Invaders Steel Orchestras, who is at present pursuing a music degree at New York University.

Dr Pinkston has only recently transferred to FMC, which is one of the oldest black colleges in the southern United States and one which has traditionally concentrated its efforts in the music department on the study of African American Music.

He joined the faculty on August 1, up to which time he had never even touched a pan, nor had he seen performances on the instrument. Speaking to the *Express*, Dr Pinkston said that when the President of FMC gave him the mandate to revolutionise the department, his first thought was to introduce pan.

He contacted Dr Batson and swiftly put the programme together since, by his own description, it was clear that pan was a cutting-edge instrument which would become a lot more relevant as knowledge of its capaci-

ty increases. Dr Pinkston took time out to visit the *Express* on Tuesday last, ushered by Pan Trinbago's Public Relations Officer, Nestor Sullivan, who lamented the sloth of local efforts to institutionalise the teaching of pan at all levels of education.

"We at Pan Trinbago felt that the people of this country should hear the absolute enthusiasm with which Dr Pinkston and his faculty went about getting pan included in the curriculum of FMC, while we are still in the debating stage and wondering about possibilities", said Sullivan.

"In less than two months, their programme is already in place and just awaiting students", he said.

Dr Pinkston said that once he had the go-ahead to introduce new elements into the music department, pan was a natural for inclusion. "Prior to August 1, I was on the staff of another university where the music programmes had been cast in stone and what I was doing was turning out a lot of fine musicians, but there was nothing new and exciting about the curriculum", he said.

"The opportunity to get in on the ground floor in terms of tertiary education in pan was just too much of a challenge to refuse.

"I had written a position paper describing what I had in mind and the next thing I knew is that the FMC President was quoting from that paper, in terms of the innovations, which also include jazz, popular music, gospel and, of course, pan".

His research had indicated that, like pan and popular music, more than 90 per cent of the people who perform gospel are musically illiterate and Dr Pinkston feels that while there are sterling examples of composition and performance in these forms, this illiteracy impedes further progress.

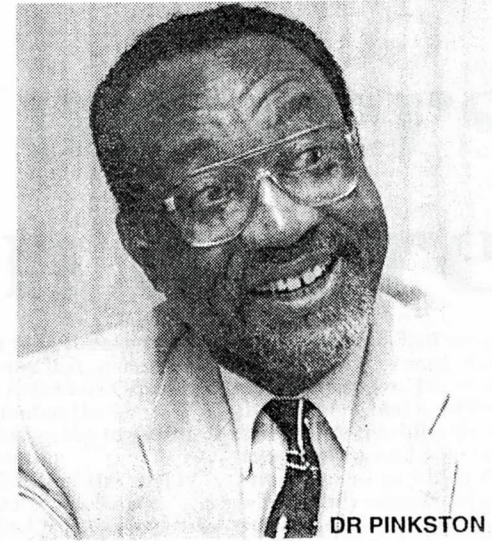
"It is all quite understand-

able that FMC had never considered this line before", he said, "because the two people who were on the staff of the music department had a different orientation. They were teaching the classical European music forms and not considering that the environment in which they were operating was largely comprised of people who had no roots in those cultures.

"Those people have been reassigned, but now that we have Dr Batson on board, all of that will change and we even plan to have a steel ensemble as one of the school bands and to integrate pan into the other orchestras at FMC.

"I said to Dr Batson, since you are already here and you are from Trinidad (and at least I did know that this is the country where the instrument was invented and its best players still come from here), then I will leave it to you to flesh out the programme.

"Not only that but in south Florida, we're looking at a large Caribbean constituency and we're right on the shoreline of the Caribbean itself and were looking at music that was developed by the same blood, so if we look at it this way, it is a natural progression that FMC should become involved



DR PINKSTON

in the teaching of this instrument and offering our people the chance to major in music on an instrument that our people invented.

"In January we will receive five students from Trinidad and there is another student who is in New York who is Trinidadian and will be joining us at FMC. "In essence, they will be signing up for Pan One, just like it were the piano or trumpet, giving the instrument the same integrity.

"This is perfect, because pan fits in so automatically to the programme, in that people of African descent can now study pan music and have as an elective gospel or jazz or contemporary/pop music, all of which is a lot more relevant to their existence than a lot of the music in which they currently major.