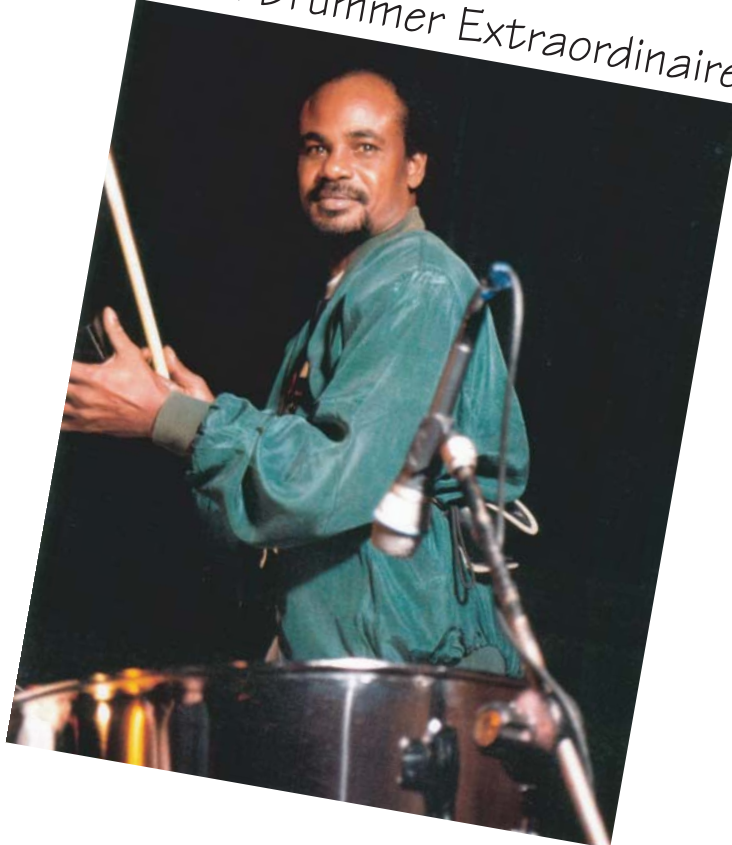


# Jason Baptiste

*Steel Drummer Extraordinaire*



## Trinidad & Tobago, le berceau du Steel drum



Caracteristiques generales :

CAPITALE : Port of Spain

SUPERFICIE : 5 130 km<sup>2</sup>.

POPULATION : environ 1 300 000  
Habitants d'origines Africaine,  
Indienne (d'Asie), Française,  
Anglaise, Chinoise, ...

RESSOURCES : Petrole, gaz  
naturel, asphalte.

LANGUE : anglais

Carrefour économique, stratégique et ethnique, située à quelques kilomètres seulement du Venezuela, Trinidad (Trinite) et Tobago terminent au sud l'archipel Caraïbe.

A la fin des années 30, les trinitadiens découvrent la possibilité de marteler le fond d'un baril de pétrole pour l'incurver et y "sculpter" des notes distinctes qui seront accordées de façon précise. Considéré par les musicologues comme le seul instrument acoustique inventé au 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle, le "Steel drum" (littéralement "tambour d'acier") ou "pan" est un instrument révolutionnaire de la famille des idiophones, c'est à dire apparente aux xylophones, marimbas, vibraphones même s'il s'en distingue par sa conception tout autant que par son relief sonore très riche en harmoniques et ses timbres sans équivalents.

Le Steelband est un orchestre comprenant l'ensemble des steel drums, des basses aux tenors et une section rythmique avec batterie et percussions. Le steel drum étant une institution à Trinidad, les steelbands locaux atteignent facilement un nombre de musiciens supérieur à soixante et pratiquement chaque quartier possède son orchestre.

Chaque année, lors du carnaval de Port of Spain, est organisé un prestigieux concours de steelbands appelé "Panorama". A cette occasion, les formations sélectionnées "s'affrontent" dans une arène envahie par la foule, devant un jury, en jouant l'arrangement d'un calypso de dix minutes.

