

What Ellie Mannette did for pan

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FEEDBACK

By NORMAN DARWAY

IN the November 1 edition of the *Trinidad Guardian*, there appeared an article by Bukka Rennie entitled "Lies and distortions of pan" which ended inviting comments. This article is in response to said invitation.

During the period 1941-1945, Ellie Mannette did much experimentation with a view to improving the existing steelband instrument and on VJ Day 1945, Invaders carried pans much different to those carried by other bands.

It was on this day that Tokyo attacked Invaders and stole its pans. This incident took place by the Penny Bank (Trinidad Co-operative Bank) at the corner of Duke and Charlotte Streets. One of the pans that encouraged Tokyo to commit this rash act was the Baracuda pan.

Days after the clash, the pan was hung from a tree in John John with a written invitation to Ellie to come and get it. He refused to do so.

In 1946, he sank and tuned the first 55-gallon drum and played it in the first Islandwide Steelband Competition held that year in the Mucurapo Stadium - on September

15. The band played *Brahma Lullaby*. It was for this competition that Sonny Roach of Sun Valley invented the second pan. He won the Ping Pong Solo Competition and his band, Sun Valley, won the competition as the best steelband on that night, beating Red Army by one point and Casablanca by two points. For proof, check the *Trinidad Guardian*, September 17, 1946, edition.

When the best steelbandmen were selected to form TASPO, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra, Ellie Mannette was the main tuner. Tony Williams of North Stars tuned his own cellos.

On Ellie's return from England, he introduced the double second pans - the year was 1958 - and the double guitar pans on specially designed stands - the year was 1959. He introduced the five-bass. His last contribution was the tenor bass. All his pans were tuned chro-

matically. In July 1996, at West Virginia University, his latest edition to the steelband world was the quadret pan.

We must not forget in 1943 Ellie put rubber on his pansticks when he and his band beat with them in a competition at Carenage on St Peter's Day.

Saying that pan was accepted before Ellie left Trinidad is only partially true for the steelband. Even today quite a few Trinidadians still do not accept it. Ask Sat Maharaj. Remember what happened to the little girl who dared to play a Bhanjan on the national instrument?

Again, since you mention research, you should have known that it was North Stars which was the first steelband to put wheels on its pans and not Cross Fire. This was done in 1956. Also, in 1956, Tripolian Steelband was the first to add electronic communication to its pans.

You credited Neville Jules with the invention of the "Bomb" tune. This is grossly inaccurate. In 1954, Crossroad Steelband introduced the first Bomb, "Crying in the Chapel". In 1956, North Stars went to town with "Puerto Rico Mambo". The band had people calling for more. Check Cooks Records for that year. And in 1957 Crossfire with "Another Night Like This" destroyed all opposition. Neville Jules himself admitted: "It was binds from St James which led me into this."

When Kitchener sang his first calypso on the steelband, little did he know that "Zigilee" use to be up at Sun Valley panyard at Burnes Road where Sonny Roach taught him the art of pan playing and tuning pans for Zigilee.

Ellie's bitterness comes from when he went to Puerto Rico to tune pans for the American Mauve Steelband. He was called a "Judas" of the steelband, selling out his birthright, by the public relations officer of the Steelband Association - see the *Nation* paper, Friday, May 27, 1960.

Is it really "lies and distortions" or "jealously and envy" from you?