



Fantastics Steelband from the town of Nagata, Kobe in Japan was founded to rejuvenate the town after the Hanshin and Awaji earthquakes hit Kobe.

➤ The town of Nagata suffered catastrophic damage because most of the local shopping arcades and markets were destroyed by fire. Kenji Akashi, leader of Fantastics, and a local civil servant around the Nagata area, lost his house in the earthquake. He decided to establish a steel band as a local project after seeing steelbands in New York and knew the sound of a steelpan would encourage people who had suffered from the natural disaster. The local authorities and a mail-order firm assisted him in the project called "Nagata Latin Music Street". They bought steelpans and provided a pan yard near Nagata Station, where they practiced regularly. The project attracted local shopkeepers and citizens, and "Fantastics" was established in 2001 with twenty members. In 2002, they played in gigs including the opening events of World Cup 2002 and Kobe Airport.

In 2005, they decided to have a big event to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Hanshin and Awaji earthquakes. They recruited

one hundred players using a community paper and one hundred and fifteen citizens of Kobe applied for participation in the event. The municipal office provided the steelpans and Kobe 100 Steel Orchestra was formed. In August 2005, Kobe Steelpan Carnival was held and ten steel bands including Kobe 100 Steel Orchestra and Exodus Steel Orchestra from Trinidad joined the carnival. A special song to commemorate Kobe's recovery from the earthquake was introduced there. The lyric of the song, "To Bring Happiness" was written by one of the primary school teachers in Kobe.

The orchestra produced a CD that included this song, Brazil and Calypso Latin Okinawa melody. The profit from the CD that amounted to over £1,000 was donated to the victims of another earthquake in Niigata. The music of the CD was arranged by Yoki Murakami, a musical arranger who comes from Yokohama. Murakami started playing the steel pan after meeting Andy Narrell at the University of North Texas, from where he graduated. He played in

the world famous Trinidad and Tobago National Panorama competition with the Harmonites steel orchestra in 2001. Murakami founded the Pan Village Pan School in Tokyo and Yokohama in 2001 and now tutors about one hundred students.

Fantastic's members' ages range from teen to the sixties. They play in over thirty local festivals and gigs annually. One of their main events is the Kobe Festival held annually on the 2nd Saturday in May. They play in the festival from a float whilst some of the members accompany them by playing the pan-around-the-neck. In Japan, steel pan music is looked upon as healing music and lends an atmosphere of encouragement to all who listen to it. The members of the Fantastics steel band certainly epitomizes the meaning of Music is the Food of Love as they bring happiness to all in attendance wherever and whenever they play. Play on Fantastics, Spread the Steelpan Gospel!

By Yoko Kimura

LAND OF THE RISING SUN

➤ FANTASTICS