

culture

By TREVOR M MILLETT

Of panmen, music and psychology

MORE THAN just an instrument of music or the embodiment of Trinidadian inventiveness, pan is coming more and more to represent a useful instrument of psychotherapy.

Since the 1960s, Dr JD Elder suggested that

pan's social value went well beyond the musical.

"Pan," he asserted, "is not just an artistic innovation - it is the objectification of man's psy-

chological tendency to react with hostility to psychic dissatisfaction and social status deprivation."

Ostracised and denigrated as society's

"black sheep" and as its hooligans, panmen were able to sublimate their feelings of hostility towards society by "beating" the pan to tune it or by beating

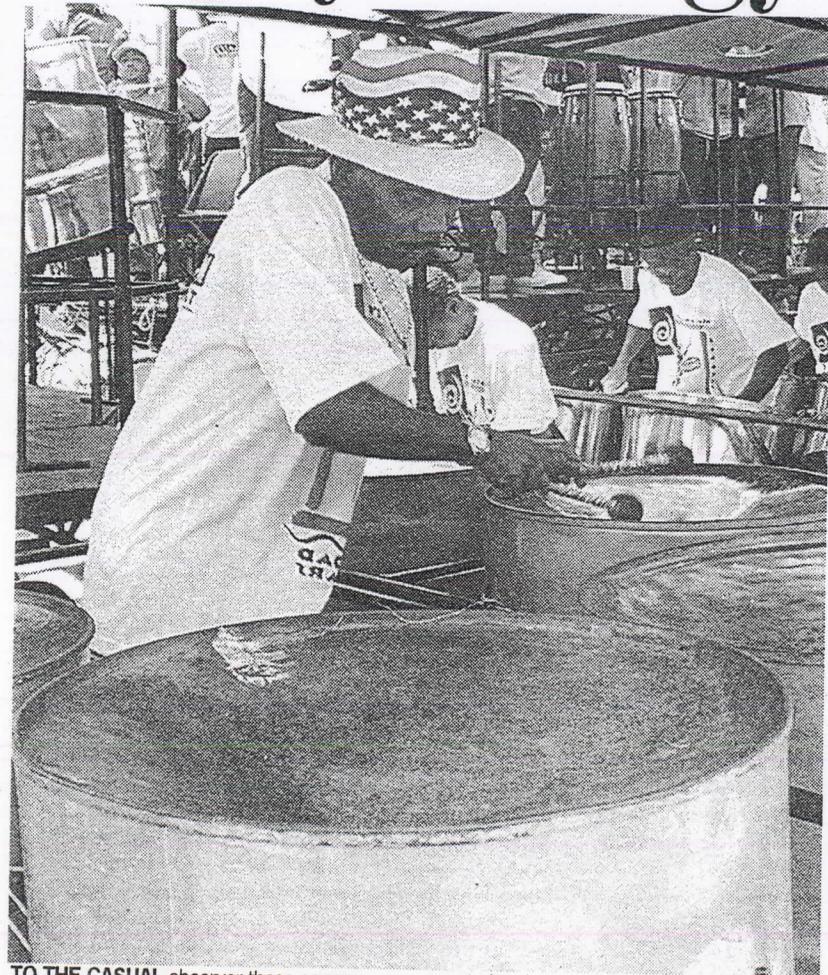
musical notes out of it. And in the early days, especially during the 1950s, opposing pansides could be beaten violently.

Interpreted from the perspective of psychoanalysis, J D Elder concluded, "Pan-beating is genuinely an Oedipal act," though panmen would of course disagree by denying "any hostile intentions."

As an act of displaced aggression, this violence directed at opposing pansides Elder regard as an example of transference, a common process in psychotherapy. As is known, transference involves the revival of emotions experienced and repressed in a previous situation of neurosis with a new person as the object.

Psychoanalyst Joel Kovel sees neurosis as "any (complicated) pattern in which unwanted and compulsive thoughts, feelings an/or actions occur without producing a major, sustained disorganisation (of the individual's) personality or the loss of (his/her) sense of reality." It produces an uncomfortable and sometimes unpleasant emotional state.

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youth, (Gypsy's little black boys), in those areas with "high delinquency rates." This pro-

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Among Sharma's subjects were youngsters who had to be treated with drugs to tranquilise them. From the first ping to the last pong, the youngsters became euphoric. "The pans excited them. And it was not disruptive; it was constructive."

He recalls seeing a documentary in which children with defective motor skills were thought to ride horses. Their mastery of the animal, "being on top of it and guiding it," empowered them and because of apparent bonding with the animal, they were able to enhance their motor skills.

"Pan could be like that too," he feels, and he points to the Lady Hochoy Home pannists as an example of what can be accomplished with the instrument.

