

Pioneer winner Anthony Williams: 'Why judge professional musicians?'

DALTON NARINE

Happy Birthday, Panorama! What with the lineup of finalists in three categories tonight, the vibes cyar done. Truly golden, pan. This happening.

One can never not have an argument over an instrument that pioneers had beaten into shape so it could be given life. But a couple have already been floating around the competition of pan on its very birthday. Pan Trinbago should begin a workshop on why we should never argue the international instrument of our times. Unless it's to set the record straight.

And there's the rub.

Those who question the birthday are wrong. They cite the 1979 Pan Boycott. Despite only a preliminary round being conducted that year, there's absolutely no need to run a chord on the four pan in a pissy fit. It's 50 years of Panorama.

Given deeper importance is how Panorama got its name. Melvin Bryan, currently an advisor to Keith Diaz, president of Pan Trinbago, and who held a similar position under George Goddard, former president of the Steelband Association, cited his mentor's book: "Ronald Williams said the CDC would give it a try to raise the \$1,000 (for the 1963 first prize) and he was going to change the name of the competition to Steelbands' Panorama. I agreed with him."

But Desmond Chase, a retired banker from Sayreville, New Jersey, USA, said he was an executive member of an ad hoc committee charged with christening the inaugural night of pan with a name.

Chase said that riding his tick-tick from his Belmont home to the meeting at the old Immigration Office on Wrightson Road, he lucked upon a movie poster outside Deluxe: In Cinemascope and Panorama, it screamed. Minutes before the meeting began, he told committee member Lloyd Pollonais. Panorama was the unanimous decision, Chase said.

Anthony Williams, Pan Am North Stars' leader/arranger of the winning song, Sparrow's Dan is the Man, said his experience in the competition was bittersweet. "We were professionals," he said, "and we shouldn't have been judge like amateurs. Why judge professional musicians?"

His back in front of a window that looks out to Victoria Square, Diaz reels off a spate of stats. And is gratified about the respect the event has engendered.

"We see growth from 2011-12 that young people are paying to come. I want to thank all of them for carrying the flag of T&T culture. They have a good time. That's why I opened the gate during [the contrempeps



Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar tries her hand on the tenor pan during her visit to the Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars pan yard on Thursday night. PHOTO: SHIRLEY BAHADUR

at] the semifinals. The attraction of young people is because the music is done by young people, basically. So many young arrangers in the country penetrating the market of Panorama. We've given young composers a shot at changing old mentality into new vision.

"It's why we decided in 2012 to be more businesslike. Increase the space and make more money."

Hence the Greens. For example, the North Greens is expected to become self-sufficient, Diaz says.

The Greens may enhance the Panorama experience of 11,000 patrons, but attorney Martin Daly sees the area as the crux of the Panorama problem.

"Not enough paying space is created to accommodate all of the patrons who'd like to pay to be in the vicinity of the Panorama," Daly says. "Not everybody wants to sit and watch it live. Pan Trinbago is making enough attempt to deal with the North Stand subculture. It needs that revenue. You want this group to stay interested in pan, even if there's marginal interest.

If it were up to me, I'll let the Greens run as far as All Saints Church."

Diaz began performing in Panorama in 1967. Many bands were eager for his skills on the second pan. But he aspired to be the top, tough guy in the organization and has had to "upgrade" himself for the demands of the post. Diaz studied communications at Cipriani Labour College for a year.

Do you think the beast is still in pan, a visitor wanted to know.

"The beast still in this thing? That's the nature of pan, the trials and tribulations of the pan man. That's how I became a steel band man who knows the belly of the steel band movement. You need to be strong. Hardcore. Tough decisions. The steel band movement is not easy.

"I knew George Goddard. I watched him walk up and down fighting for Panorama, and I said one day that I'd be in his shoes. I served under past presidents of Pan Trinbago. You have to know the pan world. You have to know the belly of the steel band man. Rudolph Charles was a steel band man."

Meanwhile, Daniel Lambert, advisor to Diaz on finance, is intent on branding Pan Trinbago as a world steel band body to facilitate Panorama competitions "anywhere." Lambert spins it as the legal underpinnings in terms of a wholesale recognition of pan that originated in Trinidad and Tobago.

Lambert plans to develop formal programmes of training, tuning and playing that could lead to accreditation. "Who accredits those bodies in the US? Or, in Trinidad and Tobago?"

For now, Diaz' mind is on the show tonight. The next decade? He's pushing hard for an elaborate revolving stage that would bring pans up from a holding bay, thus cutting into set-up time. "It'd cost a lot of money. But who'll foot the bill?"

Changing the concept of Panorama on stage sounds like a log line for a whalish movie like Moby Dick.

But it's a steel band man's dream. To futurize the Panorama. You bet arrangers and panists, and TV crews, too, are watching which way the wind blows.