

On the tune of stand

How the B

is helping

By LESLIE PICHERY and KENNETH ROACH

THE interview carried in your newspaper between one of your reporters and Mr Robert Greenidge has created some embarrassment for the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards.

The interview was headlined 'Foreigners Running Away With Pan'. While it did create the effect of winning the readers' interest, not all that Robert Greenidge was quoted as having said is true.

We at the Bureau are in agreement with the assessment that... "Other people (foreigners) are taking this thing (pan) and running away with it". In fact, at the Caribbean Conference on Pan held by CIMI — the Caribbean Inter-Cultural Music Institute, representatives of the Bureau presented papers, one of which was entitled "The Imperatives For Standardisation".

In it the fact that attempts at standardising the steelpan were being made in Britain, was posited as one of the reasons for the urgency of writing four standards on the steelpan.

Mr Greenidge lamented the fact that... "Japan is now standardising the pan, and we who gave birth to the instrument are not contributing to that." We wish, not to refute Mr Greenidge's statement, but to set the records straight, and, over and above that to

assure your readership that we — Trinidad and Tobago — are in fact making our contribution.

On July 1992, the first in a series of four standards was launched by the Bureau. The Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister did the honours.

This was the culmination of three years of hard work put in by the Bureau of Standards in collaboration with Pan Trinbago.

Some of Trinidad and Tobago's best known steelpan tuners comprised the Specifications Committee. People of the ilk of Berti Marshall, Anthony Williams and Clive Bradley gave of their services at one time or another.

Agencies such as CARIRI lent technical support to the bands in 1990. The terms of reference was the establishment of similarities and differences in the area of the physical parameters of the steelpan.

Tenor Pan

Depth of sink, length of skirt, width of groove and physical note-placings were the object of our data collection exercise. Among other things the 1990 Survey revealed that the steelpan tuners were in the process of standardising the steelpan. Some 70 percent of the steelbands surveyed had accepted as conventional the 4ths and 5ths note arrangement of the tenor pan.

But standardisation means more than phys-



MERVYN RAY GILL, pan tuner extraordinaire, has been involved in the steelband 35 years. "Bizmark"

ical parameters. Standardisation in essence means the making available of a normative document on a specific product; a document which provides information which will render the product marketable, merchantable and fit for the purpose for which it was sold.

Put another way, standardisation assists the purchaser to know better what he or she buys; simultaneously the seller is 'rendered' better able to define what she or he has to sell.

In effect Trinidad and Tobago has gone ahead of all else and launched the first standard on the steelpan. In keeping

with the stated tenet that in order to standardise anything we must agree on what we are standardising, the first standard launched in appropriately entitled "A Glossary of Terms in Relation To the Steelpan".

The document contains definitions for the various physical properties of the steelpan. Indeed, it contains an agreed definition of the steelpan.

The agreed definition of a steelpan:

"The Steelpan is a musical instrument indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago. It is a definite pitch percussion instrument in the idio-

phone class, typically made from drum or steel. The metallurgical surface is convex skirt attached to a concave surface into convex sections, g channels, g bores. Each section is a note of definite pitch. Convex sections are struck by sticks to produce tones."

Like Japan, and Tobago is one of two parent national bodies which control the process of standardisation are the ISO — International Organisation for Standardisation

tune of standardisation by the Bureau helping pan

MCL040

TG 93.02.22. p.7



MERVYN RAY GILL, pan tuner extraordinaire, has been involved in the steelband for the past 35 years.

adership
Trinidad and
e in fact
tribution.
the first
our stan-
dards in
unched by
he Hon-
ck Man-
nister did

e culmi-
years of
in by the
dards in
with Pan

Trinidad and
known
rs com-
fications
people of
Marshall,
ams and
gave of
one time

ch as
chnical
ands in
of refer-
establish-
ties and
e area of
amete

an

length
groove
e-plac-
ject of
n exer-
other
Survey
e steel-
in the
rdising
me 70
lbands
cepted
e 4th
range-
pan.
sation
phys-

ical parameters. Stan-
dardisation in essence
means the making avail-
able of a normative docu-
ment on a specific
product; a document
which provides informa-
tion which will render
the product marketable,
merchantable and fit for
the purpose for which it
was sold.

Put another way, stan-
dardisation assists the
purchaser to know better
what he or she buys; si-
multaneously the seller
is rendered better able
to define what she or he
has to sell.

In effect Trinidad and
Tobago has gone ahead
of all else and launched
the first standard on the
steelpan. In keeping

with the stated tenet
that in order to stan-
dardise anything we
must agree on what we
are standardising, the
first standard launched
in appropriately entitled
"A Glossary of Terms in
Relation To the Steel-
pan".

The document con-
tains definitions for the
various physical prop-
erties of the steelpan. In-
deed, it contains an
agreed definition of the
steelpan.

The agreed definition
of a steelpan:

"The Steelpan is a
musical instrument in-
digenous to Trinidad
and Tobago. It is a de-
finite pitch percussion
instrument in the idio-

phone class, tradition-
ally made from a steel
drum or steel container.
The metallic playing
surface is concave with a
skirt attached. The play-
ing surface is divided
into convex sections by
channels, grooves/or
bores. Each convex sec-
tion is a note tuned to a
definite pitch. The con-
vex sections are played
by striking with pan
sticks to produce musi-
cal tones."

Like Japan, Trinidad
and Tobago is a member
of two parent interna-
tional bodies which con-
trol the processes of
standardisation. They
are the ISO — Interna-
tional Organisation for
Standardisation — the

IEC — International
Electrotechnical Com-
mittee.

These two bodies as-
sume the responsibility
of disseminating infor-
mation relative to the es-
tablishment of new stan-
dards.

Because of the steel-
pan is indigenous to
Trinidad and Tobago,
and because our crafts-
men have not docu-
mented their processes,
the onus fell on us at the
Bureau to engage in the
exercise of documenting
the various aspects of
the steelpan with a view
to standardising it.

This information had
to be fed to the ISO with
a view to establishing
that no other country
has attempted to launch
a similar standard. That
having been done, the in-
digenity of the
steelpan to Trinidad and
Tobago has become es-
tablished beyond the
shadow of a doubt.

Cultural Facet

Our research has
taught us the impor-
tance of the process of
documentation. The
Africans have paid the
price. Dr Lonke, a Musi-
cologist attached to
CIMI has revealed in a
thesis that the prototype
of the modern-day piano
was in fact discovered by
the Italians in Africa.
Today the piano is ac-
cepted as European.

We are in agreement

with Mr Greenidge's
lament that in the area
of marketing of the steel-
pan a great deal is left to
be desired.

The Japanese busi-
nessman, precisely be-
cause he is more aggres-
sive and of wider vistas
than persons involved in
our relatively conserva-
tive private sector, will
seize the opportunity to
establish a niche on the
marketability of our
wonderful product.

In addition, the hesi-
tation being displayed in
the area of removing the
steelpan from the cate-
gory of extra curricular
activities, can, in the
long term, contribute to
the detriment of a now
burgeoning industry and
a vibrant cultural facet.

In the light of the
above, may we take this
opportunity to appeal to
the entire country for as-
sistance as we proceed to
produce the remaining
three standards in the
following areas:

- (1) STEEL — Behavioural patterns.
- (2) ELECTROPLATED COATING
- (3) THE STEELPAN INSTRUMENT

Your cooperation in
whichever way possible,
is being solicited in the
national interest.

Leslie Pichery is Stan-
dards Officer II and Ken-
neth Roach is Consumer
Liaison Officer of the TT
Bureau Of Standards.