

## The Longtime Steelband

### Khalick J. Hewitt speaks on the Steelband History

Khalick J. Hewitt is a Panologist in Brooklyn USA. He originates from Trinidad and Tobago. To be exact, he is from behind the bridge in East Dry River. He grew up next to the City Syncopators Steelband panyard and was an early member. Over the years, Khalick has been writing about the early history of the steelband and calypso. We hope that you enjoy the article and that it will send you to the panyards to hear the beautiful sounds of the steelpan.

1<sup>st</sup> release 1998, revised in 2002

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This article attempts to capture some of my personal memories of some of the various elements and characters of the steelband movement. It makes no claim to be a definitive history of the steelband movement. It includes my thoughts and observations of some of the problems facing the steelband movement but limit its growth and development.

Over the years there has been a few books and dissertations written about the steelband movement. But, a definitive history of the steelband movement that extols the essential characters, traditions and innovations is yet to be written. I take full responsibility for whatever mistakes this article may contain as it is based solely on my memories while growing up in the steelband movement behind the bridge in East Dry River, Trinidad.

## Introduction

"Your wealth and your pride, even your image, they take from you  
But, you survive all Civilizations old and new  
Great Man, Black Man, pride of your father and your son  
Africa! Remember, that you are the same one  
From Egypt to Ethiopia across the Oceans to America  
To the Russian Steppes of Europe, West Indies and India.  
But, with every beat of the drum your image unfolds  
Black Woman remember your children of Africa  
Displaced and scattered without a trace of their culture  
The color of their skin is their heritage  
So no matter where you go or where you live  
The Black Man with the drum remains your true heritage."  
Ras Shorty I

On August 13, 1992, then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Mr. Patrick Manning declared the steelpan to be the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, (Trinbago). To date, that declaration is yet to be an Act of Parliament in the country of its creation. There is no legal protection for the national instrument. Yet, the steelpan, the only instrument created in the 20th century, continues to improve and it is in demand throughout the Caribbean and the continents of Africa, America, Europe and Asia. Today, there are steelband orchestras in America, Sweden, Japan, China, Israel, England, Canada, Cuba, South Africa and Switzerland.

The steelpan is a percussion instrument that comprises the body of the steelband orchestra similarly to the European conventional orchestra. The creation of this musical gift owes its presence to the ingenuity of the African working class. The turbulent and sometimes violent treatment of the Africans by the European enslavers did not prohibit the Africans from seeking cultural expressions and entertainment. After emancipation, the Africans working class struggled against the oppression and denials they received from European colonialism. And, in their struggles against an oppressive political and social system they were determined to develop their own cultural forms of music and art. The African working class appropriated the musical traditions of the European colonialists by empowering themselves with the instrumentation, melody and harmony derived from Western musical tradition. As a result, they dug deep into their past and extended the drum into the steelpan and their religious festivities into Carnival.

From its creation in the 1930s, the steelpan embodied the heritage of an African people enslaved and brought far away from their homeland to islands to serve their European enslavers. The Africans, though far away from their home, improvised and created an instrument to replace the distant drum that was banned and taken away from them. The steelpan was their answer to the many questions they silently asked themselves as their estrangement placed them in a strange land and circumstances under tremendous suffering with no one to hear their pleas. They transformed the drum into a steel instrument so that they could give cultural articulation to calm their fears with its music. With the steelpan instrument the bridge to their culture remained open. Although they were taken from their homes in Africa, remnants of their culture remained with them leading to the invention of the steelpan.

## The New World

"I'm a slave from a land so far  
I was caught, Oh yes, and I was brought  
Here from Africa."  
Sparrow

Africans were enslaved and brought to the new world by the Europeans. But, Africans were not always slaves. Their history did not begin with slavery. Slavery was the result of conquest by a foreign invader who was the last on the human evolutionary ladder towards civilization. While Europe lay in the dark ages, there were African civilizations in Egypt, Mali, Ghana, Songhay, Benin and Timbuktu. But, by the time Europeans began to enslave Africans numerous wars among Africans and Africans and Africans and Arabs had engulfed the African continent leading to their military demise. And, even though they resisted slavery with their every breath, nevertheless, they were finally conquered, enslaved and brought to the new world. One of the places they to which were brought was the twin-islands of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinbago was one of the various islands in the Caribbean that was used to drop off the slaves to work on the plantations. Spain was the first European power to bring African slaves to Trinidad. Then came the French and finally the British. Throughout European slavery, the slaveholders tried to strip the Africans of their culture in order to control and rule them. But, the Africans resisted until the Christian religion was used to pacify them making it easy for the Europeans to complete the enslavement.

