



ERS Engine Room Section

A Caribbean-American Cultural Not-For-profit Organization

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Boston Carnival 2000

The Engine Room Section is definitely the place to be for Boston Carnival. Everyone in the band was in the spirit of Carnival. This is the way to enjoy carnival: inexpensive costume, sweet Soca music, DJ Glen on the mixing-board, and a lot of regular fun-loving band members. Have you seen the band on Cable? Well, we looked good and I expect many more band members next year. ϕ

THANKS to you...

ERS had great support from the contributors listed below. These people, organizations and companies all helped to make the ERS Boston Carnival band a memorable event: Representatives Gloria Fox and Shirley Owens Hicks, Reebok International, Thomas Construction, ODF Contracting Co. Inc., Rhythm and Spice, Jack Madden Ford, J.L. Hammett, Prestige Sound Station, Laxton Records, Beverly Williams, DJ Glen, Kay's Oasis and Vibes Records. ϕ

*Do you want to
advertise in or write
an article for this
newsletter?
Call ERS at 617-
524-0539*

How will we keep in touch?

ERS has many ways to keep you informed:

- Read about us in our mailings and Newsletter...ERS started this newsletter to keep you up-to date on all of our activities.
- You can check us out on our WebPages.
- Call us at 617-524-0539.
- We will call you for special events.

Send us your email addresses if you want us to contact you by email. If you are not on our mailing list please call and leave your mailing information at the ERS phone line at 617-524-0539. Please speak slowly and clearly.

ϕ

Who or what is ERS?

ERS is a not-for profit cultural organization primarily devoted to providing for cultural exchange between people of the Caribbean and others. ϕ

Carnival Pictures

ERS has collected pictures of our band members and can order prints for you. If you want to stop-by and see our album please call ERS at 617-524-0539. ϕ

ERS Carnival Gift

Point Cumana Punch

(Serves 1. Do not drink and drive)

- 1 1/2 ounces rum
- A squeeze of fresh lime juice
- 3 ounces cola (any cola)
- A dash of Angostura bitters
- Mix and serve with ice... ☐

This and That

You can still purchase fabulous ERS T-shirts or Trini rags.

These make excellent gifts

T-shirts (white with ERS logo)

- Sizes: 2x-large
- Price: 1 for \$15.00, 2 for \$20.00

“Trini” Rags

- Trinidad colors or red
- Price: 1 for \$8.00, 2 for \$15.00

Food and drinks to go

- Rum punch, sorrel, peas and rice, calypso chicken, fish-broth, roti, kurma, chutney, sweet bread etc. For all type of Caribbean delicacies Call ERS at 617-524-0539.☐

What’s up for Boston Carnival 2001?

ERS is already at work on Carnival 2001 but we are always open to ideas from our members. It is never too early to plan for next summer’s fun. If you have an idea give us a call at ERS 617-524-0539. ☐

Sweet Music From the Music Factory

Keep your summer groove on. Check out the Music Factory Volumes I and II CDs. These hot and spicy CDs are guaranteed to chase away your winter blues. For the “Music Factory” CDs contact ERS at 617-524-0539. ☐

Trinidad and Tobago Carnival 2001

Check out band members at “Smokey and Bunty” while you are in Trinidad. Band members will be hanging out at both locations: St. James and Carenage, for those after-parties cool-downs. ☐

Band Members... On the road

Ron M. and company certainly played “mas” with a passion and helped to make ERS band the ultimate party on the road

New York Connection, Tom and company...Boston says “bring it on” You and your crew are the life of the party.

Karen P and Family and Cheryl T. and company partied like it was 2001.

The Washington connection-by-New York.... This crew made a brew that made believers of all who tried it and some people even forgot their addresses after trying the brew.

Band members had so much fun most of them missed the Saturday night parties...

ERS says “Bring on 2001.”

If you have a band note for our next newsletter please call ERS at 617-524-0539. ☐



ERS Upcoming Events

Band members appreciation get-together. Stay tuned.

