

# PAN IN DE MAS

By Laurie Andall

**E**VERY pan aficionado has that moment of epiphany when the music transcends us into another place where nothing else matters but rubber on tinnin' and friends, lovers, acquaintances and strangers can only exchange that look of spiritual exhilaration, of a celestial experience shared in this Underworld where words are merely an interruption. And, for that moment, we are all children charmed by the pan-nist, oblivious to a bounce here or a mash there among this strange throng in a place of revelation where our possibilities are boundless.

Under the glazed majestic arches of the Chinese construct on the edge of the Savannah, blessings rained like manna from heaven with steelband champions All Stars, Phase 11 and Silver Stars jostling for musical space in the performance of their final rehearsals before their ten minutes of glory, sending pan lovers into a frenzy in this temporary triangle of Steelband excellence where doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, nurses, welders, unionists, technicians, business men and women, vendors, politicians, accountants, labourers and many others from all strata of society and others across the diaspora and beyond, mingled in classless camaraderie, genuflecting before Boogie's *Tribute to Pat Bishop*, transformed by Smooth's *Play Yuhself and Feeling the Vibes* from Edwin Pouchet.

Nobody begrudged the task of the judges from this vantage point but the Pan lover is such a creature of certainty that most were confident that right here under the Four Eyes of Confucius the Panorama was all but over, even dismissing the wise counsel of veterans who suggested that the winner of The Dragorama often wins the People's choice but seldom gets the nod of the Adjudicators sitting under the eaves of the Grand Stand.

On Birdie Mannette Pan Avenue the Jouvert Dream of a dedicated steelband Corridor took root as Pan people made a brave effort to reclaim their Carnival heritage in the Jouvert, attempting to reclaim the beach head of the Festival itself as a prelude for a launch into the Mas, remembering the days of Silver Stars *Gulliver Travel* when Pan arrived at the pinnacle of both the Mas and the Music. But the Boom box which sent the Brassmen into extinction on Kitchener's Road and threatens to silence the Pan, is a formidable opponent which counter attacks at every Steelband intermission, even on the hallowed grounds of Panorama.

But the joy of Pan ringing out on the Carnival barber green, whether it be the haunting melody of the Bomb, drawn from the familiar refrains of yesteryear, or the up-tempo harmonies of the Panorama selection, is certainly worth fighting for, if only because it is about a music that came out of our historical odyssey and it gives our carnival an identity that has no equal on this planet, our own native legacy a rampart from which we could begin again to resist the onslaught of the Parade of The Flesh which threatens to overwhelm us all with biblical implications, and to return to the Epics of Bailey, Saldenah, McWilliams and Minshall.

Certainly we must join McFarlane in his lonely struggle to turn back the drunken tide of the Philistines and the road back begins on the Birdie Mannette Pan Avenue.

So we should indeed give a bow to the V.I.P's at the N.C.C and work towards encouraging steelbands to roll out of their panyards and reclaim the Mas.

To maintain a presence on the road, steelbands first made the adjustment from Pan-round-de-neck to pan-on-wheels when the pan pusher was an integral part of the pan family and a printed T-shirt was compensation enough for his efforts. Then times changed, and the pan pusher could no longer



be taken for granted and often pannists were left to push and play and out of this anomaly the float, pulled by tractor or truck, replaced the pan pusher. Today, even the loader who works for a fee with panmen often doubling up to make an extra buck is under threat from the forklift and the crane. Next door in Grenada they have long taken the float to the next level with its own engine and we must submit that the evolution of pan on the road, unlike the instrument itself, still has some way to go, even demanding that the steelband itself get into the business of Pan transportation.

At the post-mortem of the collaborative Jouvert morning experience of Scherzando Steel band Co-operative with U.W.I's Department of Creative and Festival Arts, Studio 66 and the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies of their presentation 'Fifty Years of Mud, Fete and Tears' under the banner of Jouvay Ayiti, (winner of the Small band category in both Downtown and Uptown, PoS), a critique of the limitations of Pan music on the Road in comparison to the Boom Trucks led one Jouvert novice to suggest that perhaps the solution to Pan's battle for the attention of the masquerader lies in the Pan Float having its own Boom Box to give relief to pannists who, for sheer decibels and energy cannot compete with technology. This idea may be worthy of consideration but certainly not on Birdie Mannette Pan Avenue.

But Pan on the road on carnival days, much like the Disc Jockeys, is an expensive business although not as prohibitive as the Power Stars of Soca when they are not jumping from truck to truck to push their tune for Road March or is it

Stage March? But that is another story. As a steelband one must consider the cost of rehearsals, inclusive of passage and meals for pannists; tuning and arranger costs; preparation of float which could include welding and other accessorial skills; Flag man or woman and banner girls who no longer perform just for love of the community band; and cost of tractor or truck before one calculates the pannists' stipend. So a small steelband, more or less about twenty musicians, could incur a cost of about \$25,000 before a note is played, while the cost from medium to large band could reach as much as \$50,000. Of course this is the main reason why one seldom sees an unsponsored steelband in the mas.

**S**till, it was a positive to see All Stars not only carrying the flag of the Pan Movement but placing in the first ten in the Tuesday mas and Exodus playing for Exodus and sharing in the glory of a mas prize, if only as musicians and Rhapsody N G with their amplification and Ph 1 pans, going *manos a manos* with the Boom Trucks and the Invaders and Starlift with their Monday mas and the Renegades with their Bomb competition and the Desperadoes, rising from the Panorama disappointment to hit the road and the Solo Harmonites, coming out to represent. Kudos must even go to the Birdsong CePep crews for keeping the Panorama and carnival stages spick and span even while Mr. Fete was in full swing. Our steelband ancestors made an investment of blood, sweat and tears in the creation of this modern carnival

and pan men and women are bonding to protect the product of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. Much respect to the bikini and beads brigade but it is certainly worth noting that they hardly, if ever, hitch their wagon to a steelband.

The time has come and the battle to reclaim the character of our carnival has been joined by youthful Moko jumbies, Midnight Robbers, small bands of Indians, pierrot grenades, Dame Lorraines, devils of every colour and sailors risen from the Red and the Dead Seas. It is a heritage worth fighting for since whether we like it or not, it is our international badge of recognition, with clones in the carnivals in New York, London, Toronto, Miami, Philadelphia and other major cities. So we have a responsibility to the cultural empire that our ancestors created.

When Minshall was hired as a designer of the opening ceremony at the Atlanta Olympics it was as a masman from Trinbago. For the same reason MacFarlane has been retained to make his contribution to the 2012 London Olympics.

These are signature achievements of which we should all be proud and we may even see one of these icons summoned for Olympics 2016 in Rio. Some of us do not need these external validations to appreciate the richness of our cultural legacies but most of us do and in recognizing this we must accept that we all have a responsibility to make the carnival representative of who we really are, especially in this dawn of our golden anniversary of nationhood.