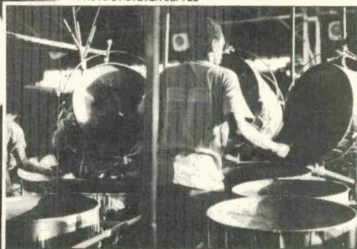


PHOTO BY GENE SCARMAZZO

At left, Crazy lives up to his name. Below, steel drums of the Panberri Steel Orchestra.

PHOTO BY STEVEN SEFTEL



# PORT OF SPAIN GONE INSANE

BY STEVEN SEFTEL

The first week of 1993 found me traveling south for the winter to Trinidad, home of the largest Carnival in the Caribbean and one of the best in the world. Like most pre-Lenten Carnivals, the street masquerade lasts just a few days, but what makes Trinidad's Carnival distinctive from others is that it is a season-long event—festivities take place for up to two months prior to Fat Tuesday.

It was five years since my last visit to Trinidad/Tobago, and all my senses were glad to be back: calypsos blaring from storefronts and passing maxi-taxis, the distinct aroma of curry filling the air, and the colorful sight of Hindus, Rastafarians, Christians, Buddhists, Baptists, and Muslims all living together in relative peace on the island, which is rightfully called "rainbow country."

One thing I've always said about the Trinis is that they're serious about their fun. When it comes to Carnival they've got a competition for everything: There's the calypso queen and young king, monarch, junior king, costume king and queen, masquerade band of the year, road march king, extempo, Panorama, small band and junior Panorama. I knew by arriving early I wouldn't miss much, and the level of

anticipation and excitement would increase with each passing week. In early January, most of the season's calypsos are just being released over the airwaves, steel bands are beginning to organize practice sessions, and mas camps are gathering fabrics, sequins, wire and other materials to construct their costumes, transforming ideas, concepts and dreams into colorful dancing bands of masqueraders a thousand or more strong, prancing through the streets of Port of Spain for two days in late February.

## PANORAMA

The big steel bands of Trinidad are a phenomenon which far exceeds the social functions of a musical instrument. If there is one unique aspect of Trinidadian culture of which the Trinis themselves are most proud, it's the steel drum. The huge pan orchestras which come out in full force to compete in Panoramata bring this art form to new heights each year. Next to Carnival itself, Panorama attracts not only the largest crowds but the most varied as well: black, white, Chinese and Indian all come out to support their national instrument

and their favorite band. The "big yard" becomes a beehive of activity and the paved track becomes a runway for these massive ships of steel on wheels, which from a distance

seem to be afloat in a sea of humanity. The bands line up in formation and play for the crowds, awaiting their turn to be launched onto the stage to play for the judges, grandstands, tv and radio. I can hear the nation's pride for this art form in the cheers, not just for the best performances, but for the smaller, struggling bands who also get a positive response for making their way to the competition at all.

The steel drum or pan as we know it today is a relatively new invention. It is recognized as the only distinct musical instrument to be invented in the 20th century. In the mid-1800s, skin-headed drums were banned from the island (although they continued to be used discreetly for *orisha* ceremonies). For public performances and celebrations, however, the players needed a substitute for the drums that would still enable them to play their accustomed rhythms and melodies. They turned to bamboo, added a few glass bottles, and thus the "tamboo bamboo" bands were formed. Varying lengths and widths of bamboo and partially filled bottles were used to replace the bass, mid and lead Shango drums. Tamboo bamboo still exists in Trinidad, but barely. There are just a few bands remaining and they seldom perform in public.

As the tamboo bamboo bands paraded in Port of Spain during Carnival, they were joined by other makeshift noisemakers—metal food utensils like coconut graters, used as *guiros*, and biscuit tins and buckets beaten with sticks. People began to notice that these instruments sounded different by the end of Carnival when the metal was bent out of shape and stretched. The tamboo bamboo gave way to iron bands, which eventually began to mix the kitchen instruments with vehicle instruments such as automotive brake drums, which were struck with iron rods and are still used today. Tuning metal became more and more successful and once oil drums were brought into the bands, bass and midrange notes became more accurately controlled until by the 1940s, steel bands as we know them today were just over the horizon.