During slavery in Trinidad, the British forbade the Africans from playing the drum. The African population, who are the descendants of Africans, were made slaves and taken away from their homeland, deprived of their freedom and brought to the island first by the Spaniards, then the French and finally the British during the European Slave Trade. In spite of the horrors of slavery and its aftermath, the Africans held on to some aspects of their culture and recreated the drum that they used in their social and cultural ceremonies to ease their oppressive conditions in the New World. The drum was the instrument that their ancestors used in their social, cultural and religious festivities throughout Africa.

After the British banned the drum, the Africans created the tamboo-bamboo instruments out of bamboo to express their musical heritage. But, the British also banned the tamboo-bamboo music. The Africans resisted every British attempt to suppress the steelband and the steelpan survived. After the tamboo-bamboo was banned, the Africans turned to steel drums to provide musical instruments. The British also banned the steeldrums because they saw its use as subversive. The British banned the first two instruments for security reasons because they suspected that the Africans were using those instruments to transmit messages to one another to plot revolts to escape from their oppressive conditions.

The beginning of the Second World War made the Africans important to the British Army as the British sought soldiers to fight their war abroad in Europe and Asia. Thus, the British were forced to enlist Africans in a unit called the West Indian Regiment. But, there was still no tolerance for African culture, in spite of their contributions to the war effort. In the 1950s, the Africans middle-class began to demand self-government. The importance of the Africans' presence in the war gave the panists the opportunity to enlist some middle-class Africans, local religious leaders and a few white local liberals in their fight against the banning of the steelpan. Leaders like Albert Gomes, Beryl McBurnie, Lennox Pierre and Canon Farquar were at the forefront fighting for the rights of panists. They believed that the steelband was a positive force to shape the 'moral' character of the panists (player of the steelpan) by giving them something to do with their creativity.

But, the British saw the panists as savages and the steelpan as crude and noisy and continued their ban on the steelband. The British enlisted the Police in their attempt to stamp out African culture and its off spring, the steelpan. The Police harassed and arrested the panists with charges of 'disturbing the peace' in their attempt to destroy the steelband movement. Some times the Police would raid the panyards and destroy the steelpans. The harassment by the Police placed a stigma on the steelband movement as a group of low-class hooligans creating noise during the night with their steelpans. As a result, most parents were reluctant to permit their sons to join any steelband orchestra. And, most parents forbade their daughters to date panists. The panists became persona non grata in their own land. As a matter of fact, most people called the steelpan a 'noisy' instrument and several attempts were made to suppress it.

During the 1930s, Trinidad was still a colony of Britain. Africans were denied all the benefits of civil society. They had no rights and were unequal before the law. The British made every attempt to strip them of their culture. In their quest to find instruments to use in their festivities, a few Africans, who resided in the surrounding urban districts of Port of Spain, invented the steelpan. The steelpan evolved out of the climate of white supremacy, racism and colonialism that existed in Trinidad in the 1930s. In the early 1930s, the Africans attempted to create a musical instrument by using discarded biscuit drums, caustic soda drums, dustbins and any other steel drum they could get their hands on to accomplish that goal.

The early creations were simple. Due to the panists' lack of musical training, the early steel drums carried only a handful of notes. At first, the panists created a crude instrument with limited notes. The instrument was tuned to whatever upper pitch they could get. It became known as 'Ping Pong'. Later on, more notes were added and it was called a tenor pan. The early association with the steel drum's development has enshrined in the local language the term 'pan'. But, the steelpan instrument that we know today was created from discarded oil drums. And, its correct pitch is in the soprano range.

In the early 1940s, the United States had an Army base on the island of Trinidad. The Army would discard their oil drums after use. Since the Africans were prepared for this opportunity, they took those discarded oil drums and used them to fashion and develop the steelpan. They soon got another opportunity to display their new instruments. After the end of the Second World War, Trinidad celebrated the victory over Japan (VJ Day) with a large carnival festival. On VJ day the nation awoke to the sounds of steelbands like Invaders, Rising Sun, Hell Yard, Desperadoes and Free French. That celebration provided the impetus to the Africans to merge their creation with the national carnival celebrations. They came on the road with their crude instruments created from the oil drums and played them to large onlookers. Later, in the early 1950s the steelpan was refined and tuned properly by Ellie Mannette. Ellie Mannette, then leader of the Invaders Steel Orchestra, based his styling on musical 4th circles and added more notes to the steelpan making it the instrument that we know today. Today, the steelpan plays all types of music, including classical, reggae, jazz, latin and calypso. It has been a part of jazz ensembles and has accompanied popular singers.

## Emergence

"The steelband music is very sweet  
You get a rhythm with every beat."  
Kitchener

The origin of the steelpan was an urban activity that grew out of the working class industrial districts of Port of Spain and San Fernando. There are not too many working class communities that can claim to be the creators of a musical instrument. Yet, it is believed that the working class industrial district of Laventille, a low-income African community on the hilly urban area of East Port of Spain, can proudly claim to be the birthplace of the only musical instrument of the 20th century. It is probable that this phenomenon occurred simultaneously in other districts like St. James, Woodbrook and even as far as the Southern districts of the country. But, what is certain is that the creators of this 20th century phenomenon were young African men, regardless of the district from which they came.

