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1/08/99 pg 79

Musi

Christmas comes early for Panazz players

By TERRY JOSEPH

PUNCHA CREME, black-cake and Christmas trees may seem a little odd at this time, but for the Panazz Players it was all part of the mood, as the band put down tracks for their next album at Studio Rob in the Caribbean Sound Basin.

The Christmas tree lights flickered and a smiling Santa Claus presided over the control room on Friday, as engineer Sean Poland sat before the 64-track console, dedicated to the mix-down of the new album. "We had to create the mood of the season," he said, "because it is always difficult to put down Christmas music in July."

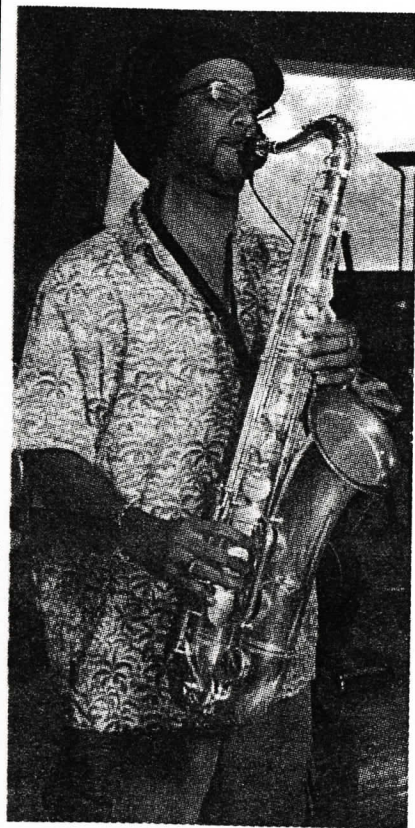
Poland, who has



FROM LEFT: Sheldon Webester—producer, Barry Bartholomew—engineer, Sean Poland—engineer.

worked with names like Whitney Houston, Toni Braxton, Black Street, Notorious BIG, The

Fugees and Trinidad's top calypso and steelband acts, spent the past two weeks on the project. In



ARTURO TAPPIN—Saxophonist



NIGEL WILLIAMS, left, Barry Bartholomew—producer

We went for the traditional Christmas music and looked for songs that would have international appeal

Largely sponsored by Republic Bank, the effort also includes the technical work of Robin Foster, but it is now left to Poland to mix-down the tracks and shunt it to Atlanta, where Glen Shick will master the disc.

Bartholomew and the band's marketing manager, Lisa Ghany, assured that the product will be ready in good enough time to engage the attention of international distributors, who are already well into the process of selecting new Christmas albums for their catalogues. The band plans a local launch that will include public performances nationwide, in addition to its normal schedule of

corporate contracts.

Panazz, whose international fame was kickstarted by winning the annual Pan Ram-ajay competition for three successive years, has gone on to tour several continents and entertains Caribbean audiences with regular frequency. Last year, the band was selected for the prestigious Bank Boston Celebrity Series.

Between now and year's end, the Panazz Players diary is rammed with engagements. Among the more prestigious events listed are appearances at October's World Beat Music Festival in Trinidad. Later that month they play for the Grenada Jazz Society.

order to reduce the perennial hazard of overtones from the pans, he separated the band's instruments, recording them from individual rooms. The result is a much clearer identification of the various musical voices in the orchestra.

Nor was it only pan. Sterling Gittens and the Youth Pulse choir guitarist Wayne Bruno and Barbadian saxophonist Arturo Tappin are also featured on the album.

In fact, bandleader Barry Bartholomew said Panazz was encouraged to do the album by Tappin, whose work so impressed Roberta Flack during a recent visit here that she engaged him to join her band for a tour to South Africa, which begins next weekend.

Yet unnamed, the ten-track album of popular seasonal selections cost the band some \$100,000. "We went for the traditional Christmas music and looked for songs that would have international appeal," Bartholomew said. There are some novel approaches to the music, however. In "O Holy Night", Tappin's arrangement gives an up-tempo treatment to the work without sacrificing its integrity as an inspirational piece. "Feliz Navidad", "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen" and "Winter Wonderland" have also undergone a Panazz makeover. Bruno is sparkling in "The Christmas Song" and Natasha Joseph's solo work on the double-tenor in "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" is precious.

For "Amazing Grace", the band used no percussion, rendering the piece in a reflective mood, as a musical thanksgiving and placing it in immediate contrast to Scrunter's "Backyard Jam". For "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" the full weight of the band is experienced, along with the power-

ful chorus of the Youth Pulse Choir.

Bringing up the tail is what Panazz calls "The House to House Medley", which includes Relator's "Bottle and Spoon", Kitchener's "Drink a Rum" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas"; topping out the production with a flavour that supports the cultural traditional of Christmas visits to the homes of friends.