L'autre temps fort pour le pan est au mois d'Août lors du "Pan Ramajay" où de petits orchestres incluant des instruments conventionnels, ainsi que des solistes, mettent en valeur l'instrument au travers de styles musicaux variés.

Pour devenir maître du Pan,  
mieux vaut être ne dedans...



Ne le 11 juillet 1962 à Point Fortin à Trinidad, Jason Baptiste commence à composer ses premières melodies sur des bidons de lait dès cinq ans. Issu d'une famille de musiciens, c'est en son sein qu'il fait ses premiers pas. Musicien de Steel pan puis arrangeur, il semble suivre l'école de Trinidad, mais très tôt ses ambitions dépassent celles de la culture de son pays.

Contrairement à la tradition et bravant la difficulté technique, Jason choisit de jouer du "double second" avec quatre mailloches au lieu de deux. De l'instrument Jason extrait une densité harmonique jusque là encore jamais atteinte et se donne la liberté d'explorer d'autres musiques telles que le Jazz ou la musique classique européenne.

Guidé par les anciens Jazzmen trinidadiens (Earl Rodney, Errol Goodridge, Wilfred Woodley, Pat Robertson ou Fortunaria Ruiz) et innovant avec la nouvelle génération (Michael et Felix Ruiz), il acquiert une renommée dans les cercles d'initiés, participe au Pan jazz Festival de Trinidad et gagne en 1996 le Pan Ramajay en tant que meilleur soliste du pays. Il parcourt le monde, joue en Thaïlande dans des clubs de Jazz avec des musiciens russes, puis aux USA avec diverses formations dont plusieurs incluant des musiciens brésiliens.

Le jeu de Jason avec sa technique et sa sensibilité est un spectacle aussi bien pour les oreilles que pour les yeux. En solo, en duo avec une contrebasse, en trio ou en quartet, il captive son audience des heures durant.

Le public français découvre depuis plusieurs années la culture des Antilles anglaises et notamment celle de Trinidad, grâce aux efforts d'artistes français ou américains comme Andy Narell, Guillaume Kervel (fondateur de Calypsociation et Pan à Paname) ou Emmanuel Bex venus puiser à Trinidad leur inspiration. Ne faisons plus attendre le public français, offrons-lui un authentique maître du Pan.

Le passé regorge de rencontres trinidadiennes enrichissantes et fertiles, on peut citer celle d'Othello Molineaux avec Jaco Pastorius ou celle d'Harold Philipps avec les Beatles... Qui peut prédire ce que celles de Jason déclencheront ?