There are some people who give credit to Winston 'Spree' Simon as the individual responsible for giving the instrument its first voice. This claim has been disputed by some saying that no one person created the steelpan. Anyway, Mr. Simon was even given a national award as the creator and innovator of the steelpan. I believe that there were many panists exploring the idea in different parts of the island. Also, I believe that the steelpan was invented in the working class district behind the bridge. I do not think that any one person was responsible for the creation of the steelpan. Some panologists (steelpan researchers) maintain that other panists: Sonny Roach, Leonard Morris, Oscar 'Bogart' Pile, Neville Jules, Ellie Mannette, Dudley Smith, Randolph 'Fisheye' Olliverie and Wilfred Harrison also contributed to the early development of the national instrument. The many pioneers of the steelband movement stretched from the north in Port of Spain to the South in San Fernando. But, those pioneers in the city of Port of Spain stood out for recognition because Port of Spain the capital and the major carnival metropolis. Also, the steelpan has always been intrinsically linked to carnival. The panologists will have to settle that dispute. What is certain is that Africans created the steelpan in Trinidad.

The 1930s were the years of African and Indian resistance in Trinidad against the inhuman, uncivilized and barbaric conditions imposed upon them by British colonization. As a result, there were riots in the Sugar Cane and Oil industries that employed Indians and Africans respectively. The British introduced martial law to suppress the riots. Each step of the resistance brought incremental changes. But, the Africans and Indians persevered. It was that hostile environment during the years from 1939 through 1945, which gave birth to the modern steelband. And, from 1945 to 1960 the modern steelband was consolidated.

The British colonized Trinidad and Tobago and ruled the twin-islands through 1956. Previously, two former colonialists, France and Spain, ruled the twin-islands. In 1956, self-government was introduced to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and a new political party called the Peoples National Movement (PNM) was formed. In 1956, the PNM took over the reigns of self-government under the leadership of the late Dr. Eric Eustace Williams. Dr. Williams, a former island scholarship winner, Oxford graduate, scholar and historian, became the first Premier of the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1962, Dr. Williams became the nation's first Prime Minister. In 1986, he died after leading the nation and his party for an unbroken thirty years. The longest unbroken reign for any democratic leader. His contribution to the steelband movement was the initiation of a steelband association to represent the affairs of the steelband movement. Under his leadership the government contributed financial assistance to the steelband movement. It was also the first time that a local government placed financial assistance to the steelband in its annual budget. Also, he organized the local businesses to sponsor the various steelbands granting

them tax relief for doing so. Later, he would grant many steelbands space on lands that the government controlled to open their panyards.

"Trinidad and Tobago  
Will always live on  
Colonialism gone  
Our nation is born  
We go follow our leader  
They always do their best . . . ."  
Sparrow

On August 31, 1962, Trinidad and Tobago was granted political independence from Britain. But, the ruling classes continued to view the steelband movement as a necessary nuisance only to be tolerated during the carnival celebrations. After carnival, the local radio stations banned steelband and local music on the radio. During the Lenten season, for forty days and nights, the two local radio stations Radio Trinidad and Radio Guardian refused to play steelband and calypso music. Even in some homes children were forbidden to sing a calypso tune during the Lenten season.

As a result, calypso and particularly the steelband, were relegated in the peoples' consciousness primarily to the carnival celebrations. That perception would continue to haunt their acceptance as normal art forms way into the future when attempts were made to play calypso and steelband music throughout the year rather than only during the carnival season. The high record sales that occurred during the carnival celebrations seemed to drop drastically after the carnival season ended. After carnival, the fervor that gripped the people evaporated until the next year. The large crowds that attended the panyards, supported the Panorama competitions and assisted the Steelbands on the road for carnival disappeared.

In 1976, Trinidad and Tobago adopted a republican form of government thus ending the monarchical system that it inherited from Britain. It replaced the Governor General, as representative of the Queen of England, with a President. But, in spite of the new republicanism, most of the upper and middle classes and especially the local elite still did not consider the steelpan to be a serious instrument. During elections the politicians would make several promises to aid and assist the steelband movement. But, the majority of the support for the steelband movement came from the ordinary African and Indian citizens, the two largest groups in the country. The African and Indian upper classes, the Chinese and the local white population gave very little support to the steelband movement. To the contrary, they did everything in their power to stifle the growth of the steelband movement. One of the ways they attempted to do this was to ban the playing of steelband music during the Lenten season for 40 days and forty nights.