The big steel bands are a fascinating spectacle. The bass players have up to a dozen full-size oil drums with just a few notes on each drum. The bassists have to cover a lot of area to reach all these notes, and enthusiastic players dance around, hitting notes above, below, behind and beside them. On the other end of the tonal range are the tenor players, who also really get into it on stage, but because all their notes are in one pan they have less room to move around. So the tenor players often jump up and down to the beat, some looking like they're about to explode with enthusiasm.

Between the highest tenors and the lowest basses lie the double tenors, double seconds,

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double guitars, double cellos and tenor bass. In the middle of the whole orchestra, on the tallest float of all sits the "engine room," the percussion section, which is the backbone and foundation of the band. It usually consists of various sizes of tuned car and truck brake drums, cowbell, woodblock, drum kit, scraper and whatever other goodies the band wants to throw in, provided they don't pass the limit of 120 players. The whole band is on wheels, with various floats and racks positioned on stage together and covered with a roof, which adds to the ship or UFO resemblance. During a performance, the whole thing is in motion from the dancing of the players. The engine room maybe rocking back and forth while various cello and tenor racks are bouncing up and down.

While at one time pannists were exclusively black men, today in some bands you might see a Chinese woman playing alongside a Rasta, East Indians, grey-haired men, white Europeans and kids, shoulders barely as high as their six-pan basses, who have to jump up to reach the farthest notes.

Many years ago the pans had a reputation for violence and there was strong rivalry between the bands. If the bands crossed paths during Carnival, mini-riots would sometimes erupt and the whole scene had a "bad john" (Trini term for "rude boy") reputation.

This situation has changed, however, and one of the people responsible for the new attitude is the late George Goddard, who was president of the steelband association and managed to bring peace to the art form. Following his inspiration, Exodus helped join four steel bands together as the Allied Pan Forces for their Carnival mas band. The participating members were Solo Harmonites, Birdsong, Laventille Sound Specialists and Exodus. After the steel band rivalries of years gone by, locals were most impressed to see four steel band flags flying together over one united band!

Goddard's nephew is Pelham Goddard, arranger, composer and keyboardist for Charlie's Roots and also composer and arranger for Exodus, probably the most sought-after and hardest-working musician on the island. If he's not writing or playing for Charlie's Roots or busy composing any and all of the last five year's worth of road marches or writing jingles for television, he might be up at the panyard conducting 100-plus pannists, most of whom can't read music.

His tune, "Dus' in Deh Face," was created specifically for Panorama '93. David Rudder

composed the lyrics, which address everyone's surprise when Exodus won last year's Panorama and the anticipation of whether they could do it again this year. The song captures the competitive spirit of Panorama and challenges all contending bands to a "musical war."

The annual Panorama competition, which lasts about two weeks and ends just before Carnival, is an event synonymous with the season. Thousands of musicians make great sacrifices to practice every night, foregoing all the fetes, calypso tents and most other pre-Carnival festivities. They virtually live at the panyards, practicing nightly for five to eight hours. As the players gather each evening so do the spectators and supporters who come out to listen to the development of the songs, drink a few beers, have some hot roasted peanuts or "aloo pies" and simply feel the vibe.

Some of my favorite evenings in Trinidad were when we went out to the panyards. Maybe we'd first go check Phase II and hear how Boogie Sharpe is rearranging his composition, "Birthday Party," and then over to the Renegade yard to hang out and see what Jit

helped the Exodus posse set up the band, rolling each rack of pans into its proper place on stage, the pan fanatics packing the north stand and grandstand of the Savannah were all jamming to the recorded calypso version of "Dus' in Deh Face."

