



Preparing for Tomorrow



NGC Couva Joylanders take the stage at Panorama 2020



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**The panorama of pan
- NGC invests in the
industry's big picture**



Imagine for a moment that steelpan music lived a full life outside of Trinidad Carnival. Imagine year-round concerts by acclaimed bands, featuring chart-topping collaborations with leading vocalists. Music-literate children learn pan and pan history in schools and join pan camps and clubs in their free time. Panmakers abound, with many brands and storefronts competing and driving innovation, and tuners are in ready supply. In that place, pan is a thriving industry of artisans, musicians, teachers and entrepreneurs, collectively producing for a healthy market.

For NGC, there is no reason why this cannot become the reality of pan in Trinidad and Tobago. For one, as the birthplace and authority on the instrument, the country has the intellectual and creative capital to build an industry around it.

Moreover, the national public is instinctively protective of pan's heritage and future. Just under two decades ago, when Trinidad and Tobago learned that a patent had been filed in the US for 'Production of a Caribbean

Steelpan', the news triggered national outrage. The public challenged the idea that someone far removed from the history of this instrument could stake a claim on its future.

If the passion and skill sets are there, then the right investment attention should catalyse the development of this industry. This is certainly NGC's conviction. The Company has therefore been working hard to secure the future of pan, injecting over \$14 million into the industry since 1999.

NGC AND PAN

At the heart of NGC's campaign of support lies a question – how do we grow pan into a viable, profitable industry? Two considerations have underwritten NGC's investment to that end.

Firstly, from its experience in energy, NGC recognised the need for a strong value chain.



If steelpan music is a product that Trinidad and Tobago wants to bring to market, due investment is needed in the raw materials and processes involved in its creation.

Secondly, after initial investments are made, the industry should be able to stand on its own. That is, it must be a generative industry that can exist without the need for corporate support. It must be able to maintain its own viability with positive feedback loops that stimulate continual growth. In other words, it must be sustainable. Marrying both these criteria, NGC has tailored its investments to help build pan's value chain in such a way that the industry can independently sustain growth into the future.

Talent development

One of the primary inputs into the pan industry is talent – there must be players capable of producing music. NGC's investment in talent began with its support of unsponsored steelbands over two decades ago. Without a corporate sponsor, these bands would not have been able to fund their activities, which would in turn have

meant their players would not have had the opportunity to practise and develop their talents.

This support eventually evolved into more structured partnerships with bands in the Company's fenceline communities – NGC Couva Joylanders, NGC La Brea Nightingales, NGC Steel Xplosion from Tobago and the Gonzales Sheikers.

To participate more actively in player development, NGC began funding music literacy training for band members. Traditionally, songs are learnt by rote in panyards, with students mechanically copying what the band leader would play.

This method of practical instruction would be used as most members cannot read sheet music. However, if pan music is to be competitive at an international level, its players must be professional musicians capable of reading and writing music.

Literate pannists could study and practise independently, expanding the scope of music they could produce. They would also be able to write their own original music or record the music of others. Development of this skill set





can create niche markets for composers and arrangers, as well as scorers and transcribers, who could generate income from material they produce.

Thanks to NGC's music literacy programmes, many band members now sit music exams and receive certifications that can allow them to further their training and build their marketability as musicians.

Of course, building a future in pan music requires a level of commitment to practice and engagement with the bands and their activities. To give a push in this regard, NGC directed funding for incentives and rewards for dedicated players who have met certain criteria of performance, attitude and involvement. In the past, this stipend was used to finance player participation in regional and international events.

Business competitiveness

Recognising that player success is correlated to the exposure and performance of the bands with which they play, NGC has also invested in building the capacity of band administrators. The intent is to ensure the leaders have the necessary training to manage the bands as businesses. To be successful, bands must actively promote and seek engagements; they must have income to cover instrument tuning and repair, pay salaried members, and offset costs associated with participation in competitions; they must be able to advertise their product and stimulate demand for their music. Bands with solid reputations are able to retain talent and attract new members who can add value. Accounting, marketing, brand management and managerial skills are therefore valuable assets for band leaders.

Over the years, NGC's capacity-building training has exposed leaders from across its sponsored bands to fundamental coaching around the administration of their bands as businesses. This training will help raise the standard and profitability of these bands and increase their competitiveness.

In addition to focusing on administrative skill sets, NGC has also allocated funding to assist bands with wealth generation projects. These are special internally run initiatives that bands can use to earn their own income, such as annual concerts or the sale of branded items. NGC's contribution to these projects is essentially seed capital. The idea is to help ensure the bands' survival and sustainability well into the future, beyond the term of NGC's support.

Infrastructure

A major factor in the success and growth of any band is having an adequately outfitted space for practice,

with proper acoustics and sufficient square footage to accommodate pans and members. A dedicated band facility can also serve as an epicentre for community events, academic instruction and wealth generation activities.

