

Meaning of Panorama

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THE BIG YARD reverberated with the sound of sweet pan yesterday as the competition to decide the champion steelband in the world got underway. A crowd of panlovers, estimated at more than 20,000, filled the Savannah pavilions and feasted on a non-stop performance of pan talent as some 33 of the country's steelbands sought selection from the Panorama preliminaries.

The musical extravaganza started promptly at 11 am — for the first time in many years — and went far into the night. But intoxicated by the rhythmic ring of steel, the musical instrument that Trinidad and Tobago has proudly given to the rest of the world, nobody in the huge audience was complaining. Indeed, that gregarious, harmonious, ingenious, melodious marathon has become, over several years, the eagerly accepted “experience” of Panorama preliminaries, a unique ritual that not only launches the supreme contest of the steelband world but remains one of the defining events of the nation's culture.

Rank Amateurs

Musically speaking, Panorama may be considered another wonder of the world.

In no other part of the globe, perhaps, does one annual contest draw such nation-wide enthusiasm both on the part of players and those who appreciate the art form. It must be a kind of miracle that Panorama could repeatedly erupt, seemingly overnight, in such a scintillating display of talent from thousands of rank amateurs, the vast majority of whom cannot read a line of music yet, within a few short months of preparation, they become masters of their instruments and members of disciplined orchestras.

The blossoming was heady in the Big Yard yesterday. Some 33 steelbands containing more than

3,000 panists played a range of music that illustrated another remarkable aspect of the competition. They were all tunes composed either by TT's calypsonians or musical arrangers who have become legends in their own right and whose work give each Panorama outpouring its own musical distinction.

While TT's pan culture may take root in other parts of the world and while other countries may even be brazen enough to lay claim to the origin of pan, the magnitude of our Panorama overwhelms them all. The contest, from preliminaries to finals, is the ultimate and incomparable proof that Trinidad and Tobago is not only the birthplace of pan but the enduring fountainhead of the expertise and talent that the musical form inspires.

Firm Effort

With horse racing gone from the Big Yard, the tradition of Panorama remains. Indeed, with the facilities now under firm control by the National Carnival Commission, yesterday's preliminaries saw a number of innovations and improvements.

A firm effort was made to ensure that the event finished before midnight and did not proceed exhaustively into the wee hours of the morning as in the past. This time, MTS guards manned the entrances and exits, keeping out stormers and unauthorised band followers. This freed more policemen for duty inside where they were able to exercise greater control over the large crowd.

Also NIPDEC was able to raise additional funds for the NCC by operating three car parks around the Savannah facilities, charging \$10 for each vehicle.

So Panorama 1994 was off to a splendid start yesterday. The zonals and semis are next. And then on to the climax of the finals. May the best band win.