This was Pelham's moment to really see what he'd created. Although he had been performing the song on stage with Charlie's Roots for nearly two months, the crowd reaction and vibration coming off that north stand during Panorama is completely unique.

Few steel band arrangers actually compose their own calypsos so this was a special opportunity for the tune to come full circle. Because the recorded calypso is played to the audience and judges before the steel band strikes up, it gives the composer the opportunity to send out his own energy in the form of the calypso to the audience and have all that energy given right back by the crowd, thus creating the mood for what he's about to unleash. Pelham just stood there in the middle of his steel band, observing the stands and absorbing all this energy.



PHOTO BY STEVEN SEFTEL

*Left, view of the Exodus panyard shows the rolling, tin-roofed pan racks. Above right, Panorama clamps the Amoco Renegades on stage.*

Samaroo was doing with their tune, Lord Kitchener's "Mystery Band." Then maybe go east and check Exodus or Potential Symphony doing the new instant-classic pan tune "Dus' in Deh Face," from David Rudder's new album. As the season progressed and we were driving through the populated areas, every few minutes seemed to bring the sounds of another panyard, either the ping-pong and pitter-patter of a few pans simply warming up or the musical thunder of a full orchestra "running" their tune.

I spent most of my time this year in the Exodus yard, where the band started to practice right after New Year's. It was fascinating to see how their tune, "Dus' in Deh Face," developed. In early weeks, small parts of the tune were practiced over and over, until gradually the whole thing was learned and run at slow, then faster tempos. After the Panorama preliminaries, it was back to the panyard as Pelham changed the arrangement, and after the zonal finals, the arrangement was changed again as the level of competitiveness increased.

I'll never forget the first time Exodus played the tune on stage at the preliminaries. As I

The performance was great; the energy level within the steel band, with all that sound being created, was tremendous, amplified by the tin roof over the 300 or so steel pans.

The judging criteria for Panorama is complicated. There are four categories: arrangement, general performance, tone and rhythm. These categories include considerations such as introduction, reharmonization, melodic development, motivic development, dynamics, interpretation, creativity and balance.

Of all people surprised at Exodus' win in 1992, none were more surprised than the Amoco Renegades. Keeping with their tradition, they played Kitchener's 1993 tune "Mystery Band." Kitch has an unmatched talent for writing calypsos which can be adapted to pan and improve upon by the arranger. Renegades know this well and their arranger, Jit Samaroo, did an excellent job once again.

The Renegades took the lead in the Panorama preliminaries and no one, not even Phase II, Exodus or the Witco Desperadoes, could catch them. They then proceeded to win the northern zonal finals, and following that the national semifinals.

The Saturday just before Carnival was the national finals, and the Renegades came on third, between Exodus and Tropical Angel Harps, out of 12 bands. Even though all the challengers had been busy rearranging, tightening and tuning, no one could outplay them that night. I'd never heard them tighter, and when the competition ended at 4 a.m., the judges gave them the win by only one and a half points out of a possible 500. Barely in

## T&T carnival '93 report...



of the year they would have liked it more, but in February they want to hear calypso and only calypso.

From there I headed straight to downtown Port of Spain, since J'ouvert morning officially starts at 2 a.m. Downtown J'ouvert is the wildest time of Carnival. Some people cover themselves with mud, some with old rags, and they all head downtown to dance to steel bands, iron bands and trucks with sound systems on the back. Since this is the uncorking of Carnival, people go crazy—some make it home by dawn, others not until the following midnight.

Monday and Tuesday found me playing mas with Minshall's Donkey Derby band, with mobile music supplied by Charlie's Roots and dj Chinese Laundry. Mondays are informal, with people just

wearing small pieces of their costumes, saving Tuesday for the full color, because most judging takes place on Tuesday.

