

The Power of the Ensemble

NGC Sanfest

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Hello everyone. I am so very pleased to be here with you today, on behalf of the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago. My remarks are going to be very brief because I know what we all *really* want to hear is the wonderful performances from the finalists of the NGC Sanfest Pan Ensemble.

This part of the competition is one of the highlights of the entire Festival. The eyes and ears of a pan-loving Nation are focused very closely on you, youthful pannists. Some of you will be our shining Panorama stars of the future, and we want to see if we can spot you from now!

What is particularly enjoyable for people in the audience who have a little age on them, is that the musicians are playing some of the greatest Road March tunes ever written...melodies produced between 1971 (which is just after the Junior Arts Festival launched) and 1990. Tambu, Mighty Duke, Rudder, Penguin, Calypso Rose—we are so looking forward to hearing how you interpret the well-loved compositions of these great calypsonians of a few decades ago!

It's fitting that today you are all sitting (or standing like me!) in a place which is important to the cultural history of Trinidad and Tobago: Skinner Park. And you are taking part in a festival which is also history-making: NGC Sanfest.

What do I mean?

Let's talk about NGC Sanfest first. An astonishing 200-plus schools have taken part in this year's Festival. Over its 45 years, some of this country's best-known artistes and role models first experienced the big stage and the demands of tough competition in the Junior Arts Festival. Who am I talking about? How about Machel, Kes, Liam Teague, Atiba Williams, and Sherma Andrews to name a few. NGC Sanfest was an important landmark on their road to international fame and success.

What will it be for you, young musicians? You have put in many long hours of practice. Your teachers have been with you every step of the way. It's an exhausting process when you are striving to be the best that you can be, whether through learned skill or natural talent. But, there are no shortcuts. Everyone who leaves here today will have won in terms of tenacity and drive, even though there will only be one first prize. Through your performances today, you will give meaning to the NGC Sanfest theme, *Empowering Youth Through the Arts*, and you will bring it alive on stage.

In February 2007, Panorama Finals were held here in Skinner Park for the first time in the Nation's history. So the pannists today are following in the footsteps of some of the great panmen and women of our time. This Pan Ensemble competition gives young musicians from primary and secondary schools the opportunity to express and hone their talents on the national instrument, and to play as one part of a much greater whole. The rhythm of working in a group, and the dynamic of the relationships within that group coming together harmoniously, is a precious thing.

In many ways, the production of the Junior Arts Festival is also an ensemble performance. It is made up of the contributions of diverse, separate groups of people who form a harmonious whole. Remove any one of the components and NGC Sanfest could not continue to bloom and grow, year upon year. There are the patient judges, the administrative team, technicians and stage managers. There is the deeply committed executive led by Arts Council Chair, Sherid Mason and Festival Director Winston Bramble. Jessel Murray and the Department of Creative and Festival Arts from UWI are playing a significant role for the second year running. There are the hard-working teachers, the tireless parents and the schools who provide facilities, instruments and motivation. And there is the important role that the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago is able to fulfill through our investment in the Festival for some 13 years. Funding is the oil that smooths the way for the Festival's principals to focus on planning and running the show, and making the NGC Sanfest something of which we can all be proud.

To the performers and the audience, I wish you a most enjoyable few hours as we let the music take over from the talk.

Thank you so much.