

# Negotiating

# Pan's Labyrinth

By LAURIE ANDALL

WHEN Lord Humbugger chipped down Charlotte Street at the helm of Alexander Rag Time Band, dressed to kill in top hat and scissors-tail coat on Jouvert morning 1939, the all steel percussion group coming all the way from Woodford Street to the irresistible chants of 'Run yuh run, Kaiser Williams, run yuh run' was really performing the last rites to Tambou Bamboo, the staccato rhythm which had served previous generations so well in our earlier street festivals.

At this musical eclipse one can well imagine the comments of the market vendors on Charlotte Street and the burgesses of Hell Yard as the prologue to Pan unfurled before their eyes changing the Carnival landscape, which thereafter was silenced by the bombs of World War Two, forever.

While the curfew imposed by the war forbade street parades, it offered Pan's pioneers an opportunity to experiment and invent and by the time the Fuehrer's dream of a master race receded into history, the pans of biscuit, paint, carbide and caustic soda had given way to Winston 'Spree' Simon's four note tenor on which he played 'God Save the King' for the Governor in celebration of the victory of the allies over Nazi Germany, on Marine Square, Port of Spain.

As Pan moves from the periphery challenging for the centre of our social consciousness, a position which it temporarily holds for at least one month each year during the panorama festivities, it has offered us many proud moments, validating not just our survival as a people emerging from centuries of colonialism but as a people capable of charting new horizons in the advancement of civilization.

Pan may yet provide the sound tracks for the ideal state upon which many philosophers have pondered but which like the promised land has eluded every prophet and politician from Moses to Obama. If only our leaders could get it right!

The first time piano and pan met in a public concert was at the Victoria Institute in 1948 when Casablanca, which had a few months before won an island-wide steelband competition featuring pannists like Patsy Haynes and Art DeCoteau, collaborated with the German musician Professor Walter Katz and Tenor singer Victor Soverall to produce a successful show at the princely sum of twenty five dollars. We look at this encounter as the beginning of the gradual embrace of Pan as a musical invention worthy of acceptance by the conventional Orchestra.

Of course, TASPO's tour in England was a watershed moment in Pan's history, followed by the appearance of a steelband ensemble led by Belgrave Bonaparte at the Rome Olympics in 1960 and, a few years later, the appearance of the

Pan Am North Stars at the US nationally televised Ed Sullivan Show.

PanAm North Stars holds pride of place in these epic pan moments because it also collaborated with Jocelyn Pierre and the Marionettes Chorale in concert in 1965 and, in 1968, offered us a musical collaboration with internationally acclaimed pianist Winnifred Atwell at Queen's Hall resulting in an album which today stands as perhaps the most significant musical legacy in the history of Pan.

Of course the many travels of Hugh Borde and Tripoli Steel Orchestra with internationally-

renowned pianist Liberace has become the stuff of legend and we are all eager to view the movie of Liberace's life and the role as co-star in which we expect the Pan to be featured.

The Desperadoes from the hills of Laventille have also etched their way into steelband folklore with their 1966 visit to Dakar, Senegal and their tour of eight US cities where under the musical directorship of the inimitable Pat Bishop, they played at Carnegie Music Hall, Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Philadelphia Academy of Music, blazing a trail to establish Pan as a musical brand on the recording landscape of North America.

Also the Trinidad All Stars, not to be outdone, after their popular Panorama victory in 1980 with Scruter's 'Woman on de Bass' visited India and China, breaking new



ground on the old trade route of Marco Polo, as cultural ambassadors of Trinidad and Tobago. This was a tour on which Earl 'Abdul' Reid, a Scherzando veteran and then Pan Trinidad P.R.O., served as the representative of the international authority on Pan.

Also on this tour was teenager Derrick Nurse who as Warrant Officer Class 1 of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, was musical director of the recent collaboration between The Defence Force Steelband and Patubate of Brazil. This five-man group from the Land of Samba and Soccer has added its own unique flavor to our steelband by incorporating the music of discarded steel and plastic drums, pots and pans and other discarded car parts, along with electronic music.

Watching and listening to the two groups discover each other as Officer Nurse blended the music into one during rehearsals for a Steelfest performance at Scherzando's Culture Market, was a unique experience.