Monday afternoon brought the biggest rainstorm anyone had seen during Carnival since one year in the '70s when the whole event was held in May because of a polio outbreak. Lots of folks danced right through and those who sought shelter eventually gave up and joined the sound trucks again, taking a two-hour shower. For the rest of the afternoon, instead of singing "Dus" in Deh Face," David Rudder sang "Rain in Yuh Face." When we crossed the Savannah stage, it was so muddy the lyrics soon became "mud on yuh feet."

Tuesday's weather was a perfect blend of sun and clouds, and our mas band came out with about 1300 players. We had plenty of room to jam all day long except in Independence Square, where it was so crowded you

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PHOTO BY STEVEN SEFTL

second place was Phase II. Third place was tied, 11 points behind the winner, between Exodus and the Trinidad All Stars, who both performed contrasting arrangements of "Dus" in Deh Face." The Desperadoes took fourth place—only one half point behind the tie for third. Surprisingly, Pamberi came in last. In the preliminaries they took third out of 24 bands, but somehow lost the magic as the weeks progressed and the finals arrived.

### FROM DIMANCHE GRAS TO BACCHANAL

Following Panorama was Dimanche Gras, the final evening before the streets of Port of Spain erupt into a two-day party of mud and music, drink and dance, costume and color, which can only be called Carnival.

Most eyes were focused on the national stadium, where the Dimanche Gras show was broadcast live on radio and tv. The event opened with David Rudder singing the national anthem and included the king and queen of Carnival competitions for the most elaborate costume. Also at the show was the calypso monarch competition and everyone was anxious to see if Sparrow would get dethroned. In the second round, Chalkdust unleashed a new composition called "Misconception," which fans and judges agreed was the winner. So Sparrow got dethroned and Chalkdust drove away in his new car!

Most of my friends and I, however, headed over to Westmall, where David Rudder and Charlie's Roots, Kassav', Second Imij and Superblue were performing. After years of spinning Kassav' records, I'd never seen them perform, so I took my chance when they flew in from Martinique for this one show. I enjoyed it thoroughly and so did most others right in front of the band, but afterwards the prevailing sentiment seemed to be that zouk wasn't appropriate for Carnival. If it were another time

# Chalkdust IN YUH FACE

BY GENE SCARAMUZZO

To quote one of this year's calypso tent jokes by MC Sprangalang, "nobody has the ability like Trinidadians to know something was going to happen before it happens *after* it happens." Although I'm not a Trini, let me say that I knew Carnival '93 in T&T would be a year to remember, but I'll admit I would never have guessed that it would be one in which good calypso and soca would barely be heard, buried under an avalanche of "jam & wine."

After last year's heated outcry against the inane lyrics of jam & wine, culminating in Ras Shorty I's castigating "That Eh Enough," I expected this year's lyrics to be more thoughtful even if in defense of the style. But in the end the recorded output certainly seemed to support David Rudder's contention that the purveyors of jam & wine took Shorty's lecture as a call-to-arms to come on even heavier this year. And even more defiantly, they blended in a heavy dose of Jamaican dancehall, a real slap in the face to those Trinis who feel there is already too much Jamaican dancehall in T&T.

Of course in this report I've listed all the great songs for the road because, ironically, there were many outstanding ones. But keep in mind that the shelf life of these songs is short

indeed, sure to be forgotten by next year. Long to be remembered about Carnival '93, aside from minor elements like the unseasonal rains and the now-legendary "donkey dance," will be the brilliant performances by conventional steel orchestras in this year's Panorama, the affirmation of all that is good about the traditional Trinidad calypso in the selection of Chalkdust as calypso monarch and a handful of hard-hitting social commentaries like David Rudder's "Dus" in Deh Face," Chalkdust's "Kaiso in Hospital," Shadow's "Survival Road," Kurt Allen's "The Last Call" and Watchman's "If Yuh Black Yuh Black."

Unfortunately, Carnival '93 will also be remembered as a year of great confusion and uncertainty. Hard economic times, the hardest that T&T has ever experienced, seemed to dampen the bright spirit of hope and unlimited possibility that always made Trinbagonians feel blessed as a nation.