For these reasons, NGC has sought to help its sponsored bands meet their infrastructural needs. So far, the Company assisted with the renovation of the NGC Couva Joylanders' facility, House of S.T.E.E.L, located in the band's hometown of Couva. This facility consists of a multistorey building with classrooms, office space, courtyard space for practice, an indoor hall, a bar/concession area and toilet facilities. It is currently adequate for the needs of the band and is utilised to host both band and community activities.

NGC is actively working with stakeholders to secure similar spaces for its other sponsored bands, NGC La Brea Nightingales and NGC Steel Xplosion, who do not own dedicated facilities.

Supporting pan trades

In the early days of the steelpan industry, the pioneers of the instrument trialled various iterations before arriving at the schematics for the pans we use today. The body of knowledge they collectively developed was passed down through successive generations of panmakers and tuners, and today, they remain the proprietors of that knowledge.

If the local pan industry is to grow, there must be sufficient specialist panmakers and tuners to service greater demand. Unfortunately, induction and training in the craft did not keep pace with demand for the instrument, and there is a dwindling number of skilled craftsmen in the industry today.

To help address this growing market gap, NGC partnered with the MIC Institute of Technology in 2018 to deliver a customised pan manufacturing programme to members of its supported bands. In this three-year programme, participants are learning to sink, groove and tune pans. This will augment the pool of pan artisans in Trinidad and Tobago and ensure the country can preserve the authenticity of these crafts.

This training will also allow bands to save significantly on tuning – a skill which usually costs tens of thousands to outsource. For NGC Steel Xplosion in Tobago, the value of having in-house tuners would be even more pronounced, as the band is currently dependent on a tuner from Trinidad.

In addition to manufacture and tuning, band members are being taught basic welding and machine shop skills so they can build pan stands, repair broken instruments,



Digital Music Scores were launched for free public access on NGC's website on March 6th, 2020

or customise tools. They are further being trained in sound engineering, music technology and computer applications used in the industry. There is consequently scope for a diversity of pan-related career paths to grow out of this training programme.

Learning resources

For any industry to iterate its activity, there must be a constant stream of practitioners mobilised to keep it going. This demands prior education in the fundamentals of the relevant discipline.

When it comes to pan, NGC has not only invested in skills development for band members, but it has most recently sought to build the repository of instructional material available to teachers and students, in the form of music scores for pan. Insofar as there can be no future for pan without requisite learning, this project lays important groundwork for the industry.

In 2019, NGC approached The University of the West Indies (The UWI) to record and transcribe music performed by

its sponsored bands over two Panorama seasons. For a few weeks, a team of postgraduate students visited the panyards and captured their songs. Using the music notation system SIBELIUS, these recordings were converted into music files and edited for three proficiency levels – Primary School, Secondary School and Masters. The resulting scores were then compiled into digital publications which were launched for free public access on NGC's website on March 6th, 2020.

NGC foresaw several important benefits of this project, all centred on sustainability of the industry. Having music scores customised for steelpan makes instruction possible outside the panyard, accessible for classroom education and available to a wider public. Anyone who can read sheet music could potentially learn to play, even independently, and this could encourage more musicians to take up the instrument, adding to the pool of players.

On top of these important outcomes, scored music targets sustainability on another level. Many pannists learn to play music by ear, relying on oral instruction from their leaders. However, the fraternity risks losing pan compositions as



2020 Medium Band Panorama Champions, NGC Couva Joylanders

tutors age or pass away unless there is a deliberate path to preservation for posterity. The industry cannot build without a foundation. Scored music is therefore just as much historical record as it is instructional material.

It is also noteworthy that in the course of the scoring exercise, students from The UWI gained experience in how to record and transcribe music, which builds capacity in a field that may well rise to prominence if the campaign to grow pan is successful.

Competition

Alongside all the foundational work that NGC has funded in the pan industry, a core area of support continues to be equipping its bands for competitions, the biggest of which is the national Panorama event. Competitions give exposure on a national stage, allowing bands to connect with audiences who appreciate their music and potentially grow their fan base. The stakes of competition also push bands to produce at high quality and work at constant improvement.

NGC funding helps bands offset expenditure associated with preparing for competitions, particularly Panorama. These costs include pan tuning, purchase of custom uniforms and transportation costs.

In 2020, NGC's decades-long investment in pan was rewarded with a Panorama win by one of its sponsored bands, the NGC Couva Joylanders. The young band from NGC's home community earned top honours in the Medium Band Category, after an exceptional performance in the finals. The win was doubly momentous for NGC as the event was held for the first time in Tobago – an indication in itself that the industry is expanding its footprint.

GROWING THE FUTURE

Pan is an industry with many moving parts, all of which must be properly attended for the industry to perform and grow. Understanding the components and mutually reinforcing relationships in the value chain is crucial to directing investment where it is needed. By taking a panoramic view of the pan industry, NGC has been able to incubate growth across the value chain and set the instrument on course for a full life outside of Panorama. ■