Letter to the Editors

As a spectator (this year and this year only), I must say I was impressed with the band, the colors and the enthusiasm of the members compared to other bands, as always the ERS band members looked like they were having a great time.....The band was visually pleasing. The many colors were a nice change, the sparkles, and the music all above average. I have noticed a steady improvement with the band’s presentation, timeliness, music and costumes. Every effort should be made to maintain what has been achieved in the past 3 years and to continue to set high standards to enable the band to grow.

By Email

The ERS Committee and newsletter contributors & editors:

- Sheldon Braithwaite
- Fabian DePeiza
- Miki DePeiza
- Wendell DePeiza
- Yvette DePeiza
- Anna Francois
- Sharon Francois
- Sam Harewood-Polo
- David Hinds
- Dayo Joseph
- Curtis Mc Intosh
- Sonia Pierre
- Suzanne Pierre
- Robert “Sam” Saldenha

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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE STEEL BAND

By Sam Saldanha

In this article I am going to trace the beginning of the Steel Band, the various perspectives, and try to make some sense about what we know about the history of the steel band, myths and facts. Of course some pan enthusiasts will not agree with all that I have written, which is quite understandable, as steel band history is more an oral history rather than a written one. There is a tendency in the steel band fraternity to place oneself at the time of an event, and when discovered to attribute the knowledge to some other persons. These are some of the pitfalls, which makes steel band history very confusing to some writers, and until more documentary proof is gathered and certified, we will continue to sift through all the literature we come across. However, by making the facts known to all, hopefully a truthful history of the steel band will eventually be written.

The Author's background

I was born and grew up around the "Green Corner" (the area famous for Globe Cinema and the Carenage Taxi Stand), and it was only natural that I would gravitate to "Starland" steel band, located at Green Corner. Though not as prestigious as "All Stars", "Desperadoes", "Invaders" or "North Stars", we did have some good years. Starland was unique in that the bands from the town (Port of Spain) saw us as a "West" band, and the West bands saw us as a "Town" band. It was not until we move to St. James, that I finally began to get the real insight into "pan", and understood what it was all about. 'Nuff said about the Author. The history of the Steel band usually begins with the edict banning the African's drums in second half of the 19th Century-

specifically 1868- and the then freed African slaves and their descendents, created another instrument: tamboo-bamboo. Tamboo-bamboo was then the instrument used by the lower socio-economic groups (grass-roots) on the Carnival street parades until some time in the 1930's, because in 1938, some sort of melody was heard in one of these bands.

As the most popular perspective goes, one of the tamboo-bamboo players burst his bamboo, and he took up a dustbin, and started beating it with his hands (could be stick) along with the other tamboo-bamboo players, and that was the Steel band in its most primitive form. I mentioned stick because the supposed band was "Alexander Rag Time" band, from Newtown, Woodbrook. Unless that player had no feelings, or did not care about his hands, it was virtually impossible to beat that dustbin with his hand for the entire Jourvert morning. (The saying that one is "beating pan" came from that event. Today, pan is played rather than beaten). When dustbins and cans replaced tamboo-bamboo, it was the Steel band in its embryonic stage, the very beginning, and its most primitive form. It was clearly rhythmical, rather than melodious. In all honesty it was noisy and a damn nuisance to the middle and upper classes. There were also iron bands, bands consisting purely of "steel" - iron. Again it is obviously, that these were not melodious, but more rhythmical.

By 1938, dustbins replaced tamboo-bamboo, and the tuners had discovered tone. The entire drum was one tone, and not notes. According to "Lord Kitchener" in his calypso "Spree Simon", Spree was the inventor of the steel band. In an article "PAN IS MIH GIRL - THE BERTIE MARSHALL STORY" by Keith Smith of the "Sun"- an afternoon newspaper published by the Express of 9th April 1984, Spree claimed that during the Carnival of 1939, "He had loaned the "Kettle" pan to Winston Bartholmew who was

nicknamed "Thick Lip"... "after taking back his Kettle pan from Thick Lip the face was beaten in and the tone he was getting from it before was gone. He then tried to punch out the face of the pan with a stone and in so doing he got a different tone and notes from the pan. And so the convex, or the 'Spree-type' pan came into being."

