

STEELBAND IN CARNIVALS AROUND THE WORLD – THE ROLE OF T&T

In every country where steelbands participate in carnival or outside of carnival there are certain facts that are well known and established amongst the organisers, players and technicians connected to the particular steelband. These are as follows:

- Trinidad and Tobago is known as the place where steelband originated
- The names of Tony Williams, Bertie Marshall and Ellie Manette are known as some of the pioneering figures in the evolution of the instrument

Anthony Williams developed the concept of placing the notes on the tenor at intervals of fifths going counter-clockwise and intervals of fourths going clockwise. Tony developed this after various experiments with note placements.

Bertie Marshall discovered and developed the harmonic method of tuning to produce a more refined sound of the instrument. He also introduced the Double Tenor to the family of instruments.

Ellie Manette introduced the whole-tone method of note placement on the double pans, seconds and guitars.

This paper will try to examine the role of T&T nationals in the development of steelbands globally. The paper will look closely at the specific roles they have played in starting, developing and sustaining steel orchestras in the territories under review.

SECTION 1

Why do T&T nationals go abroad?

- Migration and trade patterns
- In search of a better life – T&T provided no real future for them
- Policy on arts in the adopted country
- Recognition and remuneration for their work
- Value of the artists

Let us examine some of the contributions to Carnival and its related arts that these nationals of T&T and the Caribbean made while they were in their adopted countries.

T&T and the English-speaking Caribbean were colonies of England so that most of our nationals who sought a better life looked to the mother country. It is also true that many Caribbean nationals migrated to North America especially after World War 2. Specifically, we went to the USA and later on Canada.

It was inevitable that our nationals in these 'new' countries will start a Carnival similar to the Trinidad Carnival. It is within this context that steelbands played a major role in the start-up and sustenance of these Carnivals.

Notting Hill Carnival started in the 60's as did Brooklyn's Labour Day Carnival and Toronto's Caribana.

SECTION 2

The character and components of these 'new' carnivals were similar to the Trinidad version, the masquerade, the music, the dance plus the steelband, all formed part of carnival mix.

For the purposes of this presentation I may focus on one of these carnival situations to make the points relevant to this discussion. The personalities will be different in the various territories but the conditions and situations were almost identical.

THE BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of World War 2 a number of situations impacted on the migration patterns of T&T and Caribbean nationals.

- Post-war UK needed skilled nationals to re-build that country after the Germans had destroyed many buildings and infrastructure in their cities
- The ascendancy of the USA in global politics and economics attracted many of our nationals seeking betterment for themselves and their families

CLAUDIA JONES, a Trinidadian, was a radical intellectual and political activist. She was deported from the US to England because of her 'subversive' activities. She was one of the founders of the Notting Hill Carnival. A statue of Claudia had been erected and placed in "Carnival Village" in London, in recognition of her contribution to the institution of Carnival.

TRINIDAD ALL STEEL PERCUSSION ORCHESTRA (TASPO) toured England and France in 1951 performing at various venues and introducing steelband music to those countries for the first time.

STERLING BETANCOURT, a member of TASPO, remained in London where he teamed up with another Trini musician, RUSSELL HENDERSON, to begin and develop a steelband movement in UK and Europe. Sterling was recently awarded an MBE for his contribution to British Immigrant Culture.

PHILMORE 'BOOTS' DAVIDSON, another TASPO member, soon followed and went to London to meet his friend, Sterling. They were joined by CARLTON 'ZIGALEE' CONSTANTINE a few years later. They were the ones who started the spread of steelband in UK/Europe. They also played an important role in the beginnings of the Notting Hill Carnival.

THE ESSO TRINIDAD STEELBAND (SOUTHERN SYMPHONY) was originally from La Brea and migrated to Laventille because of the demand for the band on the post-war circuit on Wrightson Road and the Naval Base at Chaguaramas.

They toured more than forty two countries between 1959 and 1966, introducing steelband music to thousands of people who had never before heard about Trinidad much less the steelband instrument. There are four persons from this group I should mention, although all may not be related directly to carnival.

THEOPHILUS 'PHIL' TRIM played tenor and sang with Southern Symphony, he is the composer of the 1960's mega-hit record "MAMMIE BLUE". Phil has been living in Spain since the break-up of the steelband in the 60's.

ASHTON 'LOMAT' JOHN was the drummer for SS, he remained in Europe and excelled as a singer and percussion player until he finally settled in Sweden near to his colleague and band-mate ROBIN BELGRAVE. Lomat died and was interred here in Port of Spain in 2009.