The organisers and sponsors of

SteelfestTT2012 a reality including the SteelfestTT Planning Committee, the National Gas Company, the Ministry of Arts and Multi-Culturalism, Pan Trinidad and our dearly departed Pat Bishop, Keeper of the flame, who was honoured for its conceptualization, deserve a bow. SteelfestTT is part of the growth curve that Pan has been seeking to achieve and it should become part of our bi-annual- if not annual- calendar.

It was at Pan Trinidad's 2011 Convention that Steelfest 2012 was unveiled to the Pan community by its Chair-person Maureen Manchouk.

It was immediately evident that here was a lady who had come to enrich the narrative of women in pan with a plan not just to highlight our national instrument but to embrace the culture of others

across the diaspora, using not the tired system of patronage but a partnership model of business to bring a win-win model to the portfolio of all shareholders.

Katzenjammers, a band of over fifty years, with an impeccable steelband pedigree as the first Tobago band to win a national competition (in 1967) and defending Panorama champion (Medium category 2011 and 2012) was chosen to make a musical presentation with Cuba's Obini Bata, an all female group combining dance, percussion and song.

The high calibre international performance took place at Katzenjammers' brand new pan theatre, an achievement that has been realized under the leadership of Beverly Ramsey Moore. The theatre has since been incorporated as a Pan Institute, serving as an inspiration to other steelbands, as the full import of SteelfestTT 2012 begins to resonate throughout the wider Pan community.

The remarks of the Minister of Planning and the Economy, Senator Bhoew Tawarie, on the Steelfest programme brochure and his address at the opening of the inaugural International conference on the Steelpan 2012 were the first comprehensive statement to date from a government minister of the People's Partnership on the Steelband industry.

Many of us in Pan have been waiting on a clear policy on Pan as our national instrument, given the yoke of multiculturalism which has been hung around Minister Gypsy's neck. Having grown up post-independence accepting that Trinidad and Tobago are islands of Steelband and Calypso, we now acknowledge that calypso may well include soca, chutney and even parang, but we hesitate at the thought that Pan, too, may mean something else.

Yet, as Dr. Tawarie implored at Steelfest 2012, we also welcome musicians and instruments from foreign lands to our home, the home of Pan. As a matter of fact it is via the journey of Pan in foreign lands that the instrument has arrived at the place of esteem with which it is held today. Many Pannists earn their living abroad, perhaps moreso than in Pan's own homeland. So it goes without saying that Pan welcomes fusion.

It was disheartening to hear that Pan accounts for just 2.8% of the revenues earned by the Creative sector which is a challenge for Pan Trinidad, steelband leaders and the government. This was countered by the good news that the long overdue Pan Headquarters is at last to be constructed but we hope that the deafening silence of both Pan Trinidad and the National Carnival Commission on the controversial 'Pan in Schools' issue has nothing to do with this development.

Even the minister had no words of wisdom for us on this topic while our Pan Tutors languish without contracts and it is almost two years since a school has commissioned its quota of Pans, leaving manufacturers and many tuners in abeyance. In our own school system Pan is slowly being left behind while our leaders twiddle their thumbs at the altar of multiculturalism.

While the minister complained of the need for a 'properly documented history of Pan' some were left to wonder if his advisors had not informed him about Kim Johnson's 'The Illustrated Story of Steelband' or George Goddard's 'Forty Years in the Steelband Movement' or the few post-graduate theses lying about, including American Steven Stuemple's 'The Steelband Movement: Formation of A National Art', certainly a fusion along the lines of SteelfestTT.

There is too much romanticism, the Honourable Minister declared, yet informing us that the industry must think opera and motion pictures among other media arts. Did Hollywood not build its success on romanticizing the west, turning outlaws like Jesse James and Billy the Kid into legends and criminalizing patriots like Sitting Bull and Geronimo?

Against this background and with ministerial advice in tow, our local movie makers have a pantheon of heroes awaiting their intervention. Imagine what our actors could do with tales about Trail, Fisheye, Patch eye, Breakdoor, Gold Teeth, Eddie Boom, Whitey Kincaid, Ghost, Cobo Jack, Boots, Elephant Walk, Fire Kong, Preacher Boysie, Joe, Lolly, Mastifay, John Bull, Bake Nose, Jack Slade and many others.