

# All Stars: Fit to be winners

By TERRY JOSEPH

**NEAL AND MASSY** Trinidad All Stars won the inaugural Pan and Mas competition and has gone home with the whopping \$100,000 first prize—three times as much as Amoco Renegades won for being adjudged the best band in the land (at Pánorama), just 72 hours before.

But there is no argument (contrary to a Page One report in the Saturday *Guardian*) from any quarter, as everyone agreed that the All Stars were at their finest on Carnival Monday and Tuesday.

The competition, in which bands had to perform as both musicians and masquerade producers, attracted 22 bands, 16 more than last year's Parade of the Bands total pan participation.

Trinidad All Stars had announced at a news conference to mark the start of celebrations for their fiftieth anniversary that they would win both the Panorama and the new pan competition (which does not yet have a name).

The band came fourth in the Panorama finals, winning \$28,462 just \$3,500 short of the \$32,000 won by Amoco Renegades.

Each band in the contest was supposed to play a different tune at each of the four competition venues in Port of Spain and to present costumed masqueraders.

All Stars did even better, by playing a medley of pop classics (including "Stardust", "Impossible Dream" and "Without You") at Victoria Square, their Panorama selection ("The Power of Music") at the Savannah, "Pan in Ah Rage" at Adam Smith Square and the "Barber of Seville Overture" at South Quay.

Their mas, *Fleet's In (in Hawaii)* featuring sailors in uniform as well as Hawaiian "hot shirts", was also well received by the crowd at the Savannah, where the band was accorded lusty applause.

To win the biggest prize ever in the history of steelband competitions is a status befitting the Neal and Massy



Trinidad All Stars.

This year the band is into six months of celebration of its fiftieth year under this name.

Captain of the band, Beresford Hunte, told the media last January that the band had come out to win all available prizes this year, because there was beginning to develop a belief that the Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars was just in this thing to keep up a tradition.

They are, in fact, an integral part of pan tradition, being one of only five steelbands which have been involved in the Panorama competition from its inception in 1963.

**F**OUNDED by Neville Jules, who was the band's leader until 1971, the band spent many years working in the garret of the Maple Leaf Recreation Club on Charlotte Street, before actually occupying the Duke Street yard for which they are now famous.

In the garret, a handpicked team learnt the various songs for Carnival including the band's "bomb", a tune of non-calypto origin, which would be performed in kaiso tempo for the annual jouvert morning parade.

In time to come, the band would be the subject of musical rivalry, with Neville Jules being seen as the innovator of this Jouvert Bomb competition which is now held in front of the Pan Trinbago

Headquarters and carries Jules's name.

Learning the bomb would be an exercise in intrigue. Members of the band were sworn to secrecy and would be severely chastised for any breach of the promise.

Songs like "In a Turkish Market" were being scored and rehearsed upstairs and people who gambled and drank in the club downstairs would leave the building without a clue as to the musical activity on the upper floor.

Turkey feathers (quills) were said to be used instead of pansticks during rehearsals, so that no one outside of the band could hear the bomb before it was dropped on Jouvert morning.

At that time, followers of the band would gather to hear the opening bars and as soon as they recognised the tune (much more classical music was played on the radio in those days), there begat a cheer,

ushering in that year's work.

Later, the Woodbrook Invaders would join the musical battle, coming down to Charlotte Street to drop their bomb outside the All Stars yard or the club.

They brought songs like "In a Monastery Garden" and "Leiberstrum" to Charlotte Street.

**E**VENTUALLY, the Hilanders Steel Orchestras would join this mini competition, which went on at least until 1965, by which time the competition had been formalised and the Hilanders won with Handel's "Let Every Valley be Exalted".

The Trinidad All Stars had its colourful moments too, like watching calypsonian All Rounder operate as an MP in the various sailor bands that they produced.

All Rounder took the function most seriously, clubbing truant members of his band with the little truncheon provided for the purpose, even as they just wandered into the

bar at the corner of Charlotte and Duke Streets for a beverage.

The likes of the Mighty Sparrow and Nap Heppburn were regular ailers in the band, along with some of the more famous female names from the nightclub circuit, stretching as far south as the Miramar Club and as far west as the Gaza Strip on Wrightson Road.

But now the band is into a different era, having passed through a series of captains and musical arrangers, including Anthony "Reds" Collins and Gerard "Gerry" Gemmott and Leon "Smooth" Edwards.

They have too, in the interim established a reputation for excellence with their biennial Classical Jewels concerts and a number of international tours have rendered their names conversation pieces on several continents.

This then, is the Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars, fit to be the biggest money winner in the 50-year old history of steelbands being on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago.

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