

Band Spotlight

Fonclaire

This Southern based Steel Orchestra had its genesis in 1965 when a number of young boys expressed a desire to form a steelband. One of the more experienced young San Fernandians Milton "Wire" Austin decided to accede to the wishes of the boys and formed a steelband. "Wire" was elected Captain and together with his brother Rudien, Ancil, Austin and Vincent Swanan formed the nucleus of the band. They chose the name of the band to be Fonclaire for the expressed reason that the panyard was situated at the corner of Claire

and Fonrose Streets San-Fernando. The going was tough at first, finances were not easily obtained. The band had to rely on the charities of some small businesses and by the strong devotion and financial support of its members.

The band first tasted victory in the 1968 Bomb Competition when the band played the selection "Alla Tuca" by Mozart. The success of the band took off. Fonclaire won the "People's Choice" at the Panorama Competition in 1973 and obtained the sponsorship for the first time. Mosco Tites

sponsored the band. In this same year the band won the southern title in the Panorama Competition with the selection "Steel and Brass" for the first time.

Fonclaire did many innovative things, not the least being that it was the first band to use a vocalist, Wilton Xavier in the by gone days of the "Block-O-Rama". The band also appeared on many shows with a group called "The Imperials". This singer featured in two of the Albums of Fonclaire - Junk and Steel (1972) and Funk, Steel and Brass (1973). By this time the band had real-

ly become synonymous with in sweet steelband music and released an album entitled "People's Choice".

By 1974 the band got new sponsorship through the combined effort of the National Brewing Company and Fernandes Distillers Limited. The band became Stag Fonclaire by 1980 and later VAT 19 Fonclaire.

Fonclaire holds the record for the most wins by a band in South Central Zone. Following the year 1973, the band has won this coveted crown in 1978, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

When the steelband Music Festival was restarted in 1980 following its curtailment from 1974, Fonclaire won the 'Best Test Piece' at this "Pan is Beautiful" Competition with the selection "The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" by Handel.

Fonclaire has never won the National Panorama Competition but came second on three consecutive occasions 1989, 1990 and 1991 the last two with selections by its then arranger Ken "Professor" Philmore. Over the last few years the band which is still a force to be reckoned with, has fallen on leaner times, "competition wise".

Fonclaire has not been denied of International exposure though, for in 1975 the band toured USA and performed in the Brooklyn Hall of Music and at Macy's on Thanksgiving Day. The future of the band is bright and its continuous success is assured.