Fear of the future has caused confusion in the present, creating an atmosphere in which calypsonians attack each other in vicious, mean-spirited calypsos, in which the economic rewards of jam & wine music pose a

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## TECHNOBEAT

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Lee "Scratch" Perry, *Soundz from the Hotline* (Heartbeat). Too many Perry reissues and thrown-together new releases these last two years have given me a Scratch resistance I thought nothing could penetrate, but *Soundz*, as it turns out, is exceptional. The musicians on these Black Ark recordings from the '70s are first rate, including Aston Barrett, Sly Dunbar, Willie Lindo and Augustus Pablo. More important, the Upsetter himself puts in such an effort sides of him I've never heard before burst out like multiple personalities. Note the Marleyesque delivery of "Standing on the Hill" or the rock-steady tenor on "News Flash." I even catch myself straining to untangle the knotted vocals on "Ashes and Dust," although it's a foregone conclusion they'll zing right over my head. The funhouse atmosphere was never more seductive nor flirted with convention to this extent before. The nuttiness is full strength, but you don't have to scrounge a couple of Dramamine to weather it.

Tom Zé, *The Return of Tom Zé: Brazil—The Hips of Tradition* (Luaka Bop). Eccentricity seldom cracks the cultural barrier. An artistic stance that's shocking in Oran may soak into the background hiss of Cincinnati, and irony, tied even more tightly to local convention, fares worse. But when Northeast Brazilian Zé sings of lighting bonfires "to appreciate the lightbulb," the meaning is as clear as the manner in which he uses traditional rhythms to uncover the symbolism of technology rather than the other way around. Because he's less interested in modernizing Brazilian music than dissembling it, Zé chooses from a sweeping pop vocabulary whose hurricane eye is an aggressiveness that translates most readily as avant-garde rock, but he's craftier than that. And more mysterious. I like David Byrne's contributing vocal on "Jingle do Disco" better than anything I've heard him do in years, because his own eccentricity flows naturally in Zé's urgent throw-away setting. Nothing here is forced, but nothing is easy either when every explosion is sublime.

*The Soto Koto Band* (Higher Octave). I still don't consider Soto Koto's music African any more than I think of Velveta as cheese, but there's no denying the joyous kick of this over-processed Gambian band in overdrive. Smooth sonics pull the best qualities of Aquarian Age atmospherics into a lush big band setting, where every instrument from sax to vaseline-fingered kora floats on a purified etheric field—even when delivering nothing more demanding than *nouvelle cuisine* dinner music. The problem is the size of the portions. Too many songs, like the 2:50 "Rainbeat," peter out just when my resistance is dwindling and I'm willing to be washed into a catchy groove. A cloudburst isn't enough. For this to succeed, I've got to be drenched silly.

The catholics, *The catholics* (Terra Nova). Bit of the bounce of the bush to "Why the Caged Bird Sings," otherwise nothing betrays this band as Australian except a certain psy-

chological remoteness from the African and Caribbean references. But that distancing is part of the game plan as songs build to a fevered pitch not by generating heat but through cold sweat and mental acrobatics mapped out by writer/bassist Lloyd Swanton and saxophonist Sandy Evans. The model for this group may well have been Weekend, Brits who pushed hard with African rhythms for the sheer exhilaration of a three-minute vacation, though the jazz influence is stronger here with intimations of Bill Frissell via Dave Brewer's multifaceted guitar and compositions that pull in several directions at once—like "Walter Burley Griffin," which arrives at funk through a process of elimination. The band's got a great sense of narrative and a set of chops to go with it. Worth seeking out, especially if you prefer diagrams to photographs. [P.O. Box 455, Sunland, CA 91041.]