## Leadership

"I could beat everyone of them in the band  
Except for the captain, that's the man."  
Sparrow

The leadership structure of the steelband was unconsciously based on the old African hierarchy system. The steelband was governed by a group of elders in the community and a Captain was elected as leader/chief of the steelband. The captain was the Chief of the steelband and the steelband was the tribe. But, he was also accountant, pan-tuner, musical arranger and lead 'badjohn.' He led the steelband with an iron fist. But, he was unselfish with the steelband. He gave the steelband all his time, money, creativity and sometimes his life. He lived for his steelband, most times neglecting his family. His passion for his steelband knew no bounds.

The Captain ruled with the help of a Committee that consisted of a secretary, treasurer and two or three trustees. Although the committee had some powers of persuasion yet, the Captain was the man in charge and everyone knew that. He was a benevolent dictator who was in total control of his steelband. He exercised his authority in the following ways: he chose the tune for the steelband festivals, the 'mas' to be played on Carnival days and the fetes in which to play. There was to be no dispute and his word was final. There was no appeal to his decisions. In most cases he was a benevolent dictator. Those who questioned his authority faced suspension from the steelband. Sometimes, dissenters were banished or temporarily banned from a steelbands because they challenged the Captain's orders and had to leave the community and reside elsewhere. Two cases in particular come to mind. The first case was when a few members of the Desperadoes Steelband Orchestra had a disagreement with Rudolph Charles, the band's leader. As a result, they decided to leave the band and open their own steelband a few blocks away from the Desperadoes Steelband Orchestra. When Rudolph heard about it he went immediately to their panyard and smashed their pans shouting, "The hill has room for only one steelband and that is Despers." That ended the dissent.

The second notable case that I know of was when panists from Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra 'stage side' obtained a contract to play at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel. After a few months, a few members complained that all the panists from the orchestra should be given an opportunity to play at the hotel since it was an opportunity to make some money. That led to an argument between the 'stage side' and the other panists. The Captain, Neville Jules, called a special meeting to discuss the matter. At the meeting he decided that there would be a rotation of the panists to give everyone an opportunity to share in the financial rewards of the job. The 'stage side' members disagreed with his decision and left the orchestra. Of course, they lost the contract at the Hilton Hotel. The dissenters formed a new steelband called Boston Symphony Steel Orchestra. Their Captain was Winston Gordon. They opened their panyard on Piccadilly Street at the corner of Laventille Road.

As a result, the Captain banned some of the dissenters from returning to the Trinidad All Stars Steelband. Boston Symphony lasted for two years. After the steelband disbanded, some of the panists joined other steelbands, a few returned to Trinidad All Stars while some migrated to the United States and Canada and some stopped playing pan altogether.

Steelband Captains were chosen for life and their word was the law. Some steelbands had a group of community elders who advised the Captain. As long as they supported the Captain he was untouchable. At times they would replace him but that was seldom. Most Captains led their steel orchestras until they died, migrated or retired. The Captaincy was always male. He was trusted and the members depended on his wisdom and bravery. He settled all disputes among members of the orchestra. Some of the famous steelband Captains were: Rudolph Charles aka Charlo (Desperadoes), Neville Jules (Trinidad All Stars), Ellie Mannette (Invaders), Philmore 'Boots' Davidson and Kenny Hart (City Syncopators), Michigan (City Symphony)

Oscar Pile aka Bogart (Casablanca), Winthrop Thomas (Joyland Synco), Kim Loy (Hilanders), Earl Rodney (Harmonites), Stephen Nicholas aka Goldteeth (Renegades), Arthur Byer (Sunland) and Anthony Williams (North Stars).

## The Panist

"If your sister talk to a steelband man  
The family want to break she hand,  
Put she out, lick out all she teeth in she mouth  
Pass, you outcast."  
Sparrow

It has been a long hard struggle for the panist. He began as a pingpong man, then he became a steelbandman, then he was called a panman and finally he became a panist. That title gave him a new status as a musician. But, the panist is yet to achieve the social and economic status for creating the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. In the 1960s and up to the late 1970s, the steelband was considered a community band. The panists were mostly young unemployed men who came together to form a steelband. In the early days women did not play the steelpan. Most of the panists were men who struggled without recognition and respect to give a voice to their creation. They were never paid for their skills. Even today, the only people who make any money from the steelband are the pan-tuners, arrangers and businesses that sponsor the steelbands. Today, few panists like Robert Greenidge, Len 'Boogsie' Sharpe, Rudy 'Two Left' Smith, Othello Molineaux and Andy Narell are lucky to carve out a financial existence. In the beginning of the steelband movement, most pan tuners and arrangers belonged to the individual steelband. They tuned the instruments and arranged pieces for the steelband. But, an exception was made for the bi-annual Music Festivals. During that time the steelbands would hire a trained musician (most times from the Police Band) to arrange and conduct the classical piece to be performed at the festival.