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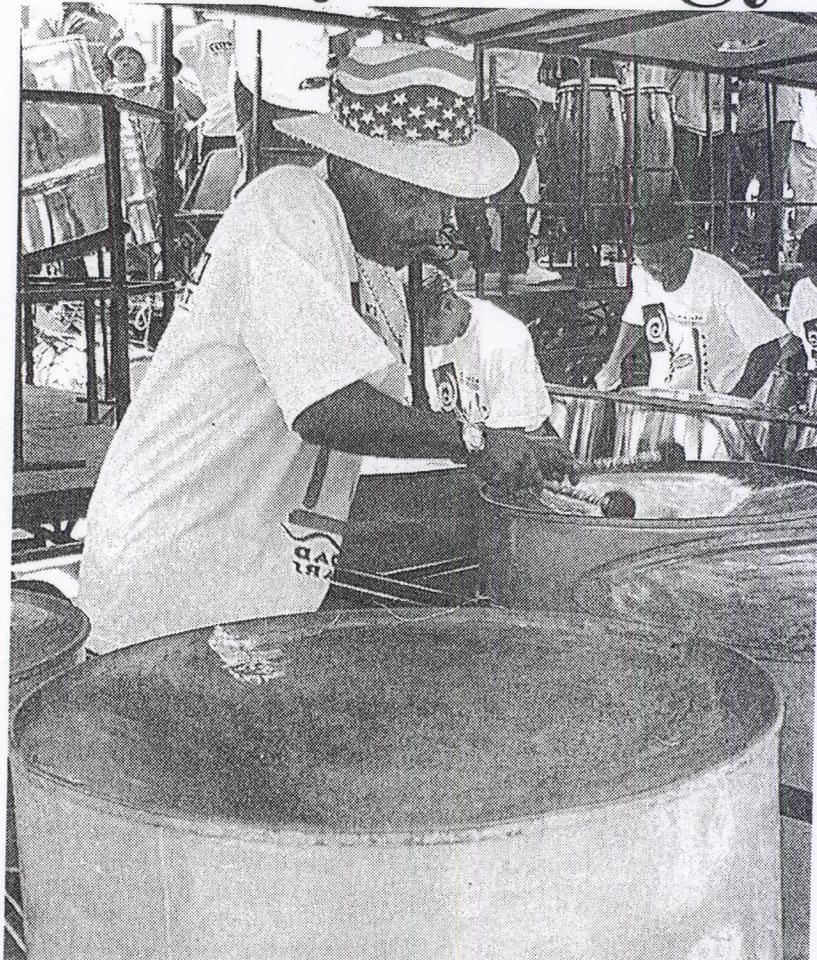
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Taken to its logical conclusion, Panorama, the panman's war zone, then becomes for all intents and purposes an oversized psychiatrist's couch where neuroses caused by frustration are engaged and temporarily resolved.

Though it is true that pannists are no longer exclusively working class elements, the fact is that the vast majority remain non-professional, non-executive workers who struggle to make it in an increasingly complex and challenging world. Their lives continue to be thickly encrusted with frustration.

Panorama is therefore a therapeutically valuable and safe arena in which anger, hostility and frustration can be converted into and expressed as musicianship. Couched in the Grand Savannah, it is



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Writes Elder, "As laymen, we know that somehow, for a considerable number of angry young men in Trinidad and Tobago pan music-making as well as moulding, beating, basoning, scoring and punching of metal with metal scribes, hammers and punches have been the means of restoring to the society several of the alienated as satisfied, balanced, useful and conforming citizens."

Unintentionally, the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandsmen (1959-70), working in collaboration with the Tourist Board, was able to confirm the accuracy of Dr Elder's psychological insight.

During its lifespan, NATTS organised what was then a novel training programme for

youth, (Gypsy's little black boys), in those areas with "high delinquency rates." This programme, executed during the July/August holiday period, proved, to quote the late Pete Simon, "a resounding success - the kids needed no coaxing."

A pan aficionado himself, Simon underscored the "unanimous" view of "astute observers" that "the steelband is a great instrument of social control which, over the past few years, has unwittingly been supplementing the work of the police."

Mastery of the pan revealed to adolescent participants potential that lay long dormant in themselves and could easily have remained undeveloped. Exposure to the programme increased their discipline, built their concentration and encouraged them to strive for excellence.

"Committing to mem-

ory the many intricate arrangements of calypso and - above all - the classical masterpieces of the great composers," Simon inferred, "could only be the result of dedication, application and considerable self-involvement."

Icing on this hypothesis comes from Satanand Sharma, a gifted young musician and composer who is currently a teacher at UWI's Creative Arts Centre. An island scholarship winner, Sharma sees the pan as a medium for wholesomeness and joyful optimism, especially in relation to those whose lives are fractured in one way or another.

As a student at Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, USA, (1983-87) Sharma was compelled to do music therapy as "an important component" of his music education degree. He used the double second pan set for this course.

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About pan's capability to build character and sublimate undesirable emotions, Sharma claims pan is able to "tap into those feelings of oppression and depression that (some) people (in TT) experience. And it oftentimes brings joy."

Referring to the Bible to help support the hypothesis that pan-playing has tension-releasing power, Dr Elder directs attention to the story "King Saul's" fits of hysteria and to the healing power which the harp music of the shepherd David had over the mental troubles of this disturbed "King of Israel" and claims, "Any psychiatrist can explain the scientific theories underlying this story."

Like Pete Simon and Satanand Sharma, Dr Elder's claims leave no doubt about his conviction that pan can serve as an instrument of "effective therapy," though care must be taken to deal with every case on an individual basis.