BELGRAVE AND CLIFTON BONAPARTE were members of SS, Belgrave was the leader of the steelband. During their time touring they had free time on their hands so they learned to play other instruments. In the early 1960's they left the steelband in Europe and returned to Trinidad and started a conventional orchestra called "THE BONAPARTE BROTHERS". They became a regular feature on the local music scene here in Trinidad.

LINCOLN 'DELGADO' NOEL went on to become one of the finest Tuners on the planet. His foray into pan tuning goes like this...."He had an idea about tuning before we left Trinidad...it was when we had a real problem that Lincoln came to the fore as a tuner...We were in Cairo, Egypt, and had to return to Rome, Italy, for a performance....the instruments went on the wrong flight and landed in New York...we landed in Rome, with no instruments....in two days Lincoln made all the instruments for the band...in time for the gig..."

MERRYMAKERS STEEL ORCHESTRA did a world tour in 1959 there are two members that come in for mention they are as follows:

RUDY 'TWO-LEFT' SMITH is a Jazz Musician, Arranger and Tuner based in Denmark, he has performed throughout Europe, Asia, North America and beyond. Rudy has been active in the London Carnival as Arranger, Tuner and Panorama Adjudicator.

ALFRED COOPER was the drummer for Merry-makers who remained in Europe performing with various bands and establishing himself as a top drummer on the circuit. Alfred died in Toronto last year (2010) after a long battle with ill-health.

During this period American Folk Singer, PETE SEEGER, a legend in his own right, was introduced to the steelband around 1956. He learned to tune, visited Trinidad, started his own band and wrote a book on Tuning.

SECTION 3

Because I am familiar with the Notting Hill Carnival, I wish to use this as the example to show the role of Transnational Citizens of Caribbean roots in the development and continuity of that Carnival. I will try to look at the various roles necessary for the advancement of steelband and other carnival arts.

TUNERS OF CARIBBEAN ROOTS

GERALD FORSYTHE, from Woodbrook, was a member of Invaders. He is an accomplished Pianist, Tuner, Arranger, Pan Player and Steelband Adjudicator. He was instrumental in establishing Pan in Schools in England in the 70's. He toured with SS to Japan when the Bonapartes left to return to Trinidad. He is a founding member of the Guild of UK Tuners.

FRANK ROLLOCK, from Tacarigua, has been the Leader, Tuner and Arranger of the London All Stars Steel Orchestra based in Brixton for many years. Frank has almost his entire family playing in his band and has been a pioneering figure for steelband in England.

MICHAEL 'BUBBLES' OLLIVIERA, from St James, was a member of Pan Am North Stars. They were invited to perform in London around 1970 and there was a mix-up that caused half the band to be in London while the other half remained in Trinidad. Those that were in London started a steelband called "20th Century Steel Orchestra". They toured and performed regularly in the UK and Europe. 'Bubbles' is an accomplished Player, Tuner and Arranger. Still very active in pan, he was the Arranger for Reading All Steel Percussion Orchestra (RASPO) at the 2010 Panorama in London.

TOUSSAINT CLARKE, from Barbados, is a Tuner and is associated with "Real Steel" of Plymouth, England, they participate in the London Panorama and Carnival. Toussaint tunes for steelbands in England, Europe and his native Barbados.

"BIGS" AND HIS SON, from St Vincent, have been tuning in England for many years. Their band was Eclipse Steel Orchestra of Tottenham, London. The band was a regular participant at the Notting Hill Panorama and Carnival. A few years ago "Bigs" died, his son continues the tradition of his father, as a Tuner.

AUBREY BRYAN, from Guyana, is an established Tuner for many years now. He lives in Croydon, South London and tunes for several bands, institutions and individuals in UK and Europe.

DUDLEY DICKSON, from Grenada, tunes for Ebony (London), Phase 2 (T&T) and many other bands in Europe and South Africa. In a recent interview in a magazine Dudley is quoted thus...***"I will really like to teach Tuning to youths in my native Grenada and other parts of the Caribbean. There seems to be a serious lack of tuners there..."***

SECTION 4

This section deals with persons in Administration and Leadership Roles in the Notting Hill Carnival

PEPE FRANCIS, from Grenada/Morvant, was a player with Ebonites/Harmonites before migrating to England. He has been the President of the British Association of Steelbands (BAS) for many years. He is also the Manager of Ebony Steelband, the 19 times Panorama Champions of England.

CLYDE 'MASH-UP' PHILIP, from Port of Spain, was the Leader of Mangrove Steel Orchestra and Mangrove Mas Band for many years.

