

ML1040

# Steelband week opens to large audiences

By TERRY JOSEPH

**THE SOUND** of steel pervaded the air from as early as 4 p.m. on Saturday afternoon and continued right up until midnight Sunday, as the 1996 edition of Pan Week got underway.

The week, which culminates on Independence day is put on by Pan Trinidad and features a series of events to showcase the steelband, in this annual commemoration of the 1992 declaration of pan as the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago.

Saturday afternoon's Woodbrook Pan Festival was not part of the official calendar of events, but fitted right into the scheme of things, as the bands in Port of Spain's western suburbs came together for a jam at the Adam Smith Square in Woodbrook.

On Sunday, the official programme kicked off with an interfaith service, followed by a street parade, which emptied into a roaring party at Pan Trinidad headquarters. That flowed into a concert by pan virtuoso Liam Teague, which ended with a short jump-up to deliver that audience into an 11-band street party on the sprawling Broadway in downtown Port of Spain.

At Adam Smith Square on Saturday, organisers and performers showed little respect for the advertised starting time of 1 p.m., at which time absolutely nothing was happening at the site. It was not until nearer sundown that the steelbands began to play.

The Express returned later in the evening, in time to catch performances by the Woodbrook Modernaires and the T&TEC Power Stars. In the apparently inevitable interim between band presentations, the DJ and other artistes put on performances that were evidently geared to supply contrast, since they all delivered large gobs of Jamaican dub music at this event which was held to mark the 34th anniversary of Independence.

The crowd did not respond well to the reggae and dub music supplied from either of these two sources, but particularly appreciated the effort by the T&TEC Power Stars to rescue us from the din of inequity imposed on us by the powerful public address system.

The Power Stars, fielding less than 20 members, put on a soft and endearing performance of their fine repertoire, which included Superblue's "Get Something and Wave" and "Bounce", Nigel Lewis' "Movin'", Iwer George's "Yes Iwer" and Boogsie Sharpe's "Mind Yuh Business", plus Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sherriff", "El Bimbo" and a zouk medley.

But that was Saturday night. On Sunday morning, Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday was just a tad late for the interfaith service at the St Paul Street Sports Complex. The service, chaired by Roman Catholic Archbishop Anthony Pantin, featured offerings by Christian, Orisha and Muslim clerics and performances of inspirational songs. The Carib Tokyo Steel Orchestra opened the proceedings by playing "With a Little Help from My Friends".

Archbishop Pantin then led the congregation in singing the national anthem and would later comment that he preferred to hear the anthem sung rather than played, since the line "...and may God bless our nation" was significant. He noted that such a line appeared in very few national anthems.

At the end of the ceremony, the La Creole Pan Groove supplied the music for a jump-up from the site, through the streets of Port of Spain, to the Pan Trinidad Headquarters on upper Edward Street, where a treat was in store for those who made the trek. Shortly after 4 p.m., Liam Teague picked up his sticks

to give his final concert here before returning to the University of Northern Illinois, via performances in Prague. After the first segment, he made way for the Exodus Ensemble, who rendered a segue as he rested, before retrieving the attention of the crowd with his second set.

Teague's unbelievable pan skills made him an instant favourite with the large crowd on hand at the Brian Lara Promenade, which included Prime Minister Basdeo Panday and his wife, Oma. Panday was heard to say that "this Teague boy is just fantastic." Already, the description qualifies for being the

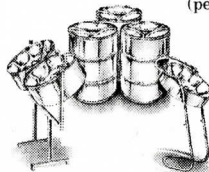
least contentious statement ever made by a Prime Minister.

Accompanied by Winston Matthew (percussion), Barry Howard (drums),

Michael Ruiz on bass and Ovid Alexis on keyboards, Teague delivered several of his favourites, including "Night in Tunisia", "Same Here", "No Woman, No Cry", "Donna Lee", "On Green Dolphin Street", "Hands Like Lightning" and "Jahaaji Bhai".

While the Pan on Broadway was easily the best attended, it was the least inspiring event on the opening day of Pan Week.

Again, Pan Trinidad does not quite get



the point that the placing of bands on the same level with the thousands who flocked the space makes little sense, since the fabric of clothing soaks up the distinctive high notes on both the pans and the percussion.

Pan Week continues with a series of activities, culminating with the street jam on Saturday from the city centre to the Queen's Park Savannah, where there will be a grand fireworks display, followed by a cultural show put on by the Ministry of Culture.

During the course of the week there are symposia, performances and the launch of the Youth Arm of Pan Trinidad, which takes place on Friday and will also usher in the Pan on the Plaza series of Friday evening concerts sponsored annually by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago.