

# It's absolutely pan-tastic

## Steelpan & many young pan players take center stage at N.Y. Panorama

BY TREVOR JOHN  
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

IF CELEBRATED COMPOSERS such as Bach and Beethoven were alive today and in New York, it would be hard to imagine that they would not be arrangers and composers participating in New York Panorama.

This coming Saturday, the massive steel orchestras — with hundreds of instruments and upwards of 100 players each — will literally roll onto the Brooklyn Museum grounds to participate in the annual New York steelband music Panorama contest. In tow, ensnared in a musical bond, will be thousands of fans, enthusiasts and supporters from the world over.

The event is held annually in New York as part of the five-day West Indian Carnival and Parade, and will take place this year on Sept. 5 starting at 8 p.m. Panorama remains the biggest draw of the events sponsored by the West Indian American Day Carnival Association during pre-Labor day festivities.

What is Panorama? At its most basic definition, it's simply a distinguished steelband music competition, and much more than a singular occurrence. It is an experience — one inextricably interwoven with the human spirit's essence to define oneself, survive, conquer its environment, showcase genius, progress and validate its humanity while aspiring to communal greatness.

Panorama is the most significant New York performing arts medium in the last 50 years, bar none.

On paper, this 10-minute musical performance of the competing bands calls for the execution of a series of dexterous, imaginative innovations demonstrating top musicianship.

In reality, it is a creative exhibition that must connect with some

of the most demanding critics, while simultaneously housing and propelling a community's dreams and commitment.

Ten minutes of distinction, fame, attention. Ten minutes annually — to sum up the sacrifices, work and efforts of a season, community and each individual involved.

It's truly an exhilarating experience for competitors and spectators alike, and few events can match Panorama's intensity, pageantry and creativity.

It is magnificently elegant, Olympic-styled in competitiveness, drama, tension — with the fervent loyalty of a Super Bowl-styled fan base where the euphoria of performing live is supreme.

It's the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat and more.

One might expect to simply get a Caribbean experience from the event, but a further look reveals a deeper introspective.

New York Panorama can be more accurately characterized as another facet of America's performing arts and psyche, richly reflective of the nation's immigrant history, but primarily expressive of the impact of Caribbean culture.

There are panorama competitions all over the globe, but New York's is unique, with decades of intrigue, history and tradition. Legendary jazz great Max Roach, well-acquainted with the steel orchestra after experiencing Panorama live, said that the steelpan instrument belonged on a "world stage."

In New York's Panorama, participants, fans and organizations have put themselves on a path to accomplish just that by creating an esteemed position for the unique Caribbean art form in the city.

The Panorama musical phenomenon has done much popularize the steel orchestra in the



Members of smartly-dressed, musically proficient ADLIB Steel Orchestra groove at the last year's New York Panorama behind the Brooklyn Museum. Teen panist Darius Gamory (below) performs with Pantonic Steel Orchestra at the popular West Indian Carnival Festival event. Photos by Cyprean Phillips



U.S., particularly among the youth. Given the contentious disconnect and often hostile environment that is New York for steelbands, it is astonishing the culture has survived, maintaining, and even increasing, its distinction.

Darius Gamory, 15, is a member of the Pantonic Steel Orchestra, playing for three years.

"Nothing compares to pan. I feel great!" declared Darius, who this year is heading for his third Panorama competition.

Many Panorama players have

developed into career musicians; several New York Panorama youngsters are pursuing music college degrees.

Then-18-year-old musician extraordinaire André White, who led ADLIB Steel Orchestra to its first Panorama victory in 2008 (the youngest to ever achieve such a feat), is now a full-time student at the prestigious Berkeley College of Music.

New York's steelband panorama is truly an American experience with authentic Trinidad-Caribbean origins; it is high culture.

Ultimately, New York Panorama is a love affair between participants and fans bordering on "madness" when one considers the mind-boggling outlay in finances, energy and emotion.

It is a positive obsession that continues to elevate New York's artistic and cultural platform.

Trevor John is the editor of the [www.PanOnTheNet.com](http://www.PanOnTheNet.com) Web site.



Red devil reveler at the 2008 early morning J'Ouvert event, which winds through Brooklyn. Photo by Hayden Roger Celestin

## J'Ouvert – early morning masquerade

BY JARED MCCALLISTER  
DAILY NEWS CARIBBEAT COLUMNIST

J'OUVERT IN Brooklyn is always a special event, but this is an extraordinary year.

The early-morning procession of masqueraders and steelbands, that precedes the West Indian Carnival Festival Parade, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. And for the first time, the event will have grand marshals.

Sponsored by J'Ouvert City International organization, the event will be held on Sept. 7, starting about 4 a.m. It will begin at Flatbush Ave. and Empire Blvd., move east along Empire Blvd. to Nostrand Ave., then then travel south on Nostrand to end at Rutland Road.

Revelers from across the country and tourists from around the world religiously flock to Brooklyn each year to witness and take part in J'Ouvert. As the early morning sun heralds Labor Day, thousands of spectators and the event judges will witness the magic and ingenuity of the costumes — some which lampoon political figures and celebrities — and the skill of the steelband performers. No blaring amplified music allowed, just steel drums and percussion instruments.

J'Ouvert City International runs the event, which is not officially affiliated with West Indian Carnival Festival Parade on Eastern Parkway.

The grand marshals for 2009 are Roger Toussaint, president of Transport Workers

Union Local 100; Sidique Wai, administrative community relations specialist with the NYPD; Angela Cooper, director of community affairs at the Susan Smith McKinney Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Brooklyn; State Sen. Eric Adams (D-Brooklyn); City Councilman Kendall Stewart (D-Brooklyn); City Councilman Mathieu Eugene (D-Brooklyn); State Sen. Kevin Parker (D-Brooklyn); Karl Cohen of the 71st Precinct Community Council; radio personality Bob Frederick; the Rev. Terry Lee of the Byways & Hedges Youth Outreach Ministry, and Brother Austin Tuitt of Global Caribbean Representation.

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