Un compositeur,  
Un arrangeur,  
Un musicien de Jazz

Seattle, 1998



Jeff, Luis & Jason

Harmonites Pan Yard, Trinidad, 2002



Arima, Trinidad, 1998



The Ruiz Brothers: Michael, Felix & Ricardo

Point Fortin, 2001



Marriott Hotel, Thailand, 1997  
Jason & Oleg



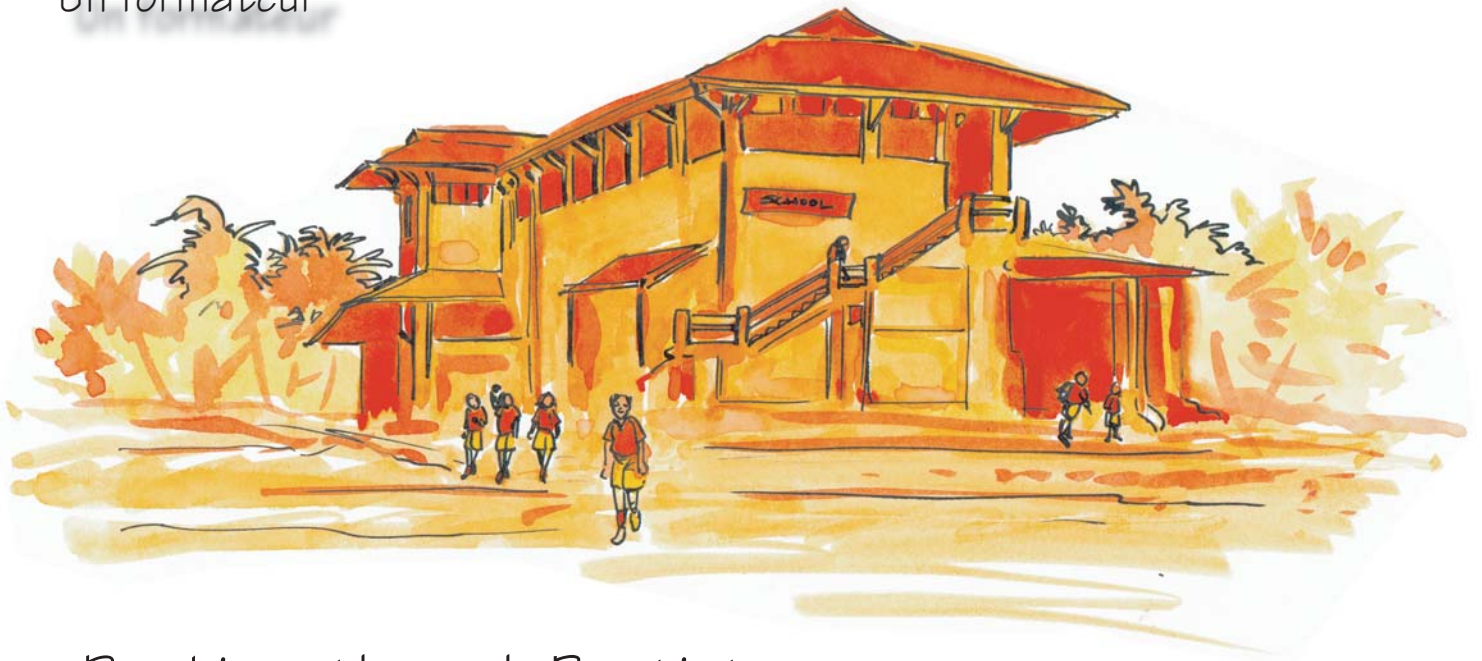
Thailand, 1997



Alexi, Oleg & Jason



## Un formateur



## Pan Lives through Baptiste

By YVONNE WEBB

PAN jazzist Jason Baptiste is ensuring the continuity of the national instrument, the steelpan, by tutoring youths to become proficient at this artform.

Baptiste is a member of the Starland Steel Orchestra of Point Fortin, which is the sole surviving, unsponsored conventional band in the area. He is also a past recipient of a National Association for Excellence in the Art (NAFETA) award for musical excellence as a composer/arranger and pan jazzist.

For the past four years, Baptiste has been conducting free summer pan classes for youths at the Techier Community Centre. A pan theatre is being constructed in the area and should be ready in time for next year's pan classes.

To date, more than 100 young people from the area have passed through this school and have gained experience at playing the tenors, double tenors, double seconds, guitar, high and low bass and quadro phonics. Some have gone on to become members of other steel orchestras.

Earlier this month, 25 pan students between the ages of 3-11 graduated at the Point Fortin Secondary School. Among them was three year old Kareem Saleem, who received his certificate of participation from Point Fortin Councillor Junior Stanley.

At the function, Stanley said pan was in danger and that the young graduates had a responsibility to exhibit an "extreme sense of patriotism" in protecting it.



En enseignant aux jeunes le Steel drum, Jason Baptiste assure l'avenir de l'instrument de la nation. Depuis quatre années, Jason donne des cours de pan gratuits l'été, et parmi la centaine de jeunes formés par ses soins, certains ont pu intégrer d'autres Steelbands...





# Where pan gone?

SHOULD top calypsonian Stalin ever ask Rudy Smith "weh pan gone?" he's likely to get a guarded reply.

Stalin's question, of course, stems from a hit tune he sang years ago in which he lamented the panman's stagnated position as against his instrument's continued growth.

TNT-born Rudy "Two Left" Smith is home again on vacation from Europe where he has been living since 1962.

