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NEWS

No respect for pan in TT

By SEAN NERO

DESPITE OVER six decades of continuous struggle, and a US government award to steelband pioneer Ellie Mannette, pan, officially the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, has not gained unequivocal respect in the land of its birth.

“Comparatively,” said Pan Trinbago’s Foundation Board, “we have readily embraced other national gourmet delights such as doubles, roti and pelau.”

The organisation contends that pan is a means of self-expression and identity that evolved from the hunger, pain and defiant joy felt by people from the ghetto areas of Trinidad and Tobago.

“Pan is a very versatile vehicle of musical expression” it said, “developed through aural tradition, and was not dependent upon intricate motor skills and is an ideal medium for producing excellent group music with minimal learning curve.”

The Foundation Board, said, the purpose of its comprehensive report, entitled “Pan, Getting Organised for the New Millennium — A Strategic Plan for Pan”, was a framework for strategic planning and invited comments and opinions from the public for inclusion into the final plan.

It also said that the report was commissioned solely for the love of pan.

“Other than being called the national musical instrument, there is no protocol that governs the role of pan.

“Does this nomenclature suggest that pan must be taught at schools, or played at all national events or displayed in all state embassies?” it asked.

The board admitted like all relatively new products, pan was facing its most significant challenge, namely, that of the market place.

“Even in its homeland, pan has encoun-

tered long, arduous struggles. Still there are many more challenges to be overcome.”

The industry needs to be restructured in order to fulfil its true potential and to accept the commercial challenges and opportunities created by an increasingly competitive global economy.

“Not only should Pan Trinbago rewrite its constitution to limit financial exposure and commercial risk taking,” explained the Foundation Board, “but also, set minimum standards for all members, including pan

organisations, tuners, arrangers and events.”

The question of music literacy among pannists, was also raised, as well as the need for a Pan Centre of Excellence and the enactment of fiscal incentives and the commissioning of major works of pan sculptures.

It is also suggested that Pan Trinbago in collaboration with the Bureau of Standards develop a system of certification marking for pan manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago.