



THE MAHARAJH KIDS STEELBAND

Back in 1956 in rural Pepper Village, a small settlement near the town of Fyzabad in southern Trinidad, an 8-year-old youngster named Malaviya Maharajh commonly referred to as Mal, first showed interest in the steel pan instrument.

Mal came from a typically thinking family of East Indian descent, where non-traditional East Indian activities were frowned upon, and as the steelband was associated with the 'bad john, drug using, gambling elements of the society at that time, he faced the disapproval of his peers.

This ideology did not deter Mal at all, in fact over the following months his younger brother, Valamekhi

also known as Mickey also showed interest in the steelpan, and proved to be even more proficient with the instrument. Mickey performed at local shows and talent contests, and always seem to be the limelight of any performances, stealing the show every time. Mickey settled in on the tenor pan, whilst Mal chose the play the more versatile double second pans. This transformation was relatively simple owing to



Mr Boisey Rouse and the Southern Syncopators Steel Band located next door to them and for whom their father, Kadar was the manager.

Both brothers started appearing on the local Radio Trinidad talent contest, "Auntie Kay Radio Show", where they competed with the likes of Jemima Noel, a trumpeter and the Twisting Tots, Wayne and Marva Arthur, two kids who twisted their way to every one's hearts. Most of the time they placed first in the contest, and before long, their other two brothers, Anand, who played a home made high-hat/kick-drum setup, and Kushwant nicknamed, Kush, who opted for a single bass, joined in. Ranees, their only sister and the youngest, just couldn't be left out, so she picked up the only thing she could lift, the maracas. This was the inception of the Maharajh Kids, and by 1959, these five kids were well on their way to becoming a household name in Trinidad.

As time passed they joined the 'Texaco Caravan' travelling show hosted by Holly Betaudier, and this led to them headlining their own, "Cow & Gate presents the Maharajh Kids" show which gave them the opportunity to perform all over the island of Trinidad. They appeared on several radio and television shows including the "Sat-teen Session" on Radio Guardian, and a Hurricane Flora Relief Show on the Trinidad & Tobago Television (TTT). Columnist Brunell Jones of the Trinidad Guardian featured regular articles and reports on The Maharajh Kids' progress in school, as well as their musical careers.

During their Xmas school break in 1961, the Maharajh Kids steelband experienced their first "working" holiday in Barbados. They were also asked to visit Venezuela shortly after their tour of Barbados but the request did not come to fruition. Their schooling was always given priority and as a result any foreign appearances during school time were ruled out, this led to numerous offers being turned

down over the years. Probably two of their biggest opportunities were to appear on the Arthur Godfrey Show, the predecessor to the Ed Sullivan Show, and the Dinah Shore Show in the USA. But again, due to schooling these offers were never even considered by their father who valued the kids' education above any fame.

They became a regular act at local spots like the Penthouse Night Club, Hilton Hotel, Hotel Normandie, Bel-Air Hotel, Breton Hall Hotel, and Radio Trinidad's, Sunday Serenade Show. They started appearing on shows with top local acts like the Lord Bryner, Ed and Angela Johnson, John Agitation, Vilma Ali, Mighty Zebra, Winston Beharry, the Lord Kitchener, and the Mighty Sparrow. When Johnny Nash appeared in Trinidad in 1961, the Maharajh Kids were one of the opening acts.

In about 1963, a similar group called the Niles Kids came to light. They were sponsored by Klim Milk, but seemed to have dissolved just as fast as they had surfaced. By the mid to late 1960's along came the Samaroo Jets. Just about that time (1966), the oldest Maharajh Kid, Mal, finished high school at Queen's Royal College and left for Chicago to continue his studies. This marked the end of the Maharajh Kids as a musical group. One by one, the kids left the country for the same reason, and by 1969, they were all gone.

The Maharajh clan now all live in Canada yet no two reside in the same city. Four of them are still involved in music, but it is only the youngest, Ranees, who continues with the steelpan, she runs her own local project training kids to play steel band music, ensuring that the culture is alive and evolving. Kush played bass guitar and drums in a group for a while in the '70's, but is now content with just listening to music. Mal currently plays keyboards and guitar as a freelance musician whilst Anand is into keyboards and studio production. Mickey is an arranger and an established guitarist who played

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for the Tropical Fever band based in Canada. However, their music activities have taken a part-time role owing to the demand of their professional careers. They just do not have as much time as they would really like to contribute to their in-bred love of playing music and entertaining others.

The Maharajh Kids and parents withstood a lot of ridicule, harassment, and general demean for being involved in an art-form that at the time was not considered to be the thing to do for children of East Indian or any other ethnic background. In retrospect, the members of this pioneer kids group, their mother, and their now-deceased father all considered the "Maharajh Kids" experience a positive one.

It's exciting to see how attitudes towards the steel pan art form have changed, to the point where the "Pan" is evolving at such a rate that its global recognition and musical journey towards being an established instrument amongst the family of conventional instruments is truly well on its way and its future lies with its continuity by the youth of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

By Malaviya and Ranees Maharajh