

*The first ever*

# EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STEELPAN



The First European International Conference on Steelpan commissioned by the British Association of Steelbands (BAS) entitled: "Steelband Music and Education in the 21st Century; Projecting a Vision of the Future through Global Experiences" was held at the University of East London, Docklands Campus between 30 - 31st August 2006. Its main sponsor was the Arts Council of England but the meeting was also part supported by Yakult (UK) and Natren (USA).



## The overall aims and objectives of the conference were to:

- Provide a forum for discussion on the diverse range of academic activities associated with the steel pan; including historical aspects.
- Exchange ideas on models and processes developed successfully around the globe.
- Discuss and report on experiences of teaching models in education, in the form of workshops and personal experiences.
- Foster national and international links with the aim of enhancing the success of projects and maximising funding opportunities.
- Establish steel band activities within the curriculum of higher educational institutes particularly at universities.

The meeting was opened by UEL registrar, Dr. Alan Ingle who voiced his considerable interest in steel pan and the university's association and its conferral of honorary degrees to eminent contributors of this art form. He also outlined the association that Nostalgia Steel band had with the university over the years that led up to this conference.

One Hundred and seven participants attended over the two days. They mainly came from the UK and Europe as well as Japan, Canada, the Caribbean and South America. Participants included pannists, tuners, teachers, students, researchers and academics. The conference progressed from an open discussion on issues facing the steel pan in the UK and Europe through to various teaching methods and formal presentation sessions on the second day. Some of the themes covered by the various presenters included Pan in Education, Pan and Global Networking, BAS initiatives, Experiences of particular countries such as the UK, Trinidad, Germany, Canada, Japan and France, Accreditation and Standards.



A wide range of issues was discussed. These included, sponsorship of steel band in the context of carnivals and festivals, difficulties in finding venues for rehearsing especially in London, communication, the role of panorama in the development of the steel pan art form, panorama judging criteria and standards, pan teaching resources, accreditation and standards, pan as a subject of research and study in higher education, BAS national and international initiatives and the use of global networking through the internet. Another import issue was the (traditional) pivotal role of Trinidad and Tobago in the development of steel pan and setting of standards and present-day autonomous trends and developments in pan taking place in other parts of the globe. It was recognised that as pan, the instrument goes global; people of other cultures will appropriate it in their specific context. At the same time, it was noted that the Caribbean practitioners need to be more pro-active in keeping abreast and ahead of developments in pan in as much as the Caribbean represents the cradle of this art form.

## Outcomes

A key aim of this conference was to initiate the introduction of steel pan into the music curriculum of universities. An invitation during this meeting by Dr. Jo Thomas (Music Department, University of East London) to meet with the organisers, to make this a reality, has been accepted. Should this materialise, this would represent a significant step towards achieving the major thrust of this conference and help to consolidate its position for a subsequent conference in two years.

A follow up meeting on accreditation and standards was proposed by Diana Hancox and accepted. This was held in January 2007 in London.

Finally, a book featuring conference papers and summary of issues discussed will be published.



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