

SUNDAY OPINION

Where has pan really reached?

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MLLOWO.

TODAY, AS ritual, Trinidadians will be toasting the winners of last night's Panorama competition and celebrating that fact that the steelband belongs to us. By tomorrow, however, pan will be back on the periphery of Carnival and, indeed, of the nation's consciousness as well.

By Ash Wednesday, Pan Trinbago, should begin taking stock of the low attendances at this year's Panorama shows which are the centre of the bands' existence and which seem to preclude their doing anything else.

Sixty years after the instrument was invented it has travelled and been accepted around the world. But the movement here has become moribund which is of concern not only to steelbandmen themselves but to citizens who understand its place in the national culture and what its present stagnation has to say about us as a people.

Except for a very talented few, steelbands have not been able to provide sustained employment for their members, do not have the same pull that they once had in the communities and are not part of any activities that have anything to do with national enterprise.

There have been few attempts to market the steelpan, except for the present efforts of Trinidad and Tobago Instruments Limited and there, certainly, has not been the kind of national participation in the promotion effort that the Jamaicans, for example, have shown with their own music.

The truth is, too many Trinidadians have become preoccupied with their own individual lives and, not caring about the larger picture, have little or no interest

in steelband development except when they raise themselves from time to time to protest the appearance of an American panman like Andy Narrel who has made a name for himself on the country's musical circuit and whose attempt to compose a Panorama tune for a steelband was blocked as a result of the xenophobia that sometimes passes for sense in Trinidad and Tobago.

To be sure there are the likes of our own "Thello" Mollineau and Robert Greenidge who, too, have been able to find regular employment in North America and Europe but, in the absence of any sustained marketing thrust, they have had to make their own way without any help and without being able to open the doors through which many more Trinidadian steelbandmen might be able to find fame and fortune.

Indeed, even before we talk about marketing steelband internationally, we have to dwell on the absence of any market for steelband both here and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Steelbands, even small sides, are not engaged for weddings, as they used to be, and they have been excluded from the dance halls for the very good reason that they have been unable to use the amplification systems used for other music bands.

Twenty-five years ago we laughed at Mr Bertie Marshall's pioneering efforts in this field and nobody seems inclined to return to that scene. We have to begin talking seriously about the state of pan and move quickly to get the steelband act together. Either that or pan will simply not be in danger, it will be dead.

Andy Narrel



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