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Storm in teacup or festering

By SELWYN TARRADATH
Public Relations Officer of Pan Trinbago

I have unwittingly found myself at the centre of a raging controversy which all began with a simple article in this newspaper, entitled, "Sponsorship of the Arts — Moral responsibility or favour." This was an indirect response to Textel's withdrawal of sponsorship from the Schools Steelband Music Festival.

Subsequent to the article I received a call from the San Fernando Arts Council to be a panellist at a debate on support for the arts, at the Carnegie Free Library on Wednesday, October 10, 1987.

I politely declined on the grounds that I was in the process of preparing a band for the upcoming Schools Festival and that I could not afford to leave a rehearsal as we were behind time.

Ms Eileen McSween, the person on the other end, insisted that I put in an appearance as they were using the title of my article as the theme for the debate. She also brought out the point that the issue was of considerable concern to the general Steelband body.

Listed to appear on the panel were Ken Ramchand, U.W.I. Lecturer and writer; Bob Henry, musician and public sector representative; Nicky Innis, Marketing Manager of Fernandes and Co.; Sandra Bernard, P.R.O. of Royal Bank and a representative of Neal and Massy Ltd.

Humanitarian Approach

I was looking forward to exchanging views on sponsorship with the private and public sector representatives and I anticipated a healthy debate. With this in mind I prepared for battle with them.

I was as disappointed as the audience when no representative from the private sector put in an appearance but I decided to continue with my argumentative stance, which was to show up the negative aspects of sponsorship and to make a call for sponsors to take a more humanitarian approach to patronage of the arts rather than using it as a means to an end.

I have stated my position quite clearly in my previous article and I did so once more at the debate when I made my opening statement and again at the summary.

The important role of the artiste in any society must be fully recognised, properly appreciated and adequately rewarded.

I specifically noted that both the Government and the private sector must play a greater role in the development and nurturing of the arts in this country as a moral responsibility and not only for the political or promotional mileage which they wish to achieve through such an association.

I enjoyed the debate even though my expectations fell short through not being afforded the opportunity to interface with the private sector representatives. The enthusiastic contributions made by members of the audience made up for this, however.

Quite Misleading

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Suddenly the firm wanted to sponsor us, they had painters in readiness to paint the pans in their colours for the National Semis and spend sums of money ten times the amount that they so reluctantly forked out earlier on.

The players were conscious enough to realise that the firm did not care as much about ensuring the band's success as they cared about exploiting that success to their own maximum benefit.

I pointed out to the gentleman who asked the question that the most positive effect of sponsorship was the access to funding that would not be readily available under normal circumstances.

I also showed him that sponsorship killed the

initiative of the steelband and the motivation to be self-sufficient. The band would be hard pressed to find its sponsor.

The debate on sponsorship I still believe that it is a testament to our society that the School Festival exists while sponsors are not available. The "Pan Is Beautiful" name is a name which would have been given by Ram Kirpalani had not seen to give financial and other support to this successful establishment.

Quite Misleading

I was greatly taken back on reading one of the daily newspapers to see a screaming headline reading Taradath (name misspelt) — "Sponsorship killing Steelband Movement." The context from my contributions on the issue and which may have implied that the headline was appropriate. In fact it was quite misleading and very contradictory.

How could I on the one hand be calling on the business sector to get more involved in the development of the arts and in the same breath state that sponsorship was killing the Steelband Movement?

My first reaction to this was "setup." I could just imagine the venom that would be spouted under the disguise of letters to the Editor, not to mention the feature stories in the weeklies.

How could I face people like the same Nicky Innis, Sandra Bernard, Ronnie Williams, Dennis Ramdeen, Mrs Persad, Ms Hesper Peters, Dr Coral Braithwaite, Mrs Kerry, Jack Lewsey and others too numerous to mention, who come to the assistance of the Steelband Movement at the drop of the proverbial hat.

I dashed off a letter to the Editor of the particular newspaper (not the *Guardian*) putting the quotations from my contribution at the debate in proper perspective, hoping to get it published in the Tuesday edition of the paper.

I was patiently awaiting the typist of Pan Trinbago's main office to complete in when I was called urgently into an adjoining office by an officer of the Association who placed a copy of the same daily's evening paper which I was reading at minutes to eleven on Monday morning, not only had an editorial bambasting me for the alleged remarks against sponsorship, based on the headline and excerpts from the story but it ran a street survey on the same topic.

I was positively infuriated; this was insensitive journalism to it's highest and coming from a newspaper that is always seeking to attach others on the point of irresponsible reporting.

A matter as sensitive as that should have warranted some investigation before printing. No effort was made to contact me; instead the Editor just waded into me in defence of free enterprise as if his very job depended on it.

Even the statements accredited to me which were factual, were dealt with out of context, no consideration was taken of the forum at which they were raised or the question that stimulated the response.

Serious Repercussions

I have no alternative but to believe that I was really set up. How could I on the one hand be naive enough to make the statement attributed to me in the headline and in the same voice berate the business sector for being insensitive to the need for sponsorship of the Schools Steelband Music Festival?

I am almost tempted to believe that the Editor took the non appearance of the private sector representatives as a signal to take to task all who dare to oppose them, but knowing that at least two of the persons listed to appear are always at the forefront when it comes to sponsoring artistic and cultural events, I will think otherwise.

I am almost enjoying the controversy stirred up by this "storm in a teacup" but I am constrained by the serious repercussions that can result from mishandling this issue.

The moral approach to sponsorship is still "a festering sore" which can be only healed when our society becomes mature enough to respect the artiste in his own right and to become intelligent enough to embrace our cultural heritage.

One member of the audience who stated that he was in the process of starting a Steelband asked me to define the advantages and disadvantages of sponsorship.

Today, without external interference, Phase 11 Pan Groove has been able to be successful and forge an identity of it's own. On the way, the band recognised that it must seek assistance from the business sector if it was to survive.

I distinctly remember the year 1976, the firm that was assisting us was reluctant to come up with funds for new pans. We still did the unexpected and won the North Zone final with what Keith Smith described as "living tinnin."