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WANTED: Steelband arrangers

By SEAN NERO

THE climax of the 1996 Panorama competition takes place tomorrow at the Queen Park Savannah, marking the completion of 33 years of this event.

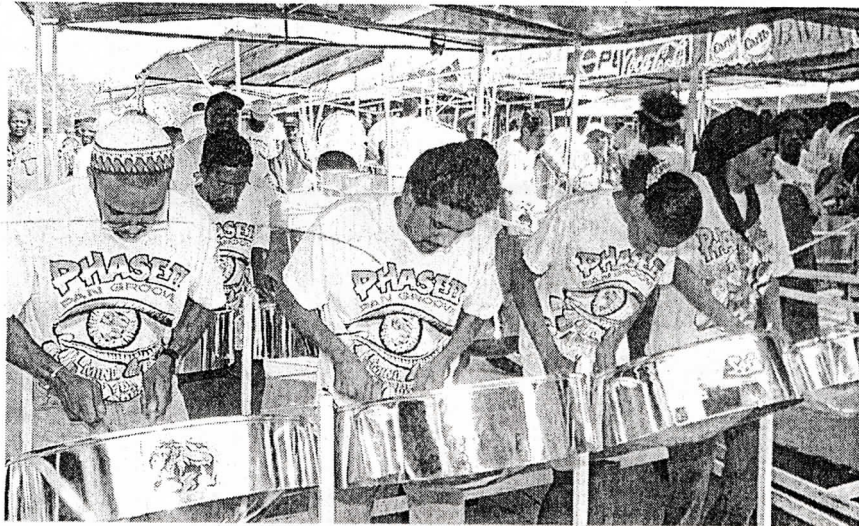
Of the many conventional steel orchestras vying for that special 10 minutes of glory on final night, Phase II Pan Groove, Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars, Hydro Agri Skiffle Bunch, Desperadoes, Tropical Angel Harps, Potential Symphony, Solo Pan Knights, Pam-beri, Arcadian Nu Tones and Exodus were the ones making the grade this time around.

Of the numerous contentious issues emerging out of 33 years of keen rivalry, the "arranger frenzy" continues to be one of the most topical. After years of steelbands basically having fixed resident arrangers, the advent of the '80s saw arrangers doubling up on their clients. This practice has become even more evident in the '90s.

In their quest to create Panorama lore, arrangers, like Ken "Professor" Philmore, Robert Greenidge, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, Jit Samaroo, Clive Bradley and Terrence "BJ" Marcelle, do works for two and three steelbands.

The question remains. Why are arrangers spreading themselves so thinly?

The reason given by veteran radio broadcaster Eddison Carr, a



PHASE II performing at Panorama. Photo by NOEL SALDENHA.

'Each steelband produces its own calibre of pannist. Some are more formidable than others, and these are but a few of the factors that arrangers consider in their work. Klub Karnival Studios owner, engineer Carl "Beaver" Henderson, exonerates the musician who arranges for more than one steelband. Henderson said: Arrangers are overworked because there is a shortage of arrangers in the first place'

man with several years experience covering Panorama, is that, "every steelband wants to win."

Most steelbands, in their desire to win it all, seek the arranger with the "name." But, what happens to the

arranger's ability to create when he accepts this added responsibility? What about the sameness in the music played by bands that share the same arranger?

Some arrangers are geniuses and do have the ability to arrange for

multiple bands. Some arrangers also try to establish differences in style and music for each band they serve. But, because he possesses instinctive tendencies, the listener can easily identify a piece by these musicians, sometimes through phrasing, sometimes through structure, sometimes through chord progressions, and a host of other aural devices.

The downside to this situation is discernible when the listener begins to feel that music from this year sounds similar to previous years.

So how do the judges cope with this sameness

that occurs in arrangements?

Musicologist and long standing adjudicator of steelband music, Joslyne Sealey, explained that each steelband has an identity of its own, despite many of them sharing arrangers.

She added that it is not the judge's responsibility to be concerned about how many bands someone arranges for; their only concern is the piece of music being performed by the specific band before the judge.

Sealey added that sameness was merely a perception, as different arrangers use various

devices in their interpretation of the original piece.

"To bake a cake," explained Sealey, "you use flour. Different dishes require their own ingredients; different arrangers possess the creative fluid to achieve this."

Sealey said steel instruments are so exquisitely tuned that they are almost equal, "Now," she said, "the only deciding factor is their arranger and arrangement."

"In addition, each steelband produces its own calibre of pannist. Some are more formidable than others, and these are but a few of the factors that arrangers consider in their work."

Klub Karnival Studios owner, engineer Carl "Beaver" Henderson, exonerates the musician who arranges for more than one steelband.

Henderson said: "Arrangers are overworked because there is a shortage of arrangers in the first place."

Henderson also indicated that he intends joining the steelband arranging fraternity. His reasons? "It is the only field in the music industry in which I have not been involved."

Henderson said steelbands must be willing to give young musicians a chance to arrange and prove themselves.

Of the 12 steelbands contesting tomorrow's national final, Samaroo (Renegades, Cordettes), Greenidge (Desperadoes, Solo Pan Knights), and Ken "Professor" Philmore (Potential Symphony, Skiffle Bunch) are responsible for the music being played by half of the finalists.

While these geniuses of pan have performed above and beyond the call of duty, there is the need, and room, for new faces, young blood, and fresh ideas.