During the 1950s, 1960s and throughout the early 1970s the relationship with in-house pan tuners and arrangers gave the steelbands their individual tones. On a carnival day you could tell which steelband you were listening to without seeing that steelband. You knew its sound. It seems that each steelband had a sound unique to its arranger. In the West, steelbands like Invaders and Starlift were distinguishable from the rest. In the South, steelbands like Cavaliers and Hatters had their individual sound. In the East, steelbands like Flamingoes and Cordettes each had their own sound. In Port of Spain All Stars, Despers, Casablanca and Syncopators were distinguishable from the rest. In those days no two steelbands sounded alike.

In the late 1970s, that distinction began to change as the Panorama competition became the main outlet for the steelbands. In order to be competitive, some steelbands started hiring outside tuners and arrangers. Popular arrangers like Len 'Boogsie' Sharpe, Ken 'Professor' Philmore, Clive Bradley and Ray Holman were in demand. Tuners like Bertie Marshall, Coker, Lincoln, Butch Kellman became absentee tuners for some steelbands. The fact that tuners and arrangers were now hired created a new relationship between tuners and arrangers and the steelband. Before, the integration of the tuner and arranger with the steelband was an important relationship as it gave the steelband control of the tuner and arranger. Also, they were loyal and available to the steelband twenty-four hours and most times for free. That relationship was lost when the tuners and arrangers started to migrate to other steelbands. Now, steelbands seek the popular tuners as Butch Kellman, Bertie Marshall, Wallace Austin and Linclon Noel and hire them to tune their instruments.

The resident tuner is a thing of the past. Still, few steelbands are able to keep an in-house tuner and arranger. Steelbands like Desperadoes (Bertie Marshall), Phase II (Roland Harrigin) and Renegades (Butch Kellman) are the only steelbands that can lay claim to that luxury. The arrangers have become an integral part of the steelband movement because their arrangements give the steelbands the opportunity to enter the various steelband competitions. The arranger is hired for the Panorama festival. He is not concerned with any particular sound for the steelband. The businesses that sponsor the steelbands receive free advertisements and tax breaks from the government. As a result, they are willing to assist their sponsored steelband to pay the pan tuner and arranger since entering and winning the Panorama competition gives that steelband media coverage and public exposure which becomes a windfall for businesses. Hence, every steelband with their sponsor seek the tuning services of the popular pan tuners.

As stated earlier, in the beginning the steelbands did not pay the panists. In later years, some steelbands were able to pay the panists from the monies they received from playing in the parties and carnival band fees. In the 1960s and 1970s, during the carnival season, most of the steelbands played in the carnival parties. But, every panist had to play the first year without any payment before he received any money. And, most of the time, whatever money the steelbands made from parties or carnival band fees were used to maintain the orchestra by buying or tuning new instruments. It was not until the 1980s, with the arrival of pan soloists like Robert Greenidge, Ken Philmore, Liam Teague, Len 'Boogsie' Sharpe, Rudy 'Two Left' Smith, Andy Narell and Othello Molineaux, that panists started to receive any real financial reward for their talent. Throughout the years, those soloists were able to produce records and CDs to display their skills.

Today, whatever money the band collects is used to hire a musical arranger for the Panorama competition and/or a pan tuner to tune the instruments. The arranger and the pan tuner sign a contract with the sponsor of the steelband and are paid by that sponsor. Their services are mainly used for the Panorama competition or the musical festival that is held bi-annually. After the Panorama and music festival competitions they leave the steelband until the next year when their services are needed again. The cost to arrange a tune for the Panorama competition and prepare the steelband far exceeds the prize money the winning steelband receives because pan tuning and arranging are expensive. The steelbands that are fortunate to have a sponsor are able to meet both financial demands. But, for most steelbands the competition is not cost effective. Steelbands are always in the red in their finances.

In the early days, there were a few favorite panists in each steelband who attracted a popular following. Those panists were known for their extraordinary pan skills and playing abilities. During rehearsals people would gather close to their favorite panist and watch and cheered as he played his instrument. The panist was treated as a rock star is today. On carnival days, the steelbands would put their pans together on steel racks with wheels and traveled throughout the city. The pans would be clustered together according to the similarity of the instruments. So, they would put the tenor pans together, the bass pans together and so on. The steelband members would pull those racks. And, people would pull those racks through the streets sometimes all day and night until the carnival festival was over. Many would assist their favorite panist. Some of the favorite and popular panists were Rupert Alexander, Guns and Shoreland, bass (Trinidad All Stars); Knolly Shine and Kelvin Hart, tenor pan, Russell Carter, bass and Roy 'Black Roy' Phillip, guitar pan (City Syncopators); Spongy, bass (City Symphony); Emmanuel 'Corbeaux Jack' Riley, tenor pan (Invaders) and Ancil 'Dumpling' Graves, double seconds (Boston Symphony).