In Denmark where he's now domiciled, jazz, not calypso, is the musical genre he's turning to for food on the table.

Smith insists that pan, like the calypso for the blues, is another

musical instrument. "When you're away as long as I've been you'll realise your skill as a musician, not your instrument would see you through.

"Over in Europe there's a tremendous amount of strange instruments played by different musicians.

"The steel pan as such is no longer a novelty there.

"An ability to execute music through your instrument is what matters most," said Smith.

Having already toured Russia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and other such European countries, Smith advises local panmen to widen their musical horizons before travelling abroad.

In Europe, for example, there's a tremendous market for good jazz musicians.

## Ask Rudy Smith

"There's little opportunity for pannists who limit themselves to purely calypso music."

"Not wanting to be misconstrued, Smith said he has a real love for his own music."

"When you get out there however, survival is the name of the game."

"And as a musician you've got to make your instrument work

for you. "I believe it's the musician who makes the difference, not the instrument."

Smith is in TNT on contract for state-owned Trintoc.

His mission is by no means simple.

As musical arranger for Trintoc Valley Harps he's committed to taking the Point Fortin-based

steelband as high as possible on this year's Panorama champ.

"It's a tough assignment," he admits, "but there's considerable musical talent in Point Fortin."

His favourite interpreters of steelband music?

"They're Robert Greenidge and Clive Bradley."



RUDY "Two Left" SMITH

"But there's a places", said Smith, pannist in Point Fortin who has already produced four LP's for his European fans.

1991, Rudy Smith

..."But there's a pannist in Point Fortin named Jason Baptiste who's sure to go places"...

Page 26, TRINIDAD GUARDIAN, Friday, September 6, 1996

entertainment

# More to pan than just Panorama and Ramajay

By DAVID CUFFY

THE STEELBAND usually receives public attention and scrutiny only for the duration of a particular national competition.

After Panorama, there is hardly another occasion on which the steelband attracts the kind of public support that it deserves and which is its entitlement by virtue of it being the national musical instrument of the nation.

Public support for the popular annual Pan Ramajay competition and biannual Steelband Music Festival falls far below the expectations of organisers and pales into insignificance when compared with the audience turnout each year at the Panorama competition. In addition, Steelband Week is yet to receive widespread recognition and given committed national and community support.

## Public's Attitude

"To continue to treat the steelband as a toy with which to play is to continue to think and behave as children ourselves," is how a noted pan enthusiast describes the public's attitude to the steelband.

An opportunity to prove all of what is written above to be harsh and totally inaccurate, as well as demonstrate support for the steelband and the steelpan player, will be had when a special concert with the title "A Generation of Pan" is staged at the Upper Level Club in West Mall, Westmoorings on Sunday September 15, from 7.30 pm.

Featured performer is the 1996 Pan



JASON BAPTISTE ... featured performer in "A Generation of Pan."

Ramajay soloist champion, Jason Baptiste, accompanied by super-talented musicians, the Ruiz Brothers.

British music critic, Benny Green, is quoted as saying: "The liberating of an instrument from its own structural limitations is one of the most profound feats any

musician can perform."

One could easily construe Green's eloquent comment to be in relation to the concert's star performers, for any follower of music in this country will know that Baptiste and the Ruiz brothers, by their contributions over the years on the instruments of their choice, can confidently lay claim to having performed profound feats as musicians.

Special guest artistes on the programme are some of Baptiste's equally talented pan colleagues. They are: former winner of the soloists category of Pan Ramajay, Dennis Smith, the ever versatile Sidney Joseph, and legendary pannist and arranger Earl Rodney.

Our musical development still centres around cultural traditions which dictate that there are seasons to appreciate pan music, as well as other indigenous art forms.

We have developed a sort of plural culture which affords everyone a space of its own and sometimes a given time period where one form must take precedence.