DEBI GARDENER (Guyana/UK) is the Secretary of the British Association of Steelbands. She is also a member of the Mangrove Steelband where she functions in a leadership role in the band.

GLORIA CUMMINGS (T&T) has been the President of the Notting Hill Mas Bands Association (NHMBA) for many years. She is also the leader of Flambouyant Mas Band in West London.

SHABAKA THOMPSON (T&T) is the Manager of Carnival Village, the Administrative hub of the Notting Hill Carnival. Shabaka is also the leader of the Yaa Ashanti Waa Mas Band

CLAIRE HOLDER (T&T/UK) is an Attorney and has been active in the Carnival as the Head of the Notting Hill Carnival Limited, a government agency that oversaw the Carnival.

SECTION 5

Some Arrangers

ANISE 'HAFFERS' HADEED, from Woodbrook, was a former member of Invaders and Phase 2. He has been the Arranger for Ebony for many years. He is the winning-most arranger anywhere in the world with a record of 19 wins in London. He performs as a soloist in the UK and Europe.

BRENT HOLDER, from Barataria, was a member of Harmonites , Ebony and Stardust (Lon). He is now the leader of Caribbean Steelband Institute (CSI) in West London. CSI is active throughout the year and participates in Panorama and Carnival.

INTELLECTUALS AND ADJUDICATORS

Haroun Shah – Professor of Biology, former member of Cavaliers of San Fernando. He is presently a member of Nostalgia UK and has been instrumental in organising three European Steelband Conferences addressing issues facing the Steelband Movement in Europe with a view to finding solutions.

Lionel Macalman – is from Guyana, he is a member of Nostalgia UK and a Professor of Education at East London University. He, like his colleague Haroun, has been instrumental in the three European Steelband Conferences.

June Bacchus-Ill – from T&T, was the music teacher at Bishops Anstey and San Juan Senior Comprehensive before moving to Tanzania, Africa. She has been an Adjudicator at the London Carnival for many years.

Junior Howell (T&T) was the Music Lecturer at Valsygn Teachers' College and a judge at Steelband and Calypso competitions here in Trinidad for many years. He has been an adjudicator for many years in London.

David 'Splav' Waddel (T&T) was a member of Starlift, Leader of Third World of St James and a commentator for the TV coverage of the National Panorama here in T&T. Splav has been a regular judge at the London Panorama and Carnival.

AJAMU NYOMBA – Professor of Economics, Clark Atlanta University – from Harmonites.

CONCLUSIONS

The developments in steelband/carnival in the adopted territories of T&T and Caribbean nationals came about spontaneously. Today carnival arts are part of the curriculum at schools and institutions across the 'first world' societies of UK, USA and Canada. This is due to the initial inputs of T&T and Caribbean nationals.

If we prepare for the future and examine the rest of the world for possible markets for carnival and carnival arts products, we can predict a serious impact on foreign exchange earnings for our country. Apart from all the talk, I really believe that it is time that we take ourselves seriously and do the ground-work to prepare our people for this multi-million dollar global industry.

Education; Training; Exposure; Resources; Political Will; are some of the ingredients we need for this initiative to take root. Let us look at the Commonwealth, we hosted them in 2009. They are our allies; there are 53 member-countries; there are steelbands in: Caribbean; Canada; UK; South Africa; Nigeria. There are about 40 commonwealth countries with no steelband at all.

Then there is the OAS, we hosted them too in the same year 2009. Little or no steelbands exist between Mexico, in the north and Chile in the south. There are 600 million people living there, there are similarities in history, culture and music, they are our closest neighbours...and what steps have we taken to engage them.

For me this is the real task to be undertaken...as any industry there needs to be training, education and facilities to develop and hone the skills that drive the industry. We need to build capacity to maintain a competitive advantage. At the same time we should spread the word...we can give you carnival and its related arts....the world is waiting!!

Some Other Examples

USA/Canada/other territories

Tuners:

US - Ellie Manette; Learie Harrigin; Base Worrel; Tony Enoch; Broko Jordan; Emmanuel Cobo-Jack' Riley; Stanley Warner;

Canada - Tommy Critchlow; Robbie Charles;

Australia - Denis Gonsalves; Lennox Jordan;

Japan – Michael Manish Robinson

Arrangers:

US – Wilfred Keel; Yohan Poppwell; Ancil White; Pra Trebuce;

Canada – Earl La Pierre; Larry Mosca; Salah Wilson; Terrance Sealey

PRESENTED BY NESTOR SULLIVAN

MANAGER OF PAMBERI STEEL ORCHESTRA