

ML1043

Spotlight

Pan rising in the church

A review
By **NATASHA COKER**

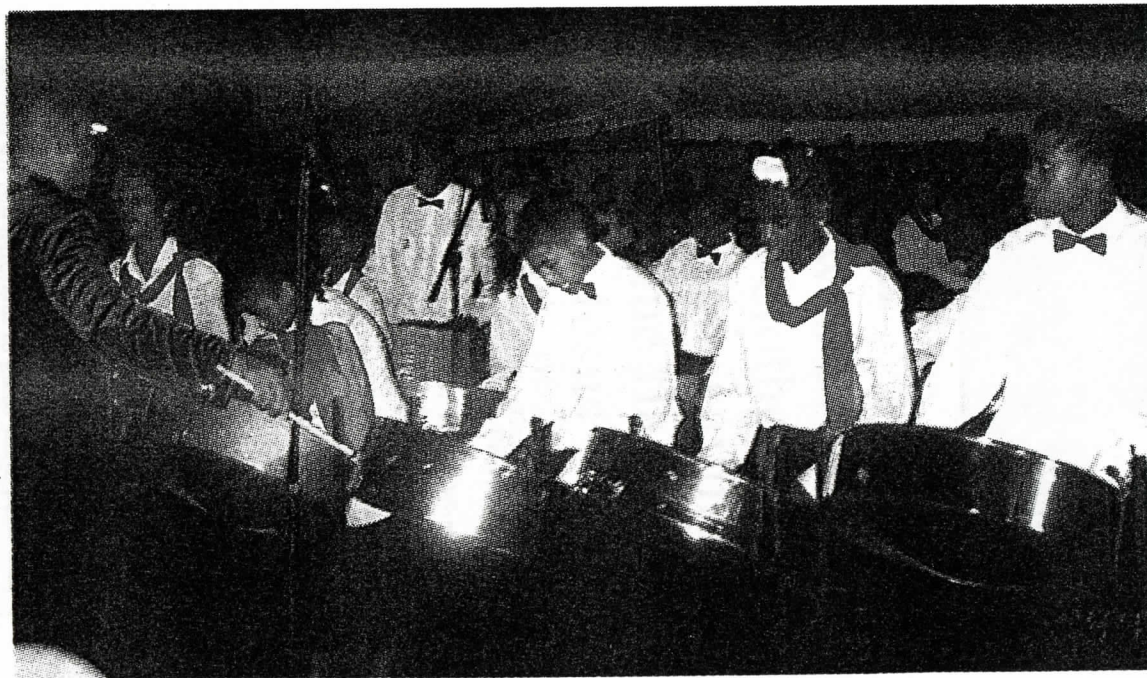
PAN has come of age in the church.

This was the feeling that permeated the air at Pan in Heaven—the first gospel steelband festival in T&T.

It was no Panorama crowd. For the 400-plus people who showed up to hear sweet pan at the Arima Tennis Club last Friday, playing the national instrument is serious business in church. Seven bands participated in the historic event which is expected to become an annual affair. This fell short of the targeted 12. All the bands were from Evangelical and Pentecostal churches across the country.

The show started promptly at 7 p.m. Arima Mayor Elvin Edwards brought greetings.

The players were decked in coordinated team colours identifying their band. Some wore casual Panorama-type T-shirts and jeans while others opted for a more formal finish, similar to what you would see at the biennial steelband music festival. Most of the players were under 25 and obviously very excited about playing pan.



NEW JERUSALEM, in red and white, was one of the more impressive bands of the evening.

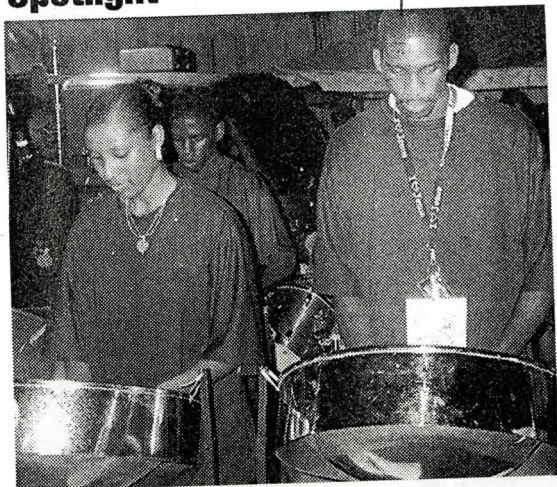
Photos: NATASHA COKER

The first taste of entertainment for the evening came from Sean Daniel, winner of the 1999 Unattached Calypso Monarch Title. He entertained the crowd with his signature tune "Pan in Heaven".

The steelbands were arranged in a semi-circle around the audience. The first band to play was Bethel Gospel Tones. Formed in the late 70s, they are believed to be one of the first steelbands to come from church. The green and white panside from Bethel Pentecostal Tabernacle in Arima, performed two songs: "There Is None Like You" and "We Give You Praise". The arranger was Sherry-An Saunders.

They were followed by New Creation, FRM Steel Orchestra, Nazarene and Praise Spectacular.

After the first five bands, patrons were entertained by singing pastor Rev Ange Williams who led some members of the audience to abandon their chairs in response.



SYMBOLS of Praise from Mt Hope Worship Tabernacle performing at the first Gospel Steelband Festival.

There was even a fully clothed flagwoman waving her blue flag for Jesus

to her song "Hail Jesus". Christopher "Tambu" Herbert followed with his selections: "Blessed Is The Man" and "Hell Shall Not Prevail".

Then it was pan again.

Symbols of Praise from Mt Hope Worship Tabernacle stirred the crowd with "Glory, Glory Lord".

But judging from the crowd response, the night belonged to New Jerusalem, the seventh band to play. Decked in red and white, the 14-month-old panside, under the direction of Roderick Cummings, had the crowd spell-bound with a well-arranged and technically sound rendition of "Jerusalem". This was followed by Sean Daniel's "Sip a Water" which had the crowd dancing and waving in praise.

Then the professor took over. Described as the "Emperor of Gospelypso", Noel "Professor" Richards brought scores of youths to the front of the stage with his songs "Gospel in the Savannah", "Try Jesus", "Chinee" and "Hosana in the Highest". For his last song, Richards invited all the pannists to go to their pans and accompany him. This they did gladly, creating an atmosphere of jubilation. There was even a fully clothed flagwoman waving her blue flag for Jesus.

Bethel Tones climaxed the evening of celebration with a medley of "I Will Exalt You Oh Lord" and "Come Let Us Praise". It was a night of fun, fellowship, pan and praise—not to mention good ole chicken foot soup (which was on sale).

At the end of the show, chairman of the gospel steelband festival committee Rev Irvin Smith, said the purpose of the festival was to expose the bands to each other, and added that the committee was working on making the festival an annual event.