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The

Williams love affair with Pan

By KIM JOHNSON

IT WAS probably the Invaders who introduced Dr Eric Williams to steelband in 1948.

Despite his rigorously British education and the metropolitan culture he acquired at Oxford, Williams loved Trinidad and Tobago's arts from early—perhaps he'd inherited this from his father, an ardent Dame Lorraine performer.

"The family's entertainment was bounded by the Police Band Concert in the Botanic Gardens on Sunday afternoons, the only form of music, that is to say, apart from Carnival, the Trinidad fete par excellence, to which I was exposed," wrote Williams in his autobiography *Inward Hunger*.

So shortly after he returned to Trinidad in June 1948 he attended the formal opening of the Little Carib Theatre. And playing there was the band from around the corner, Invaders.

"He was always sympathetic to our cause—he offered to guide us politically and he did," recalls Beryl McBurnie. And once McBurnie had launched the Little Carib, Williams realised its significance. "He told me I didn't know the value of the work I was doing, which was true," she says. "I did it because I loved it but if you see the records he had of music of various countries. He loved music and he backed the Little Carib all the time."

Other close associates of the Little Carib included HOB Wooding, Bruce Procope and Albert Gomes. "Williams and Carlton Comma and Albert Gomes were very friendly in the beginning," recalls McBurnie.

Gomes championed folk culture and defended the Shouter Baptists and the steelband movement in and out of Parliament, and Williams took the cue. Lecturing on idealism and youth he turned to the steelband: "If you let this movement die, then you drive a nail in the coffin of our aspirations."

But Williams was still a reticent man. He lived in Rapsey Street, Maraval and his personal contact with the steelband movement was almost certainly through the family to which he'd quickly grown attached—the Moyous of 42 Sackville Street. And by the late Forties young Rolf Moyou had got an old pan from "Sack" Mayers in Merry Makers—the Sackville Street steelband.

Williams married Rolf Moyou's sister Evelyn in 1950, the same year Rolf became involved in Dixieland—the first steelband of middle-class white and Chinese college boys. And when Dixieland hit the road for the first time in 1951, it was from the Moyou yard in Sackville Street. In years to come Williams would develop close relationships with certain panmen, especially George Yeates and Rudolph Charles from Desperadoes. But he kept that link to the steelband movement through Rolf Moyou, appointing him campaign manager in 1971 when he wanted to woo the movement away from Black Power.

Besides those personal contacts, Williams also had a more formal relationship with the organised steelband movement which followed a separate trajectory and began in 1955, when President of the Trinidad and Tobago Steelbands Association Nathaniel Crichlow invited him to a meeting at the Good Samaritan Hall, Park Street.

Williams was a well-known lecturer on politics and history. In 1950 he'd written in the *Guardian* a 40-part series on West Indian history. Then in 1954 he launched a blistering attack on colonialism through a series of lectures at the public library, starting in September and running up to May 1955.

It was around that month that Williams accepted Crichlow's invitation to the Steelbands Association meeting, and despite pouring rain, he got there early. Kenrick Thomas, captain of Tacarigua's Midland Syncopators, arrived shortly after with another band member. The three men stared at one



LATE Prime Minister Dr Eric Williams (left) hosts a party for the Tripoli steelband at his St Ann's residence in 1971. At right is daughter Erica, son Alistair (centre). Tripoli captain Hugh Borde is second from left and one of the country's most celebrated tuners/arrangers Tony Williams (fourth from left).

another without exchanging a word.

"What struck me was his dress, which I didn't expect to see in a steelband meeting. He was wearing a crash suit," recalls Thomas who, despite having read Williams articles in the *Guardian*, had never seen him in the flesh.

"He was sitting there smoking profusely. He had dark glasses and this hearing aid—first time I see a man with a hearing aid. I didn't say anything to him, he didn't say anything to me or my friend, but I kept looking at him."

Eventually George Goddard and a handful of panmen arrived late, followed by a bustling Crichlow. Thomas asked who the man in the suit was. "You don't know that man?" snapped Crichlow without even breaking stride. "You should know that man!"

Crichlow started the meeting immediately, introduced Dr Eric Williams, emphasising his academic qualifications and his status, explaining that Dr Williams had been invited to assist the Association in revising its rules and drafting a constitution.

Williams spoke. First, he lambasted the 15 or so panmen there for their lateness. His time was very important to him, he *buffed* the stunned gathering. Then he corrected Crichlow: politics is in everything, you breathe politics, you eat politics, everybody should be involved in politics. And he ended the session with an invitation to meet a sub-committee at his home in Cornelio Street, Woodbrook.

Thomas was on that sub-committee so he returned to Port of Spain the following Sunday, making his way to the study annexed behind Dr Williams's newly-pur-

chased house. Williams was wearing short white pants and a merino and he spoke to the panmen about their constitution and other things.

He suggested they could earn money from pan abroad, and he turned to a Chinese youth sitting on the back steps of the house to talk about his experience abroad. Although Evelyn Moyou had died two years before, her family remained close to Williams. The youth on the steps was Rolf Moyou whose band Dixieland had just returned from Jamaica and Puerto Rico.

Closing the meeting, Dr Williams invited the panmen to return next week and bring along a representative of the all-female steelband Girl Pat which he'd heard about. That meeting was not to take place, though, because on the day Goddard made the mistake of bringing along two influential Invaders supporters: Bruce Procope and Lennox Pierre.

"Before they took their seats, Williams got annoyed and said a lot of hard words," recounts Thomas. "We didn't have no discussion, the meeting just broke up."

Today Procope hardly remembers the incident, but doesn't think Williams's irritation was aimed at him as much as at Pierre. Both men were in political parties—Procope in the mildly nationalist Caribbean National Labour Party with Ray Hamel-Smith and Telford Georges; Pierre in the "communist" West Indian Independence Party with John Rojas. And Williams had his own plans for the steelband movement which didn't include other politicians.

Dr Eric Williams the politician had shown his teeth. And although he enjoyed many years of mutual support with both the steelband movement and individual

panmen, their relationship, its ups and downs, was to the end determined by politics. Williams launched the Special Works Programme around the Desperadoes and Tokyo, he twisted businessmen's arms to sponsor steelbands, he pumped money into the movement.

Desperadoes captain George Yeates was given a job in Whitehall; his successor Rudolph Charles had greater access to Williams than some Cabinet ministers. So Williams was disappointed when the Black Power movement demonstrated that panmen wanted more, and he scuttled the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbands when he couldn't sideline its leader George Goddard, and he orchestrated the creation of Pan Trinbago.

"In the end, after the 1971 elections, he dumped the steelband like any other politician," sighs Moyou, his brother-in-law, one-time campaign manager and steelband adviser.