

THE CHAMPION STEELBANDS OF TRINIDAD

An on the scene recording at Port of Spain, Trinidad, British West Indies

Katzenjammers

*under the direction of
Percy Thomas*

Highlanders

*with Kim Loy Wong
and Kevin Hart*

The Fascinators

*(appearing nightly at the
Cashah with Joseph Augustine)*

The Southern All Stars

from San Fernando

Girl Pat Steelband

*Hazel Henley, conductrix
The Almost All-Girl
Oldrum Orchestra*

Ellie Manette's Invaders

including

Tom Cat Mambo

Love Is A Many Splendored Thing

Grey Clouds

COOK

Sounds of Our Times

Don Smith

Blood and Steel

Andrew Beddoe walked up to us out of the moonless night. His head was bandaged and he looked grim. Across the tracks in Port of Spain's shantytown, torches blazed for a forty-day*. Beyond shantytown was the great swamp, while at our backs were the hills called Laventille. Both areas are infested with pan-beaters, somebody had stolen somebody's girl, and wars were raging across the tracks. Poor Andrew, a virtuoso primitive drummer,** had been swept up into the battle of the steelbandmen. The fires danced as a sugar cane train chugged by.

One way and another, steelbands have always been competing,—with and without bloodshed. These days, in one gigantic sublimation, the 200 steelbands of Trinidad slug it out more with costumes and musical arrangements than with daggers and broken bottles. But even in this year's decorous Carnival parade the packed streets clear with hurricane velocity when a couple of rival tenor panners raise angry voices.

The old reflexes for survival are still in good shape. It was only yesterday that the 'steelband clash'—two bands marching from different directions into the same intersection—was a sudden threat to life and limb for all within a stone's throw. Even the immaculately conducted finals of the yearly Festival are removed by no more than a razor's edge from the bloody days of yore.

Steelband was born as an answer to a police ban on traditional African drumming which tended (they thought) to collect and incite lawless mobs. Although the letter of the law was satisfied, the spirit remained. For drums was substituted the rhythmic clatter of bamboo sticks (which often neatly concealed a knife), later garbage can lids (usable as shields, at least). But in the meantime, the momentous discovery—and it was just that—of the tuned steel oildrum added another dimension to music and street sportsmanship. The old lust for competition was still there, but so was a new and virile music.

Polished and fresh, steel now breathes life into the mambos, sambas, calypsos and pop tunes of a continent. Again, Trinidad makes music that beats with a new pulse. Now it gives rise to a new caste of steel virtuosos. Some of them may be periodic habitués of the local jail, others candidates for the priesthood, but the star performers on this record are the acknowledged aristocrats of steelbandmen,—they are a history-in-the-making.

*a wake, held 40 days after the death of a friend or relative

**hear Drums of Trinidad, No. 1045

BB



photo: Cook

THE SIX BANDS

KATZENJAMMERS

"Steelband with Velvet Gloves"

The "secret" of Percy Thomas' famous *humming bird tremolo* is a topic for heated discussion on the island . . . and a matter for the amazement of all who hear it for the first time. Inner voices sound like an immense male chorus humming; melodies are beautifully sustained and shaded in a way new to steelband. Whatever else it may be, his technique is the product of meticulous practice and development. By comparison this is a large band (12-16 steady members). The polished musical arrangements and precision of performance (both thanks to Percy Thomas) have made the Katzenjammers Festival prize winner of the six.

**THE BREEZE AND I
LOVE IS A MANY SPLENDORED THING
KATZBERG**

(*for complete lp of this group hear Cook record #1047—The Prize-Winning Katzenjammers)

THE INVADERS

recorded in Ellie Manette's backyard

Ellie Manette is one of the acknowledged inventors of steelband and his historic backyard could rightfully be considered its birthplace. Ellie was the first to dream up the idea of pans playing in harmony and his original band was one of the first to upset Carnival . . . a new sound which stole the show.

TOM CAT MAMBO

THE FASCINATORS

appearing nightly at the Casbah

On Eastern Main Road there is a strip which houses a series of the rowdier night clubs, blaring out a gaudy mixture of steelband, jazz and P. A. Vocals (heard in the background). It's a place where everything is done for the customer. Crews of hustlers work the entranceways, forcibly injecting passersby who venture within reach, inside, dancing girls, music . . . everything for the price of a bottle of beer. In the midst of all this in the 'Casbah' we found and recorded Joseph Augustine and his Fascinators, a small group whose six-nights-a-week appearances add up to a jet propelled rhythmic teamwork.

FASCINATORS MINOR

SOUTHERN ALL STARS

*recorded in a swampy vegetable garden
under a corrugated iron roof.*

This is a big league band—large in size and bulging with star performers. They come from San Fernando and are major contenders in every steelband competition. The tenor pan improvisations usually paralyze judges and audience.

**TROPICAL MERINGUE
SKOKIAAN
MERINGUE MINOR
PP SAMBA**

THE HIGHLANDERS

It's rare for a steelband to break into song. It's especially rare when the session starts out with that blasé indifference so often seen in the tired professional jazzman. What kindled the sparks in the dark backyard of Kim Loy Yong is hard to say. But something suddenly ignited and rhythm and song roared out of that corrugated iron enclosure, from the band, from the onlookers, from the neighborhood backporch audiences. This band is the furthest in a jazz direction, with the brilliant improvisations of Kevin Hart (tenor pan) as a foil . . . and the driving rhythm of a muscular maracas players who approaches his instrument like a prize fighter coming in for the kill.

**CUMPANCHERO
ANNA
BENATA**

GIRL PAT STEELBAND**

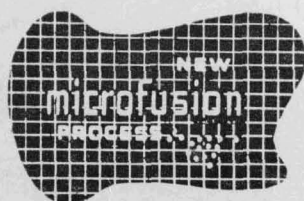
the (almost) all-girl oildrum orchestra

When the all-girl steelband was mentioned as a recording possibility, ubiquitous jazzman Red Camp spluttered, "No, not that! A Phil Spitalny of tin!" There are points of distinction, however. One is that this is the only group we heard playing *Castillanese*, the provocative Venezuelan waltz form with the jazz counterbeats on top. Personnel: 9 girls and one transient sideMAN, Bruce Procope, heard throughout stroking a gourd, quite by accident.

GREY CLOUDS (Castillanne)

(*also heard on The Castillanne, Cook record #10890)

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