## The Panyard

"Panyard horrors  
From landowners"  
Why should there be any Bandleaders."  
Merchant

A young man is standing behind his tenor pan playing a few notes. A second young man accompanies him playing the bass pan. A third young man is playing the cello pan. A fourth young man is beating an iron keeping time for the band. Another young man is playing the guitar pan. Some young men are assisting with the cleaning of the yard. A few women are cooking. And, a few young men are hanging out talking. The pan tuner is preparing some discarded oil drums to be made into steelpans. He begins by cutting the drum to the required length. Next, he prepares a fire in the open panyard to burn the oil out of the drum. Then, he sinks the drum. Again, he grooves out the notes on the drum. Next, he burns the drum once more for a longer period. Lastly, he tunes each note to the required pitch. The scene could be an African making a drum in a village in Africa. But, it is 20th century Trinidad in the panyard of the City Syncopators Steelband Orchestra, one of the top steelbands 'behind the bridge,' in the East Dry River community.

The nucleus of the steelband movement was the panyard. The panyard was the place where the steelbands practiced and housed their instruments. It was there that an insignificant steeldrum would rise like the phoenix through the fires and hammered and tempered by the tuners to be transformed into the steelpan. It was the hub of all steelband activity. The panyard was usually a space carved out in a yard that was either owned by the captain of the band, a band member or band supporter, who permitted its use.

Most of the panyards were constructed from wood and covered with rusty galvanize. Others were constructed from concrete with iron gates. Sometimes it would be a part of government lands that the government permitted the steelbands to use. Other times, it would be a private unused lot. The panyard was the home of the steelband. The panyard was the center of all activities for the steelband. There was activity six days a week. On Sunday the panyard was empty. During the week, panists would gather every day and night to rehearse their tunes, discuss various things and meet women. The panyard was also a place of recreational activity. It was the center of musical activity in the community. Also, the panyard was a place of safety.

During the Carnival celebrations, the panyard was filled with excitement and gaiety as the orchestra prepared for the Panorama competition. As the steelbands rehearsed their tunes of choice for the Panorama competition hundreds of people would gather outside the panyards overlaying into the streets to listen and encourage the steelbands to do their best. During practice sessions a few of the women members of the steelband would cook and the captain would provide beverages and alcoholic drinks. People would eat and drink all night until the practice sessions were over. The panyard was also a place for people to meet and socialize during the day. As the day of the Panorama competitions approached the whole community would be excited. From that moment on, the community concentrated on one thing, the Panorama competition. During the carnival season people would travel to different communities to listen to the various steelbands.

## The Steelband

"What a talent, plenty talent  
You hear what I say  
Steelband music is the greatest talent today."  
Terror

During the 1960s, most of the steelbands in the country was situated in the East Dry River district known as "Behind the Bridge". The area boasted of steelbands like Desperadoes, City Syncopators, Joyland Synco, Hilanders, Stereophonics, Boston Symphony, City Symphony, Melo Stars, Tokyo and Renegades. Those ten steelbands occupied the area beginning from Mango Rose at Piccadilly Street and ending all the way to the top of Laventille Hill at the Laventille Community Centre that the Desperadoes Steel Orchestra used as their panyard. In those days most of the young people behind the bridge played pan or 'mas' on carnival day with one of those steelbands. The era of the carnival 'mas' bands like Savage, Peter Minshall and Poison had not yet arrived.

The steelband orchestra consists of many steelpan instruments. Its repertoire is made up of calypsos, classical, latin and religious music. In the late 1940s, Ellie Mannette created his styling of the soprano (tenor) pan and changed the design to concave with convex note-dents and increased the number of notes in the pan. The years 1938-1939 is considered the "birth" years of the steelband movement. Between 1939 and 1945, the first melody pans with three to eight tones were introduced. In 1945, the first real steelbands came on the road during the carnival celebrations. In 1946, the Invaders Steel Orchestra was reported to be the first steelband to organize 'mas' on the road.

In 1951, a National Steel Orchestra was formed. Its mission was to take steelband music abroad. This new steelband orchestra was called the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO). It consisted of panists from the various steelbands. Some of the panists that were a part of TASPO were: Anthony Williams, Philmore Davidson, Patsy Haynes and Sterling Betancourt. Trinidad All Stars Steelband did not join TASPO because they did not belong to the Steelband Association. TASPO made two trips to Britain, the first in 1951 and the second in 1954. Both trips were memorable. The orchestra played at all the leading concert halls and received rave reviews. In the 1960s, another National Steelband Orchestra was formed. That orchestra traveled as far as Africa spreading pan-music to the world. By the late 1970s the National Steel Orchestra was no more. The winner of the Panorama competition became the new Pan Ambassador. The winning steelband now receives, as part of their first prize, a trip abroad to represent pan-music.

