

# 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

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

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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  
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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.