

ML1040

Entertainment

Flabej wows them in Missouri

By DAVID CUFFY

THE FLABEJ Steelband Ensemble would make "a wonderful addition to any festival in the world."

That's the recommendation coming from organisers of "World-Fest", America's largest international festival, after hearing the aggregation, led by John Douglas and Barbara Crichlow-Shaw, perform recently during a highly successful four-week tour of Silver Dollar City at Branson, Missouri, USA.

The ensemble was among a number of international performers from Poland, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Czech Republic, Ireland, Switzerland, Russia, France and Ecuador who participated in the annual event.

From the opening day of the festival, there were signs that the crowds would gravitate towards the steelband music. Entertainment writers forecasted that "Flabej would have the park rocking," and later wrote "it was easily one of the most popular groups at the festival."

Feedback from ongoing customer satisfaction surveys revealed that the group was the number one act. Indeed, such was the popularity that the other artistes constantly flocked to the Trinidad performances.

As some Irish dancers confessed: "There was a feeling of intensity as we approached the theatre where you were performing." While some patrons who have attended the event for between 11 and 17 years said it was the best act

ever at the park, others were left in amazement that the music was coming from the surface of the drums and not from a hidden keyboard or synthesised sound.

The band received the keys to the City of Branson and Silver Dollar City from Mayor of Branson, Lou Scharfer and popular singer Tony Orlando, of Tie A Yellow Ribbon fame, respectively.

The band's performances were constantly punctuated with applause, and standing ovations became the order of the day. On the receiving side, Flabej members said they received the warmth and hospitality of Branson so much so that there was agreement that the city was "the heart of America."

Festival organisers

presented the following commendation:

"Flabej played for standing room only audiences, as over 170,000 persons attended the festival. This group displayed an expertise of their traditional music. They were well-disciplined and dependable, with excellent stage presence. 'World-Fest' was extremely honoured to

have had Flabej as one of the participants in the 1996 festival. We feel they would make a wonderful addition to any festival in the world."

Perhaps, a teenager's e mail to her grandfather on May 13 best sums it up: "The Trinidad group was awesome. The whole park knew about them, and everyone wanted to see their show. The other groups

were pretty good, but none of them measured up to the music of the steeldrums."

Members of Flabej who made the tour were: John Douglas, Gersham France, Vonrick Maynard, Patricia Valentine, Eion Charles, Kernal Roberts, Beverly Charles, John Douglas Jr, Barbara Crichlow-Shaw, Chemiene Baptiste and Roxanne Christian.



FLABEJ in action... Photo by ARTHUR EDWARDS.