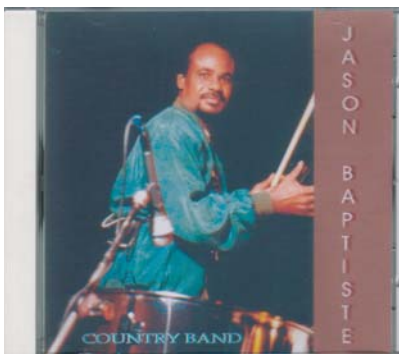
The steelpan has spread to many countries, not as culture, but as music. The North Americans, Europeans, and Japanese are willing to explore all its possibilities, and are not restricted like us by having a steelband culture.

The time has surely passed for us to break with tradition and give full, year-round support to the steelband and the efforts of its exponents.

Baptiste, Smith, Joseph, Rodney, the Ruiz brothers, and all the other pannists out there deserve nothing less.

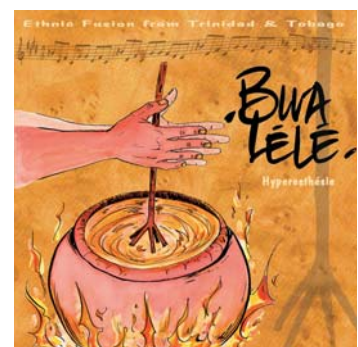
By Uptempo

"...The judges' decision was well accepted as Lincoln Enterprises Pan Ensemble was really the pick of the lot. Jason Baptiste also proved that he is an exceptional panman and an example to many of the would be soloists who run up and down the blues scale, murder the chromatic and beat the hell out of the instrument without making musical sense..."



LEFT, "Country Band", Jason Baptiste, 2001

RIGHT, "Hyperesthesie", Bwa Lele, 2002 ; featuring Jason Baptiste.



## A brief history

Jason Baptiste plays the double tenor pans with four mallets thus increasing his harmonic density. He has won various awards both as a soloist and a composer. As a steel band arranger he has consistently been in the top placing in Trinidad's Steelband competitions. Major tours include the USA and Thailand.

- 1975 - 1978 Starland Steel Orchestra
- 1976 - 1977 Golden Sounds Steel Orchestra
- 1979 - 1980 Sun Valley Steel Orchestra
- 1980 - 1984 Pan Around de Neck Roots Steelband (Cofounder and Arranger)
- 1985 Starland Steel Orchestra (Arranger)  
Keyboardist/Arranger Errol Goodridge  
Composer/Pannist/Bassist Earl Rodney
- 1986 1987 COUNTRY FUSION with Keyboardist Errol Goodridge and Earl Rodney
- 1987 - 1988 ULTIMATE MADNESS with Pianist Wilfred Woodley
- 1988 Pianist/Keyboardist, Raf Robertson
- 1989 Pan Jazz Festival with Pianist Clive "Zanda" Alexander  
Silver Harps Steel Orchestra (Arranger)
- 1990 Fortunia Ruiz and THE WORKSHOP BAND
- 1991 - 1992 Starland Steel Orchestra (Arranger)
- 1992 Joined the band FRENZ TOO a Calypso/Jazz Fusion group comprising of musicians Felix Ruiz - piano/keyboards, Michael Curtis Ruiz electric bass, Sean Thomas drums, Ricardo Ruiz drums, Fortunia Ruiz Flugel horn/trumpet
- 1994 - 1997 Self Help Marines Pan Around de Neck Steel Orchestra (Arranger)
- 1997 Traveled to Thailand to work at the Marriott Hotel. Played with Russian musicians Oleg Langouroi bass/keyboards/harmonica/vocals, Alexi tenor & soprano saxophones
- 1998 Traveled to the United States of America and worked with Drummer and Percussionist Jeff Busch, Brazilian Jazz Pianist Jovino Santos Neto, American Jazz Pianist Rual Dublag, Jazz Bassist Phil Sparks and Mike Bisio, Brazilian Guitarist, Eduardo Mendoca. Played with Seattle based Steel Band BAKRA BATHA
- 2000 Guadeloupe with Luther François and Barbados with Aturo Tappin
- 2001 Studio work for Bwa Lele, a Trini/French project

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