In the 1960s, Anthony Williams created his 'spider pan' design with 4ths and 5ths musical notations for the steelpan. Since the 1970s, most calypsonians sing a calypso about the steelpan or the steelband. Today, there are over one hundred and thirty-five conventional steelband orchestras in Trinidad and Tobago. The conventional steelband consists of up to 100 panists covering a tonal range almost equal to a grand piano. Today, the steelband orchestra is comprised of the following instruments:

TENOR (SOPRANO)  
DOUBLE SECONDS  
CELLO PAN (BARITONE)  
DOUBLE TENORS (ALTO)  
GUITAR PAN  
FOUR PAN  
DOUBLE SECOND (TENOR)  
TRIPLE CELLO (BARITONE)  
TENOR BASS  
SIX BASS  
NINE BASS  
QUADROPHONIC PAN  
IRON

"Ah band mey jaw  
And I make up mey mind for them  
They ask for war, so to solve it is no problem  
Their crude behavior I don't approve  
They stepping out of their grove  
Renegades, Sparrow coming for you."  
Sparrow

Some of the steelbands had derivative gangs that were comprised of teenagers who lived in the area and were either members or supporters of the steelband. There were gangs like Spike Jones and later Thunderbirds from Desperadoes Steel Orchestra; Lawbreakers from Renegades Steel Orchestra; Cliftones from Casablanca Steel Orchestra; Applejackers from Blue Diamonds Steel Orchestra and Silk Hats from City Symphony Steel Orchestra. Those steelbands supported their teenage gangs in their gang fights. The other steelbands had adult gangs and seldom supported their teenage gangs in their gang fights. An exception was when the teenager was a relative or paramour of one of the members of the steelband. Most of the time the adults in the steelband were too busy with their own gang fights and had no time for other fights.

There were fights between steelbands like Desperadoes and Tokyo, Casablanca and Invaders and Renegades and Invaders. Most of those gang fights would start before Carnival and culminate on Carnival day creating panic throughout the city of Port of Spain. The two most infamous of those steelband fights were one in 1954 and another in 1959 between the Desperadoes Steelband Orchestra and San Juan All Stars Steelband Orchestra. The fight in 1959 took place on Carnival Tuesday in front of the Port of Spain General Hospital. The 1954 steelband fight was memorialized in calypso by the calypsonian Blakie in his 1954 calypso "Steelband Clash." Four years later, Kitchener did the same about another fight in 1962 in his 1963 calypso "The Road".

The years 1960 through 1970 were the golden years of the steelband movement. Steelbands like North Stars, Invaders, Desperadoes, Trinidad All Stars, Hilanders, Cavaliers, Silver Stars, City Syncopators and Ebonites took the stage. Panists like Bertie Marshall and Anthony Williams experimented and innovated in their attempt to improve the instrument. The 'Bomb' competition was introduced. At the 'Bomb' competition, all the Steelbands would gather at Independence Square and play classical pieces or popular tunes, sometimes jazz, in calypso timing. The 'Bomb' competition took place early Jouvert morning on Carnival Monday. Some of the more memorable 'bomb' tunes were: "In a Persian Market" and "Bacarolle" by Trinidad All Stars; "Roses from the South" by Ebonites; "Theme from King and I" and "Carmen" by Invaders; "Czardus" and "Theme from the Sound of Music" by Desperadoes; "I Feel Pretty" and "Adagio in C" by Starlift; "Moonlight Serenade" "Night and Day" and "Cindy" by City

Symphony; "Gypsy Rondo" and "Let Ever'y Valley be Exalted" by Hilanders; "Theme from Doctor Zhivago" and "Ghosts Riders in the Sky" by Silver Stars and "Theme from Ten Commandments" and "Malaguena" by City Syncopators. City Syncopators was the first steelband in which I played mas. Most Trinbagonians may not remember the City Syncopators Steel Orchestra. But, 'Synco' holds two distinctions in the history of the steelband movement.

First, Synco holds the distinction for playing one of the largest sailor bands (I say the largest) in Carnival history: "USS Detroit-Sailors on Leave." Others say that the Tokyo Steelband played the largest sailor band: "USS Skip Jack". Some still claim that Trinidad All Stars played the largest sailor band: "USS Fleets In". Regarding Tokyo, I say that they were large because two steelbands joined with them to bring the sailor band. As to Trinidad All Stars I leave that up to the panologists.

At the time Synco played "USS Detroit" the band was situated at the home of its captain Kenny Hart in the Crescent at the top of Quarry Street, near Lastique Street. I remember it as if it was yesterday. It was a carnival Tuesday morning. As I stood on Quarry Street I never saw so many sailors in a band before. I walked from the top of Lastique Street down Quarry Street into Observatory Street and stopped at Royal cinema at the corner of Charlotte Street. There were sailors stretching for over two miles from side to side on the road. There were sailors of every description. What a spectacle! At that time, the late Philmore 'Boots' Davidson was the band's top bassman. Boots was one of the pioneers who traveled to England with the Trinidad Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) in the 1950s. Boots also created the six bass. Previously, the steelbands played the four bass. I was privileged to see him create it. City Syncopators entered the First Musical Festival held at Roxy cinema. Their soloist was Kelvin Hart. He played the tune Stardust and won.

