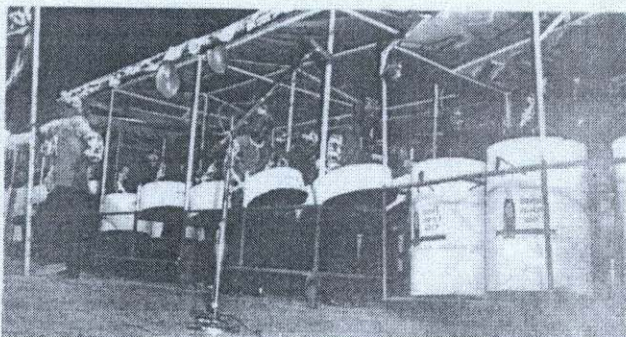


Pan fever: a heartbeat that, somehow, is a bass drum



YOU KNOW it's coming but you can't feel it.

Endless fetes advertised, band-leaders interviewed, calypso making a brief stop-over on the airwaves.

But you know it's Carnival when the north line moves down to South for Panorama Preliminaries.

It must be Carnival when the sun is more than hot and you trip over the mounting skate of beer bottles on the grass at Skinner Park.

When four overgrown women frolic in the grass then pile themselves on a squashed male companion — the eruption comes below and they all fall over in a tangle of arms, heads and legs, screaming and spitting grass at the sky.

Olympian Steel Kings are rounding the bend, pushed on by hundreds of stonners.

They're beating Kitch's *George Weekes, the Road March King* like the four bands before them.

Not hot, the pace is just warming up.

Something is stirring the crowd as the Steel Kings disappear — can't hear, can't see, but the frenzy of bobbing heads and fists dancing in the air tell their own story.

The crowd anticipates you and you are crushed to within three feet of Angel Harps.

The *Stanne* coming down to a samba beat.

People drawn like flies to the sweet pan.

One official with an inoperative hand-mike stands before the surge with his hand upraised like a spunky pebble in the face of a force mightier than itself.

Pretty soon he abandons the pose to break up a fight.

By three o'clock 13 bands have crossed the

stage and there are 14 more to go.

Among them only last year winners Hatters and Free French stand out in any way.

Coming to think of it, no performance so far has reached the famed high standard of the south pans.

Added to this, bands move too slowly across the cycle track.

If that is not bad enough hear Stork St. Hill:

"Bands are asked to move up to the white line to be judged by the competent authority."

That phrase "competent authority" seemed to be trying to convince somebody of something.

Time to move around. Once you have threaded your way through gate's eye trying to find something to eat, the crush is on.

The world here is a clawing, pushing mass of sweaty bodies and wedging elbows.

Even before you hear the "Fight!" you feel the current as though you touched an exposed wire.

A bottle crashes nearby and with eyes shut, I've feel the splinters in the air.

The main current rushes past and we huddle in the slack water, fearful and breathless, squeezed against the wire fence.

Soon a man passes by with a face gouged and bleeding; the tip of my friend's toe is missing.

Higher up the Brigade is fanning a chick who passed out.

All a dat is mas.

Take a drink, pour a corkful on your friend's toe and get out of there fast.

But if the music went

The chick at the top of the "north stand", with the peroxide hair and the tie-dyed jersey is doing a wild interpretation of *Flag Woman*, with particular reference to the sexy bumping.

Fonclaire and *Flag Woman*, Stork might as well give up with the "white line" plea.

A small side called *Nightingales* come down with *De Fosto's Chicks* in '76.

In the deepening dark they seem to touch the deep chord that reverberates total mas.

The *Stanne* makes a third and last appearance with *Syncoettes* and



ESTHER LE GENDRE

from now on it's *Flag Woman* to the end.

Hear *Silvertones*, hear *Renegades*. In the pauses hear that "scratcher" from *West Stars*.

Jump through the gate to the dying sounds of *Tropical Meroy*, heady sweet in the car-park.

Carnival is here; in the aching toes, the gritty throat, in the tenors that ring in your ears and the heartbeat, that somehow is a bass drum.