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On the pan heights

PAN will dominate the cultural life of the country for the next few days, as the bi-annual Steelband Music Festival displays the heights to which pan has risen.

It is one of the musical highlights in a country where pan was born and where innovations and developments are still going on at a dizzy pace.

This year's festival is justly dedicated to Anthony Williams, pioneer leader of Pan Am North Stars, which starred in the festivals of the sixties, and businessman Ram Kirpalani, who helped revive the festival in 1982 and 1984.

We do not need to dwell on the beauty and appeal of pan music to people all over the world; that is self-evident. Nor is there any doubt about the hard work and organisation required to produce quality steelbands year after year.

Self Sufficiency

What is needed is more organisation of the steelband movement itself and a movement towards some kind of economic self sufficiency for the individual bands.

A few years ago Ram Kirpalani showed what could be done with the Steelband Festival when management expertise was applied. The festival glittered and its organisation brought pride to the whole nation.

This year, with difficulties facing the Kirpalani empire, Royal Bank has graciously stepped in with more than \$100,000 in sponsorship and help with management of the show.

We suspect that the management skills demonstrated by Kirpalani's and now the Royal Bank may be more important than the financial help they have given. It could be the reason why Pan Trinbago president Arnim Smith has estimated that revenue will be greater than expenses by some \$110,000.

The steelband movement must move to get its house in order, and

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specially in financial order.

Standardising pan is excellent, and so is the pan factory and teaching of pan in schools and tours overseas. But it takes no prophetic powers to see that the era of massive sponsorship is drawing to a close, and that pan cannot continue to expect financial help as it did in the past, not even from the government.

Pan enjoys significant public support, which must be translated into a healthy bank account for the steelband movement. Panorama, more than the Steelband Festival, should be the money spinner.

Pan Trinbago must take a higher profile than it has been showing. It must bring in those people with the skills it needs to take pan in the right direction. It must look beyond sponsorship and a steelband movement that goes into low gear after each Carnival.

Some significant steps have already been taken, particularly the programmes in schools. These ensure that a new generation of players are getting the training at the best time, and ensuring a future generation of pannists.

Tours by steelbands continue, and the response continues to be excellent. We will remember Casablanca in Westminster Abbey this year, and the excellent reaction to tours by Skiffle Bunch, Catelli Trinidad All Stars, Phase 2 Pan Groove and the El Dorado Senior Comprehensive band.

1988 World Festival

There are plans for a World Steelband Festival in Trinidad in 1988, which is a reasonable move considering the growing popularity of steelband all over the world. Even the United States navy has a band, and we have seen Chinese pannists, Swedes and Norwegians playing pan.

A secondary school is about to put up a mini pan theatre, and discussions are continuing about a headquarters for steelband. We are still to hear something conclusive about the pan factory, proper pan records and regular nationwide concerts, but work is going on.

Until October 4 we will be treated to an exhibition of the heights to which pan music can rise. Yes, pan is beautiful. Pan is rising. Let it be so long after the festival is over.