

T&T engineer develops pan arrangement software

He's a musical genius says Leston Paul

MICHELLE LOUBON

In preparation for the annual Panorama competition, steelband arrangers would usually spend long hours at panyards perfecting their musical renditions. Now, newly-developed software will allow them to fine-tune their pan arrangements using authentic steelband tones before they even hit the panyard.

The software, developed by St Augustine electrical engineering graduate David Chow, 24, can be played on keyboards and MIDI instruments through a computer. His Indigisounds Digital Steelpan sample (steelband software) library was developed with support from Prof Brian Copeland, who received the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago medal for his work on the G-Pan, with whom he worked as a research engineer. Chow also worked with pan manufacturer Anthony Duncan to develop the steelband software concept into a commercially viable product.

"I called it Indigisounds because the steelband is indigenous to T&T," Chow explained.

"It is software that plays all the ranges of the steelband that can be played on the keyboard. Instead of being physically around the pan, you can hear something as close as possible to authentic steelband notes. You get to make use of studio technology which enables all the steel-



David Chow demonstrates features of his Indigisounds software. PHOTO: ABRAHAM DIAZ

band samples to be played."

The work was done using the tenor, double tenor, double seconds, triple cello, fourth cello and quadrophonic. Chow also included "engine-room" sounds complete with cowbells, triangles and iron.

Chow said: "You can hear the 'voicing' of the pans. You can hear the harmonies of the national instrument. You can hear the clash and it can give a modulated sound. Instead of going to the panyard with the song in your head like Boogsie, you would have an idea what will be played. It would be a lot easier to communicate with the players.

"It is the closest you would get to playing the actual pan. You can place the steelband tones and replicate a steelband according to its desired range."

Commenting on the software's ability to produce fine steelband music, he said: "You can make a full steelband. You can play the entire orchestra before the band plays it. When it comes to the double tenors, you could separate it. You could make a whole change in the way in which steelbands develop their music. It's like a general arranging tool."

Chow turned the steelband software into a commercially viable

product by linking up with an established German company, Native Instruments.

"You cannot cut out and paste my sample. You can't take someone's work and make money out of it. Once you buy my samples you only have access to two computers, so no one can bootleg"

Chow said he got involved in e-commerce so the international market would be able to access the Indigisounds software, which is targeted at a select audience—people involved in music production.

"Before this there were not good steelband tones. You would capture

the 'dirtiness' of the pan...a galvanised sound. This was an opportunity to merge the science and creativity into one," said Chow, whose marketing tag line for the software is "Pan at your fingertips."

Chow said his mentors include his father, Alfred Chow, Prof Copeland, ace pannist Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, and arranger, Leston Paul. He worked with Sharpe and Paul on the album Tribute to Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco).

Commenting on the software, Copeland said: "It's like a steel orchestra playing. You can record the different parts of the music separately. It is more than just facilitating. The arranger can change the tune much quicker?"

Arranger Leston Paul described the software as "a sterling achievement"

"I have seen the growth and development of technology over the years, from the analog to digital. A project like this could have been done in Japan or Germany but it was done by a Trini. Just like people refer to me as a musical genius, I think he is a "musical genius" in his own right.

"He has made us proud with his technological innovation. With young people like Chow, pan innovation is in good hands."

For further information, contact DAC Acoustic Services via e-mail at contact@indigisounds.com, or sales@indigisounds.com, or call 868-787-8346.

D. K.
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