

Sterling Betancourt

TASPO, STERLING BETANCOURT HONOURED

Sterling Betancourt, one of the members of TASPO receives his award from Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Joan Yuille-Williams.



The musicians of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra who ventured out to stardom way back in 1951 never knew what to expect when they introduced the little known steel pan. Then the world fell in love with the magic of the modified oil drums and the harmony of sweet music for the instrument began.

That was the experience of the members of the nation's First National Steel Orchestra when they shared the gift of the pan across the seas. Sadly though, the same pan men who pioneered the movement were forgotten, their music appreciated and remembered by only the "diehards". However, this was put right in November 2006 when Pan Trinbago in collaboration with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and

Gender Affairs held "Panguard Awards" at the Crowne Plaza, Wrightson Road, Port of Spain. Special tribute was paid to the surviving members of TASPO.

Pan Trinbago's President, Patrick Arnold, distributed plaques as well as cheques to the members of the First National Steel band. Arnold said: "As a nation we must never forget the contributions made by those men who did more than introduce an instrument to the world. He pointed out that they also placed Trinidad and Tobago on the world stage way back then." Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, Joan Yuille-Williams said: "When the First National Steel band made their first tour the members were not paid for their services." She added, that the envelopes with which the honourees were presented on the night represented payment for only that first tour, citing also the economic contributions made by the steel pan to the nation.

Yuille-Williams reminded the guests about the history of the steel pan following the abolition of chattel slavery and the Camboulay riots that preceded the outlawing of stick fighting and banning of African drumming, which opened the way for the conception of the steel pan. The surviving members of TASPO present to receive their awards were Sterling Betancourt who resides in England and Anthony Williams. Ellie Mannette who lives in the United States was unable to attend. Posthumous tribute was paid to Sydney Gallop. Also honoured on the night was Oscar "Bogart" Pile. Pan is not just an artistic innovation; it is a deliberate invasion of an area of artistic activity.

By PAPARAZZI