



**REMARKS TO BE DELIVERED BY MR. LARRY HOWAI,
CHAIRMAN – THE NATIONAL GAS COMPANY OF TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO LIMITED**

ON

THE LAUNCH OF STEELFESTT

FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 2012

The Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture and Multiculturalism – Mr
Winston Peters

Representing the Honourable Minister of Planning – **Mr.** Sherron
Manswell, Communication Services Coordinator

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism – Mrs. S Juliana
Boodram

Mr. Peter Kanhai, Office of the Prime Minister (Chairman, Sport &
Culture Board and Management)

Mr. Keith Diaz, President of Pan Trinbago and other members of the
Pan Trinbago Executive

President of NIHERST and Chairperson of the SteelFestt Committee -
Mrs. Maureen Manchouck,

Other members of the SteelFestt Committee:

- Mr. David Dedier (Co-ordinator)
- Mr. Brian Awang
- Mr. Peter Aleong

Members of The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago
(NGC) management team

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Other Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

‘At last!’

I know no better way to express the emotion that I, like my team at NGC,

and all of us here, must feel at arriving at this moment:

the springboard for SteelFesTT.

When you consider the potential of this initiative

to transform the present and the future of the steel pan,

every citizen will embrace the concept of SteelFesTT.

There are three elements that make NGC’s integral involvement

in the launch of SteelFesTT, and its timing, perfectly fitting.

Firstly, like Pan Trinbago, and now the SteelFesTT Committee,

NGC understands what it is to be a ‘custodian’.

NGC has been given the stewardship of a vital area o

of our national patrimony. Our management of the Nation’s

natural gas resource has been entrusted to us by the State.

It is designed to safeguard a valuable commodity

on behalf of the Nation.

As a state enterprise, the people of Trinidad & Tobago own NGC. Developing and enhancing life for citizens is therefore fundamental to NGC's strategic thinking.

The second element of the 'good fit', is that NGC, like the steel pan, is home grown. Steel pan may spring from humble origins, but there is nothing humble about what it has become.

Tremendous talent and innovation have flourished from old, discarded oil drums. Musicians all around the world play pan.

But Trinbagonians know that the music of the steel pan is at its sweetest in the hands of our virtuoso pan players.

The partnerships that support SteelFesTT can now fully exploit other opportunities:

- Pan as a driver of employment and industry
- Pan as a tourist attraction outside of Carnival
- Pan as a cultural icon which gives Trinidad & Tobago unique renown in the world.

NGC's sponsorship is right in line with our commitment

to the development of youth, arts and culture, but more particularly our focus on the preservation and fostering of indigenous art forms. NGC quietly sponsors numerous steel bands that take part in Panorama every year. Without our contribution, they could not make it to the stage. The intense competitiveness of Panorama, through music, is a positive force in communities, and for young people.

The third element of the good fit is one which brings the sponsorship of SteelFesTT close to NGC's heart. It is the dedication to Pat Bishop. Pat once described herself as a painter whose principal hobby is music. The festival's theme, *The Steelpan: Uniting the Sounds of the World*, was coined by Pat. It implies that all indigenous musical instruments can work together for the common good, in spite of different geographical and ethnic identities.

NGC's association with Pat Bishop spans over 20 years of our sponsorship of the Lydian Singers.

There was much more interaction between NGC and Pat that was not so public.

In 2000, Pat Bishop gave NGC her interpretation of 'what we do', in acrylic, wood and gold leaf. "I have no knowledge of technology at all",

Pat said, “but I knew that gas which used to be wasted by being flared was now being compressed and transported by pipeline for useful purposes.” She named the piece *Keeper of the Flame*.

Not only did it cement NGC’s long-standing relationship with Pat, it also became somewhat of a motto for NGC.

Keeper of the Flame is a metaphor that reflects NGC’s custodian role as manager of T&T’s valuable natural gas resource, ensuring it is used for the great benefit of the country. “Being a ‘keeper of the flame’,” said Pat, “is a considerable national responsibility.”

It is a responsibility that we take very seriously.

It is one Pan Trinbago takes seriously.

And it is clearly one that Government takes seriously, and that is why the SteelFesTT committee comprises the formidable group of people here today. They are helped by the interest and participation of performers from Brazil, China, Cuba and India and elsewhere, whose embassies and consulates here have been eager partners. Our local steel pan players will perform with foreign musicians and learn how to integrate the steel pan with other musical genres and indigenous instruments of other countries.

Cultural linkages like these help to build enduring relationships and understanding between countries, creating a platform on which further social and business interaction can thrive.

We will create new markets for steel pan products that are made here, and export the talents of tutors and tuners.

The effort of the SteelFesTT committee in the months ahead will be huge.

I thank them for taking on this Herculean task.

On behalf of NGC, I look forward to a festival that will change our cultural calendar forever with the addition of a world-class event of great international appeal.

Thank you.