

ALL STARS TRIUMPHS

By COREY CONNELLY Monday, March 7 2011

WITH a score of 278 points, Neal & Massy Trinidad All Stars yesterday morning created history by becoming the first steelband to receive a hefty \$2 million for winning the National Panorama competition at the Queen's Park Savannah in Port-of-Spain.

In winning the prestigious title, All Stars, a highly popular band whose panyard is at 46-48 Duke Street in Port-of-Spain, dethroned last year's champion PCS Silver Stars, by a mere three points during Saturday night's keenly-fought Panorama finals. Silver Stars was awarded \$750,000 for its effort.

The enhanced \$2 million prize package was made possible through the Peoples' Partnership Government for the winners of four major Carnival competitions, including the National Steelband Panorama, Soca Monarch, last night's calypso monarch final at Dimanche Gras and the Chutney/Soca Monarch.

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has said the new prize structure should become a fixture at Carnival competitions, once there was an upswing in the economy. Placing second in Saturday's competition with 276 points and receiving a cool \$1 million was St Augustine-based Sagicor Exodus.

Perennial favourite Petrotrin Phase II Pan Groove, led by famed arranger Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, secured fourth spot with 273 points along with the Woodbrook-based Caribbean Airlines Invaders.

The band from the "Lavantee Hills", Witco Desperadoes placed a disappointing seventh with 270 points. Segments of the capacity audience openly voiced their disapproval over how Phase II and Desperadoes fared in the competition.

The results of this year's Panorama finals, which commemorated the 75th diamond jubilee of the steelpan, were announced shortly before 4 am yesterday, after almost nine hours of stiff competition at the Savannah where pan music reigned supreme.

The Prime Minister, patron of the event, was on hand to present the winning cheque to the champion band. Tenor player Dwayne Ifill accepted the large replica cheque on behalf of the band's officials.

Persad-Bissessar was accompanied by Arts and Multiculturalism Minister Winston "Gypsy" Peters, Attorney General Anand Ramlogan, Education Minister Dr Tim Gopeesingh, Agriculture Minister Vasant Bharath and Pan-Trinbago president Keith Diaz.

Playing first among the large conventional bands, All Stars led by Beresford Hunte, gave a commanding performance to Anslem Douglas' "It's Showtime" a tune of choice for three bands in the large band category. Stylishly-dressed in shimmering red shirts, white trousers and matching hats, the band set the stage for the almost seamless performances which followed. The band's presentation featured young dancers, portraying several elements of local culture. Fireworks and confetti completed the display. The winning selection was composed by Edwin Pouchet and Alvin Daniell.

"We feel proud because we were the first band to win \$1 million, the first band to win \$2 million and you know when the PP (People's Partnership) Government wins in the next five years, we will be the first band to win \$3 million. Don't worry, we coming strong. We coming strong," an elated Ifill told reporters moments after accepting the cheque.

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Ifill said players had put a lot of hard work into the competition "and we are happy that our hard work paid off." Surrounded by his colleagues, Ifill however acknowledged the close race.

"It was a tight battle and I must say the band came together well," he said.

"Everybody stuck to the task and we are just proud of each other and proud that we could have come and give that beautiful music to Trinidad and Tobago. I just want everybody to have a happy Carnival."

Ifill said the band will be on the streets today and tomorrow, performing their winning tune.

Led by Ainsworth Mohammed and playing Destra Garcia's "Calling Meh", Exodus' performance was also warmly applauded. So, too, was the similarly-attired Silver Stars, but patrons were in a quandary as to why the band chose to present a curtain effect with the use of silver and black streamers, mounted on long poles (to give a concert-like effect), after the band had already become clearly visible on stage.

The gesture seemed inappropriate and may have cost the band the title for a third consecutive year. Shortly after All Stars' performance, Pan Trinbago's Keith Diaz presented Persad-Bissessar with a cheque for \$75,000 toward her pet project, the Children's Life Fund, as a means of commemorating the steelpan's diamond jubilee.

The fund, one of the Partnership's major campaign promises in the run up to the May 24, 2010 general election, was established to assist children who require life-saving medical attention.

Persad-Bissessar paid glowing tribute to Peters for his efforts at upgrading the North and Grand Stands of the Savannah, which now accommodates a seating capacity exceeding 20,000.

Earlier in the night, Diaz also presented President George Maxwell Richards with a token in celebration of the milestone. Richards said in his own way, he has been supporting the work of Pan-Trinbago and urged citizens to also play their part in ensuring the continued development of the artform.

In a brief interview with reporters after the winners were announced, Persad-Bissessar said Carnival 2011 has been a bumper celebration thus far. "I'm told every hotel room is sold out. I'm told every airline ticket is sold out. And, every fete has been sold out, every show has been sold out. It has been a bumper, sold out Carnival," she said.

The Prime Minister was also pleased with the measures that have been put in place to ensure increased security. "There are no adverse reports of any criminal activity. I look forward to their protection over the next couple of days. I feel we have a great Carnival," she said. The show, which began 20 minutes later than its scheduled 7 pm start, flowed smoothly during the medium band segment of the competition. Lengthy delays in the setting up of bands in the large bands category coupled with frequent requests for supporters of popular bands to clear the stage hampered an otherwise seamless programme.

Some patrons also noted the absence of bp Renegades from this year's stellar line-up after a judge Justice Maureen Rajnauth-Lee, on Friday threw out a plea by the nine-time champion to be included in the finals of the Panorama competition.

The band had filed an injunction, seeking to stop the Panorama finals, after complaining that they were disrupted during the semi-final round of the competition on February 20 because of the playing of DJ music at the North Stand during their performance.

PLACINGS POINTS PRIZE MONEY

- 1 Neal & Massy Trinidad All Stars..... 278 points \$2M
- 2 Sagicor Exodus 276 points \$1M
- 3 PCS Silver Stars 275 points \$750,000
- 4 Petrotrin Phase II Pan Groove 273 points \$600,000

4 Caribbean Airlines Invaders.....	273 points.....	\$600,000
6 NLCB Fonclaire.....	271 points.....	\$500,000
7 Witco Desperadoes.....	270 points.....	\$450,000
7 Petrotrin Siparia Deltones.....	270 points.....	\$450,000
9 RBC/RBTT Redemption Sound Setters.....	268 points.....	\$450,000
10 Starlift.....	265 points.....	\$450,000

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