

Pan on the squat

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THE SILENCE OF THE BAND has given birth to a strident graffiti. But words are no substitute for music, and the slogans painted on the panyard walls are little more than a death rattle, a scream of rage and pain as Pandemonium confronts extinction.

But it hasn't come as a surprise. Things began sliding for Pandemonium since January 1980 when the owners of the panyard sold the land to the National Insurance Properties Development Company (NIPDEC). The band had already been on Jerningham Avenue next to Algico for six years, seeing about their electricity bills, peacefully paying a rent to Heetai's Investment and Agencies Ltd.

It wasn't a long time, six years, but Pandemonium had put down roots rapidly. Formed in 1974, the band played at the Grape and Wine Festival in Ontario, Canada in 1975; the following year they came third in Panorama and then was there in Montreal when Haseley won gold. They ran third again in Panorama in 1977, toured Venezuela and Florida in 1978 and 1979. And in 1980, days after they placed fourth in Panorama, NIPDEC claimed the land under vacant possession.

It was a rainy March night when the demolition gang arrived. The front-line pans were, as usual, stored in an upstairs room of the old wooden house on the land. The two men who cleaned the land slept under the frescoed cherubs that had smiled upon the O'Reilly family. The background pans were in a shed in the yard, by the stables and servants' quarters.

"Next morning the Captain called me and says they throw out we pan," says Barry Nanton, Pandemonium's present skipper. "When I walked over, the place was a shambles. I don't know how they mash it up so fast but the racks were on the pavement and the pans just dumped between them all dented up and the yard locked. It looked real dread. How could they do that?"

IN THOSE DAYS the band had around 30 tenors, eight double tenors, 12 double seconds, 12 double guitars, six cellos, six four-cellos, six tenor bass, nine six-bass, six nine-bass, plus the engine room—drum kit, congas, iron, cow bell. That night in March about \$200,000 worth of musical instruments was summarily thrown out, and 50 years of evolution reversed. Out of rubbish came this instrument and back into rubbish it was cast, and today, 13 years after, Pandemonium's skipper could still ask in shock, "How could people just throw the instruments on the pavement any old how, just piled up between the racks?"

Pan Trinbago President Arnim Smith and a posse came over. He broke the lock with a hammer, and panmen from several bands took the pans back inside the yard. Pandemonium's long, losing struggle against steelband vagrancy was on.

Although some pans remained at Jerningham Avenue, the stage side practised at the Communication Workers' Union hall in Charlotte Street. "Lyle Townsend didn't charge us but we had to wait till they finished their meetings," recalls Nanton, "so every evening we had to sit on the pavement till after nine before we could start practising."

They sought an alternative panyard, but Belmont is crowded and open land hard to come by. For security reasons the lot next to the Belmont Police Station wasn't to be had. At first the corner of Robinsonville and Norfolk Streets seemed a possibility, and the Community Development Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture asked NIPDEC to stay its hand while Pandemonium tried to prepare the site. In November 1980 the General Manager of NIPDEC

replied, "NIPDEC is due to undertake construction on the (Jerningham Avenue) site...On this account the company would like to be in possession of the site as early as possible." The band could only remain until March 31, 1981. They placed seventh in that year's Panorama.

Three years without harassment didn't improve the band's Panorama performance, placing them sixth, excluding them from the finals, and bringing them back in to run 11th. The new site had proven inadequate but, joining with students from Holy Name Convent, Bishop Anstey High School and Ideal High School, however, the band gave birth to the Pandemonium Junior Groove. And then, in 1985, the letters from NIPDEC began coming again.

January 10, 1985: "The site occupied by the steel orchestra is urgently needed for development...I hereby give you formal notice of the termination of the license to occupy and now call upon you to vacate the said lands on or before the 18th January."

June 4, 1985: "These lands are urgently required for the

For 13 years, Belmont band in non-stop downhill slide to homelessness



Pandemonium Captain Barry Nanton

The Pandemonium panyard — "the slogans painted on the panyard walls are little more than a death rattle, a scream of rage and pain as Pandemonium confronts extinction"

purpose of construction...We are, therefore, constrained once again to call upon you to vacate these lands within the next seven days."

February 24, 1986: "Once again I am constrained to call upon you to vacate..."

March, 4, 1986: "I wish to advise you that the main reason for seeking the removal of the steelband from the site is on account of NIPDEC's intending contractual relations with an insurance company to construct a building on the site..."

THAT BUILDING has never materialised, but Pandemonium began hunting for a new panyard once again. Government interceded, offered them a plot next to the Medical Centre on Queen's Park East, for one year. The Ministry of Sports sponsored a truckload of concrete, NIPDEC donated 300 decorative blocks, a load of sand and half a roll of BRC fencing, and Nagib Elias credited \$30,000 worth of construction materials to the band, but while construction was in progress Town and Country Planning stepped in.

"We couldn't build with only a one-year lease, and we couldn't get more time because that land was earmarked for development—a big expansion of the hospital," says Nanton, seven years after, "It's still vacant, the Betting Levy Board uses it as a carpark." Jerningham Avenue pulled them back.

It took another three unmolested years, 1986-1988, during which the band place fourth twice and second once at

Panorama, before NIPDEC officials returned, this time to investigate the toilets. What happened is that cocaine pipers had begun to loot the abandoned "Medical Centre" site, so band members dismantled the half-built panyard, chiselling the bricks one by one and taking them back by wheelbarrow to Jerningham Avenue.

"The City Council helped us build a bath and toilets," says Nanton. "They were necessary. Before that you had to go up in the bamboo. Visitors from Hilton listening to the band would ask, where's the toilet? It was embarrassing to say you ent have none, the ladies had to go in the back by the bamboo and stoop down."

The band was working with St Margaret's Girls' School and St Francois Girls' College, but they were given two weeks to decamp. In May 1990 they were ordered by the Prime Minister's Property Management Unit to leave, but shortly after the letter was recalled. A meeting with NIPDEC in 1991 raised their hopes of remaining until 1994, perhaps even having the panyard incorporated into the NIPDEC Head Office carded for the site, but in January 1992 all of this was denied by NIPDEC officials and a writ filed in the High Court for an eviction order.

And on Friday 12, February 1993, after 13 years of the band clinging to their home with fingernails and teeth, after 11 court postponements, the High Court ordered Pandemonium to vacate their home within three months.