

1940 HELL YARD RECORD: IT'S THE FIRST EVER

The following is an extract from my book, *The Birth of Steel-Drum Music and The History of Trinidad All Stars*, which I thought I should be share with readers at this time as the Carnival fever grips the country and more particularly as we approach the Panorama finals next week:

Information has been unearthed that indicates that the Hell Yard Band of 1940 had three-note kettle pans, thereby strengthening the contention by many such as Bully Alleyne, Big-Head Hamilton Thomas, Ginghee Davidson, Sonny Jones, Oliver "OJ" Joseph etc that "notes" were first placed on pans in Hell Yard.

The pans of Alexander Ragtime Band, the first all-iron band that emerged in 1939, were "flat" and did not have "notes." Also it calls to mind the statement by Roaring Lion (see George Goddard's book) that the year after Ragtime appeared, "a band calling itself All Stars, using empty steel paint pans, caused a sensation."

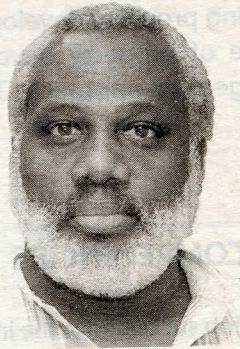
It was while talking about "pan" in the 1940s that both Big-Head Hamil and Neville Jules indicated that panmen, because of the stigmatisation and the association of "pan" with violence and hooliganism, were usually ashamed to be openly identified with the movement.

Jules said that in that period he would never have thought of putting his sticks in his back pockets

CENTRE STAGE

Bukka Rennie

Via e-mail



Bukka Rennie

if he was going out to play as most youngsters do nowadays: "No one wanted to be known as a panman."

"Right where we are sitting" said Jules, "was people who hated pan; the neighbours had a kitchen here, and if you didn't look out, they would throw garbage on your back... nobody thought then that pan would be sounding the way it is now or that pan would be accepted..."

Big-Head Hamil concurred with Jules and recalled the day when Eric Stowe came at his home and said that he had a job to make a record, and how they were so ashamed "to walk with pan in the road" that he put his pan "in a flour bag" and followed Stowe. And having said that he went on to conclude that that

was the day when "pan was first immortalised": "six panmen played pan on a recording of Roaring Lion's Leggo de Lion, each man get \$5 except Stowe. He take the lion share..."

When he was asked to provide the year this recording was done, his memory failed him and after his offsprings present attempted to jolt his memory, he suggested that it might have been "around 1949."

However, if Eric Stowe was the man in charge as implied in Hamil's story, then it follows that the recording would have been done much earlier, maybe between 1939-1943, the period of Stowe's captaincy.

In reality, the recording that Hamil referred to was done by Decca Recording on February 11, 1940, at the Sa Gomes Emporium located at Marine Square and the name of the calypso was Lion Oh, the first two lines of which were "Leggo me lion, Lion oh, Oh leggo me lion, Lion oh" and the Decca recording card listed the performers as "the Lion with his West Indian Rhythm Band."

The Decca record sheet also asserts that this performance "is the earliest known recording of a steel-band" and lists the instruments used as "boom (metal drum), tenor (two large cans or biscuit tins), du-dup, and the ubiquitous bottle and spoon."