Ray Lema and Joachim Kuhn, *Euro African Suite* (BUDA). Sunday, 9:12 a.m. Slept in, but still too early to face CBC Radio's special report on fascism. Hop on exercise bike, placing parrot on shoulder to stop his squawking. Switch on new Ray Lema cd for an accompaniment to lukewarm coffee. Peer outside, still pedalling. Low grey clouds. Bright, keyboard-led jazz with AfroEuro beat meshes with squeak of pumping handlebars. Mind drifts to dream of college days sharing dorm with prodigious but predictable friend and driving a potato chip truck around campus. Probably a message here, but none remarkable enough to register. Pass the parrot a corner of toast and watch in amusement as he clenches it in one foot and begins to eat, all the while deftly maintaining his perch on sweater. \*

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could hear music from four or five different trucks at once. After crossing the Savannah stage we headed back towards the mas camp, where we were joined by an extra thousand or so people who couldn't walk away from the great music evening was supplying.

Tuesday evening is called "last lap," when Carnival is almost over, and with so many weary masqueraders the music evolved into an easier groove than the driving rhythms heard earlier in the day. To this groove Rudder composed a nice impromptu song which blended hookline lyrics from the season's most popular party tunes and turned them all into one. It's creativity like that which sets this band apart from other soca bands on the island, and it provided a fitting end to seven weeks of music and dance and two days of bacchanal.

Special thanks to the Chow-Lin-On family, especially Ellis Chow-Lin-On, who lent me the keys to Port of Spain during my visit.

Steven Seftel is an international music programmer for KRCL-FM in Salt Lake City, UT.

## HEY MR. MUSIC

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Popombo de Nampula, and Conjunto Nimala de Lalauah. The sleeve notes describe Mil's music as "intense Mozambique skittle." It's raw and raucous and ambient recorded, so the full natural three-dimensional sound experience leaps out of the speakers at you. Rootsy in extremes.

One of the things about the RealWorld studios is their echoey natural sound. A cd reissue of one of the early RealWorld releases is out at the moment. Fatala's *Gongoma Times* shows this ambience to perfection with a natural livesound. Guinean Yacouba "Bruno" Camara heads this drum-led traditional workout with vigor.

Finally a doff of the cap to the people of Tobago. While *The Beat*'s editorial staff was getting stressed over the last issue I was doing some serious hanging out on this beautiful island. One of the many high spots was a visit to Sunday school. No, I didn't break the habit of a lifetime by attending one of those institutions that attempt to capture young minds and corral them into the straight and narrow (I'm too far gone). But a downright serious kicking session held on Sunday nights at Coral Gardens, Bucco Reef, which has been running every Sunday for several years. A sound system is set up by the beach, the drink stalls open for business and by 10 p.m. things are up and swinging. It's roadblock time as everybody, and I mean everybody, makes tracks for this venerable groove institution. This is one of those great mixup sessions where all kind of people come together, local dreads and residents skanking it up with wide-eyed tourists. The T&T musical mixing style puts an emphasis on cutting tunes together entertainingly, the reggae and ragga beating it out with dashes of calypso, a few bits of soul and the occasional bhanga ragga tune. For someone from England the pleasures of partying outside are a rare treat. Ahh... it was bliss.

Pre-eminent world-music dj Dave Hucker spins the music of two continents and assorted islands in London clubs.

## HAITIAN FASCINATION

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Skah Shah, is one of the best rhythmists in kompa music today. There are lots of salsa-style breaks, cross rhythms and just plain good arrangements. If you liked Skah Shah's records in the 1970s, you should love this album. The horns are superbly performed by Danny Block (flute and tenor sax), Sue Terry (alto sax and flute), Bomberito Zarzuela (trumpet) and Mark Gollion. Jean-Ely "Cubano" Telfort is the vocalist. It's been a long time since I heard Cubano singing so well—he sounds much better than on the last Skah Shah album, which was a hit among Antillean residents of Paris but which never caught on in Haitian communities in America. This is one of the best kompa records of 1992.