

The 'Hill' remembers Rudolph Charles

# MISSING THE LARGER POINT

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LAVENTILLE HILL is buzzing with talk about the late Rudolph Charles, more than ten years after his death. The new thrust is for a posthumous national award for the steelband captain and pioneer.

Little do they know that Rudolph himself had refused national awards in the past. When offered a medal several months before his death he reportedly told the then Prime Minister that he wanted "reward not award".

But the folks on the hill argue that there should be some official recognition of his contribution to both the instrument and its players.

**THEY SPEAK LOUDLY** and proudly of his achievements in the area of pan innovation and outright invention, citing his relentless pursuit of new sounds for the instruments and new combinations of the existing pans.

Among even his most ardent supporters, few know that last month's Pan In Point steelband competition was among the innovations he treasured most.

When this year the organisers of Pan In Point thought that they were improving upon the activity with the inclusion of a Bomb competition, little did they know that they were raping the original concept.

They went through a lot of trouble indeed, only to miss the larger point.

G Lindley Abdulah, to whom Charles had told his dream of making money for the actual pannist, says that the people who organised the Pan In Point competitions might not have even known that Charles conceived the idea or that the concept had a specific aim.

"He wanted to ensure that there was at least one competition from which the pannist could get some money," said Abdulah.

"When he first came to me with the idea, I was personnel manager at Trintoepec in Point Fortin, which is the only reason that the concept was first applied there.

"Rudolph wanted a competition which would give the players the real prize and not allow steelband arrangers and pan tuners to make considerable sums from their efforts, while the actual performers remained broke," said Abdulah.

It was why each band was supposed to play their Panorama selection from the current year and one from ten years ago.

"This would mean that both those calypsoes would have already been arranged and the pans would not need a fresh tuning, since the competition, coming as it does on the first Saturday in May, is close enough to Carnival to use the recently tuned pans," said Abdulah.

But now the organisers, overwhelmed by the success of the activity, have sacrificed the original concept and have reintroduced the role of the arranger, with the staging of a bomb competition.

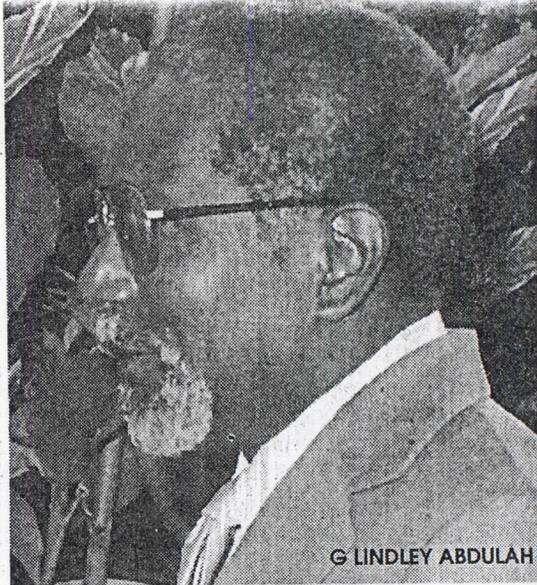
**IN ADDITION**, they have—perhaps inadvertently—relaxed the old-calypso rule to allow for different tunes from those that the band actually played ten years before.

"So now the arrangers have two bites of the cherry," says Abdulah, "which is precisely what Rudolph was trying to guard against."

The winning band, Exodus, is one of the bands that played a different song for the old calypso competition. They played Arrow's "Long Time (We Ain't Fete Like This)".

When Rudolph Charles conceived this competition, he also intended it as a pilot project for taking pan around the country outside of the Carnival season.

"It was his own interpretation of internal tourism," says Abdulah, adding that Point Fortin was supposed to be nothing more than the pilot project.



G LINDLEY ABDULAH

"He thought that once the thing was established in Point Fortin, the resulting blueprint would be used to ensure that a series of village festivals could be quickly mounted, using the pan competitions as their focal point.

"He actually thought of going to Mayaro next and then there was talk of going east to Arima or Sangre Grande," said Abdulah.

As it happens, the economic activity that *Pan in Point* has spawned would be more than welcome in most communities.

Port of Spain Mayor Ethelbert Paul is currently discussing the City Day celebrations with Pan Trinbago, in the effort to encourage as many steel-

bands as possible to parade through the city on May 18. The Mayor's anticipation is that the same level of economic activity will obtain.

Just last weekend, the Coffee Street Residents and Businessmen put on a fine show with more than 10,000 residents and visitors crowding the area. Already plans are underway to include the Cipero Street section in next year's production.

Talks are also underway for such activities in Arima too.

And although the first attempt at Pan in the Gran (Sangre Grande's version of this same concept), did not quite hit the spot, new organisers are busily working on a revival of the festival.

All this activity first came from the mind of a man who, literally, lived for and on pan.

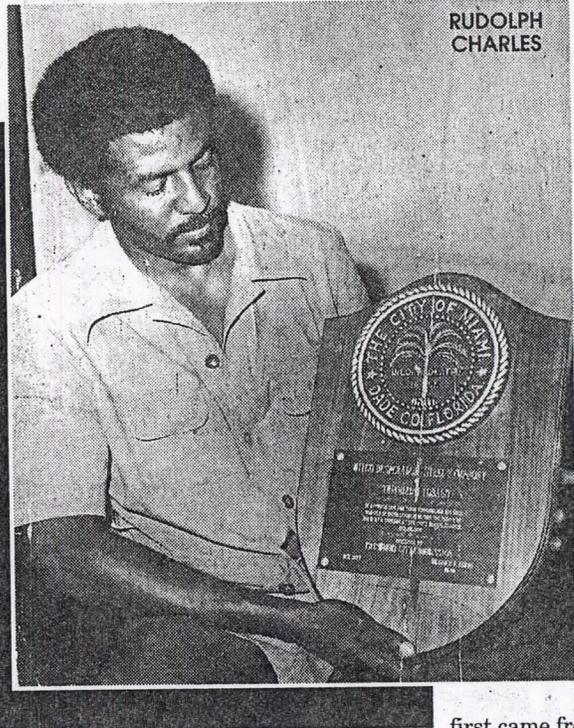
Gerald reports that Rudolph used to have his mother bring food for him at his pan laboratory-cum-bedroom.

"She would come back with dinner and still find that breakfast and lunch was on the table by the door," says Gerald, who admits that he had walled up every available crevice in his upstairs room to keep the sound of Rudolph's playing and tuning out of his head.

"I am a musician too, but this man had no limit. He would play pan right through the night, Christmas Day didn't matter. I had to air-condition the place and block up every little hole to keep the sound out, so that I could watch a little TV or talk to Mammy or even sleep, because all you could hear was ping, ping ping day and night," he says.

No wonder that as the Independence Award ceremony approaches they remember that March 29 was the tenth anniversary of his death and wonder if the powers-that-be will remember not how he died but how he lived and that, as a consequence, come August 31 they will play one for Rudolph.

—Terry Joseph



RUDOLPH CHARLES

Turn 9 photography