

Festival rules anger school steelbands

OCTOBER'S Junior Steelband Music Festival may be in jeopardy, stemming from Pan Trinbago's alteration of one of the long-standing rules of the competition. The new rule no longer limits selection of the band's tune of choice to pieces written by Caribbean composers and the school bands are saying that the competition has lost its focus.

But Pan Trinbago counters with a theory that its audiences have grown weary of hearing folk songs.

"How many versions of 'Mangoes' could people take?" asked Pan Trinbago president Patrick Arnold yesterday. "The tune of choice will be open this year. The only limit on the band will be in terms of time," he said, adding, "at this point we may even have run out of Caribbean compositions and the children are certainly skilful enough to play anybody's music."

But managers of several school bands are adamant about limiting the choices to Caribbean compositions. Fazal "Moosh" Mohammed, who manages the El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School Steelband, said on Friday night that both of the band managers were upset over what he called Pan Trinbago's unilateral change of the tune-of-choice rule.

"We are not in that," he said, adding that some of his colleagues were already contemplating dropping out of the festival.

Ian "Teddy" Belgrave, who manages reigning joint festival champions, the Arima Senior Comprehensive School Steelband, told the *Sunday Express* that although his band was still bent on participating, many of the schoolbands had now become unenthusiastic about the competition.

"It is a philosophical position," he said. "The concept of selecting from a Caribbean catalogue had begun to inspire local composers to produce work for the steelband. This retrogressive move will quite likely stem that kind of initiative, because of the ease with which an arranger could pull a European

classic and just drill the band over and over to ensure that they take the notes accurately and win the contest. That is not what the junior festival was about."

Belgrave, who worked with Woodtrin (a combination of Woodbrook Secondary School and Trinity College) on their winning version of André Tanker's "Overture" in the 1987 competition, said that over the years, other bands were warming to the concept. Reigning joint champions St Augustine Senior Comprehensive have in the past commissioned works by Jit Samaroo and Godwin Bowen to use as festival pieces.

"In addition," says Belgrave, "arrangers like Arddin Herbert and others have taken calypso to new heights."

"Going back to stretch the category to include Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov is nothing short of laziness on the part of Pan Trinbago," he fumed. "It also does not address or even contemplate the future of pan, since when we go on tour, it is always our indigenous music that the audiences prefer."

For the competition, each band will be required to play two songs—the tune of choice and a test piece.

The test piece is the subject of a different row, with charges of a leak of the selected test piece to a favoured band being levelled against Pan Trinbago. The piece (Jit Samaroo's "Prelude to the 21st Century") was selected by a committee headed by Trevor Belmosa from a number of works which had been in Pan Trinbago's files for some time.

Belmosa has since resigned from both the committee and the Pan Trinbago executive.

Arnold yesterday denied that any leak had occurred, even though (by his own admission) the brother of one school band manager was also a member of the selection committee.

He said, however, that the rule about broadening the scope of the selection of choice stays. The dissenting band managers will meet this week to decide on their next course of action.

—Terry Joseph