Although this was always questioned, one steel band historian - "Darway" from St. James - recent revelation that Spree was born in 1930, has added fuel to the fire. It meant that the oldest Spree could have been, when he claimed that he tuned a note on a pan, would actually be nine (9) years. Is it possible that Spree was tuning at the age of nine years? We know for a fact that the event stated above took place in 1939.

However, in all honesty to Spree, in 1972, Eric Williams - Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago after the Black Power demonstrations and the attempted coup, called all the steel bands to a Steel Band Convention at Chaguaramas. I was chosen to represent the North Stars Steel band. That morning I traveled in a car driven by Gary Simmons with Spree Simon, Anthony Williams (leader of North Stars), Martin Walters, another member of North Stars, and never knew who Spree was until he got up to speak at the convention that afternoon. More or less, what he said was that he did not invent the steel band, but that he was responsible for putting notes on the steel band.

Again this is debatable, but information is scarce. Always bear in mind that steel bands were very competitive, and any new

Continue on page 3



innovations were closely guarded secrets, only seen when the bands parade the streets on carnival day. Another detail not mentioned in the history was that Spree was released from jail in time for the VJ (Victory over Japan) celebration. We know for a fact that he was a free man for Carnival 1939. (WWII started in the middle of the year and Carnival was banned from the beginning of the war until 6th May 1945 – VE Day (Victory over Europe)). When he started his jail term, when he was released and the reason for his incarceration are all unclear, but is it unlikely that he could have continued his steel band experiments in jail? We know for a fact that, it was during this period (1939 – 1945) that the actual attempts to put notes on a pan; (to tune a pan) occurred.

So what do we know so far?

1. We know that the bamboo-bamboo was the forerunner of the steel band.
2. We know that by 1945, when the first pan with four notes was seen and heard, Spree would have been fifteen-years old, but bare in mind, Spree claimed that he had put notes on pan even before that.

In one article Spree claimed that things were so bad, that he was adopted as a youngster by his godmother, and moved to Pt. Fortin with her, away from the beehive of steel band activity. There is no real documentation on the early steel band activity in the southern area in Trinidad or in Tobago, so we do not know what was happening in those areas. How long did Spree remain in Pt. Fortin, and did he continue with his experiments? We do not know. Least we forget, between 1930 and 1945, Spree should have been going to school, and would not have had all the time to devote

to steel band. Unless he had forsaken his schooling, unless he was playing hooky, or unless we had a real genius among us, we will not know. Until there is documentary proof the steel band mystery will continue.

In my next article, I will write about the early instruments, some of the riots, early steel band competition (1950's), and T.A.S.P.O. (Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra). φ

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Thoughts

ERS and the entire Boston Caribbean-American community sends its blessings to all patrons that were injured at the recent concert held at the Heliport in Chaguaramas. Our special prayers also go out to Machel Montano and the Xtatik band. φ

Next Issue...

- More about ERS
- More from our resident historian and pannist: Sam Saldenha.
- Feature Island. φ

Feature Island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Location: The islands of **Trinidad** and **Tobago** (West Indies) are in the Caribbean, 5,128 km north of Venezuela in South America.

Population: 1,200,000 inhabitants.

Capital: Port of Spain.

Economy:

- Agriculture is not a major player in the state's economy, except for sugar cane. There are some coffee, banana and cacao plantations.
- The country has a lot of mining resources, especially oil and gas.
- The country is very industrialized: oil refinery, petro-chemistry, sugar industry, distillery (the country is one of the major rum exporter), fruit juice manufactures, pharmaceutical products, cement works.
- Tourism is growing, thanks to its beaches, its worldwide famous carnival and its steel bands.

History:

Trinidad was discovered by Columbus in 1498, and became a Spanish colony in 1552. The English conquered it in 1797. The Dutch colonized **Tobago** in 1632, the island became English and then French. **Trinidad and Tobago**, the two islands, were administratively united in 1888. It joined the West Indies Federation in 1958. The state became independent in 1962 (just after Jamaica) as part of the Commonwealth. It became a republic in August 1976.