As a child I used to visit Boots at his parents' home on LaResource Street, a block away from my home. His mother and my grandmother were good friends. As a child growing up behind the bridge I was always fascinated with the steelpan and the music but could not join any steelband because my grandparents did not approve. In those days most, if not all, parents disapproved of the steelband movement. Nevertheless, I would sneak away to the panyards. Every afternoon after school I visited Boots under his mother's house where he tuned the bass pans. I watched him as he cut the drums, burn them, sink them and drew the notes on each drum to create his masterpiece. Lastly, he hammered out each note. Philmore 'Boots' Davidson was a pioneer in the steelband movement. Later, Synco had a split. The younger panists left the band to form Joyland Synco under the captaincy of Winthrop Thomas. Some of the Joyland panists were: Gunga Din, the Ash brothers Herbert and Dennis (Tash), Juicy (Boldface brother), George, Change and Knolly Shine. Joyland lasted for two years when Winthrop left to form a musical combo called Five Fingers. After that the band broke up. Gunga Din and Tash joined Desperadoes.

Second, City Syncopators earned the distinction of having outplayed the best steelband, North Stars, at the 1966 Music Festival held at Queens Hall. Both steelbands played the same tune of choice 'Poet and Peasant' an overture piece by Franz Von Suppe. North Stars' arranger was Anthony Williams. Synco's arranger was Anthony Lynch from the police band. Even though Lynch did not play the steelpan he had a similar personality as Williams. Both men were soft spoken, gentle but very competitive. And, they never sought the limelight. But, Lynch's arrangement of 'Poet and Peasant' won the Margaret Russell trophy, (named after the wife of the festival's Adjudicator John Russell) for tune of choice, outplaying North Stars. But, North Stars won the overall competition. Some of the panists who played at the festival were: Ranga Rahaman; Monsoor 'Bounsin' Rahaman; Andrew Perry; Errol 'Chubby' Nicholas, Captain; Fitzroy 'Colpoke' Holder; Polcat; Stow; Carlyle Warner; Morris Miller; Ricky; Wilfred McLean; Andrew Barnett; Cecil 'Jumo' James; Michael 'Maceo' Mitchell; South; Vernon Mills; Jinks Wells; Cecil Sealy; King and Chicken, Selwyn McSween, lead tenor and soloist.

During the 1960s, the Hilanders Steelband Orchestra played in one of the country's most prestigious churches, the Catholic Cathedral. Under the leadership of Reverend John Sewell, an Anglican Minister from the Holy Trinity Church, the band played pieces from Bach, Handel and other European composers. It was well received by the parishioners although it was the first time that a steelband orchestra played music in a church. And, it was historic since the church was one of the biggest impediments to the steelband movement. It considered the steelpan an instrument of the devil. Its teachings barred its followers from truly appreciating the national instrument. That sentiment still holds true for some people today.

By 1963, the steelband became a permanent part of the annual Carnival celebrations. It was also the year that the steelbands held their first Panorama competition. Steelbands from all over the country competed against one another for the Panorama championship. The winning Steelband received money and a prize trip abroad. It was a time when steelbands used members from the orchestra to arrange their tunes for the Panorama competition. Steelbands viewed winning the panorama competition as the hallmark of their musical prowess. They took it very seriously and saw losing as a sign that they were lacking true musical excellence.

Also, during the Christmas holidays, the steelbands rendered concerts in the public square. Those concerts were first held at the Governor General's House, now President's House and then later at Woodford Square where the steelbands played the annual favorite Christmas songs and Carols for the general public. The Square became famous after the first and now deceased Prime Minister Dr. Eric E. Williams renamed it the University of Woodford Square due to the nightly political meetings he held there when he ran for election. Since he considered the meetings an opportunity to educate the masses he felt the new name University was fitting.

The concerts were called "Classics and Carols." During the week, people would gather at those concerts from 7:00 o'clock in the evening until late into the night listening to one of the top steelbands playing their favorite Christmas song or Carol. Sometimes there would be three steelbands performing. One of the memorable steelband concerts was the one performed by Pan Am North Stars Steelband Orchestra in Woodford Square. The concerts stopped in 1970 as some panists turned to the 1970 Black Power revolution.

Beginning in the late 1940s through the 1980s the steelband movement saw five major innovations: (1) Development of the instrument. (2) Steelband Organization. (3) Festivals. (4) Panorama and Festival Compositions by panists. (5) Chroming of the instrument. Those changes became the structure for the steelband movement that we know today. Other changes, like size of the steelband orchestra and number of panists in the Panorama competition would later define the steelband movement.