

# Panmen patent new 'letter pan' design

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By ROXANNE STAPLETON *Exp. Sect. 2*

TWO Trinidadians, Anthony Rosalle and Ralph James, now have in their possession the patent for their invention, the Letter Pan. The road, according to Rosalle, has not been easy but, with rock steady determination, they have emerged triumphant.

Rosalle got his start in the steelband movement in 1969, with two Tunapuna-based bands, Tropical Ebonites and Echo Diamond.

Ask if he has ever worked with any of the renowned bands, his answer was plainly no

and he indicated that it all had to do with "pan politics".

He stated that the established bands already had their own tuners and arrangers and never really strayed from their people, hence the difficulty to get a foothold in a renowned steelband.

So just how did this team stumble unto their invention?

Rosalle recalled that it was an evening in either 1986 or



ANTHONY ROSALLE

1987, when at approximately 6.30 p.m., he and James were learning a new tune on the guitar and tenor pans. Before long, he said, the place grew dark and Rosalle told James he could not see a single note on the pan. It was at this point, that James took a piece of white chalk and wrote the notes on the pans.

The idea of actually lettering the notes by using the grooves on the pan, was novel in its approach and, according to Rosalle, there are huge benefits for people/children who are newly introduced to playing the instrument.

They decided to patent the Letter Pan, which at the time had cost \$5,500, money which, he pointed out, they did not have at the time. Rosalle and his partner James then feverishly began their campaign to solicit financial assistance from the corporate community. But to no avail.

They decided to take a loan, filed their documents on July 9, 2001 and got approval October 31, 2002.

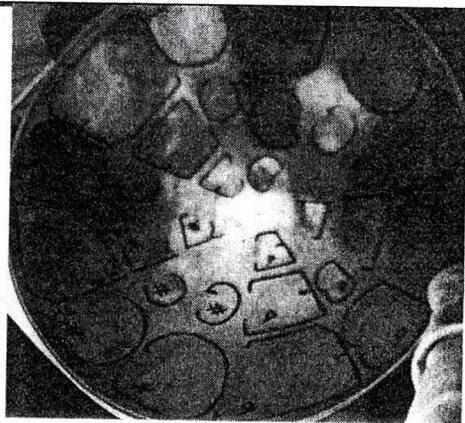
Rosalle highlighted the startling development, that though Trinidad and Tobago was the birthplace of the steelpan, tenor pans cost more in the United States, selling for a whopping US\$3,000 to US\$5,000, while in Trinidad they cost TT\$2,500 to TT\$3,000.

With a proud grin, he commented that they had entered the Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister's Innovation and Invention Competition for 2003 and are optimistic about a favourable outcome.

He reflected that partner James was recently offered a contract to work in Miami's flourishing steelpan industry, an offer which, if he accepts, in Rosalle's estimation, will result in the loss of a tremendous local talent.

He said that panmen did not get the recognition they deserved in Trinidad and Tobago, a trend he hopes will change.

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The world of steelpan welcomes the Letter Pan.

Photos: MICHEAL BRUCE