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Pan is Beautiful VIII

World steelband festival set to fly

By TERRY JOSEPH

PANNISTS from London, Switzerland, the US and Barbados are listed to join 23 local bands and 10 soloists; as they compete in this year's Steelband Music Festival—Pan is Beautiful VIII, which begins on October 25 at the Jean Pierre Complex in Port of Spain.

Several changes have been made to the rules of this year's competition, which is again sponsored by The Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. These changes include the elimination of the semi-final stage of the festival. In addition, the test-piece will only be performed during the qualifying rounds and now soloists can have a maximum of three pieces of accompaniment for their competition performances.

The qualifying rounds will take place over two nights (October 25 & 26), taking in bands in both the conventional and traditional (pan-round-neck) categories and soloists.

Finals of the traditional groups and soloists will take place on the same night (October 31) at the Central Bank Auditorium in Port of Spain. Three traditional bands and five soloists; will comprise this stage of the competition. The grand finals of the conventional bands category will have just eight bands and will be contested at the Jean Pierre Complex on November 2.

Semi-final nights in all categories were eliminated because patronage has been traditionally poor and Pan Trinidad felt that with the reduced number of bands entering at the preliminary level, there was no need to have the middle-level at this year's festival.

Pan Trinidad President Owen Serrette told the *Express* that the Pan is Beautiful VIII planning committee submitted a proposal to drop the semi-finals and the executive endorsed the concept.

Also, he said, "there are those who argue that the idea of steelbands playing classical music is some kind of attempt to legitimise the instrument in the eyes of those who still

hold Eurocentric values as the benchmark for all music.

"We at Pan Trinidad feel, however, that the demands of some classical pieces offer opportunities for the demonstration of the versatility of the instrument and we know that pannists often consider intricate classics more of a challenge than any kind of a disrespect for local or Caribbean music.

"In fact, when it comes to the performance of the calypso of choice, we often find that arrangers go for a mixture of musical styles and frequently we hear the very classical styles being applied to basic soca, so that the players and their musical directors appreciate the challenges of fighting outside of our immediate musical genre and would by so doing show off the abilities and potential of the national musical instrument," he said.

The idea of allowing accompaniment for the soloists this time around is a concept that was mooted for the Schools Steelband Festival last year, but could not be effectively implemented in time.

Soloists will this year come from Switzerland, Barbados, London and Miami, to join the 10 locals who have already registered for the competition. Among the locals will be Duvonne Stewart, who was runner up to Pan Ramajay solo champion Jason Baptiste, Aisha Williams (elder sister of six-year-old prodigy Atiba Williams), former Radio Trinidad employee and author of several books on the steelpan, Sherman Fyfe and Amoco Renegades PRO (now *Guardian* reporter) Sean Nero. In addition, there is Bruce Roberts, Marlon Redhead, Hollis Durham, Abigail Liverpool, Masika Sealey, Neil Rickson and Rachel Hayward, a player from London.

The traditional bands listed are Trinidad Nostalgic, United Sounds, Blanca 47, Serenaders,

Pashphonic, Jah Roots and Natural Mystic.

The 16 conventional bands include the Swiss National Steel Orchestra and both the Police Service Steel Orchestra and the T&T Defence Force Steel Orchestra, the latter having pulled several crackshot players into the band since the impressive performance of their stage-side at the Pan Ramajay competition last July. The other conventional bands are: Sangre Grande Cordettes, Exodus, Solo Pan Knights, Moods, Magic Stars, Parry's Pan School, Courts Laventille Sounds Specialists, The Neal & Massy Trinidad All Stars, Petrotrin Invaders, Stryke



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Stars, Mello Harps, Tobago Bucooneers and Simple Song.

Curiously enough, none of the 16 bands from the South/Central Region of Pan Trinidad are listed to perform; many of them arguing that the cost of preparation for the Festival was prohibitive. Other famous names like the Witco Desperadoes, Phase II Pan Groove and the Amoco Renegades are also out of this year's competition.

Admission to the qualifying rounds is \$10; the playoff at Central Bank costs \$20, while the grand finals at the Jean Pierre Complex has a \$40 ticket-price.

Judges for Pan is Beautiful VIII are Dr Anne-Marion Osborne, Easley Blackwood and Jamaica's Marjorie Whyllie.

Tickets for the festival are already available at all branches of the Royal Bank, Pan Trinidad offices and Crosby's Music stores in St James and San Fernando.

