



sforzata

STEEL ORCHESTRA

....NO LONGER JUST "THE SUNSHINE BAND"

The Sforzata Steel Orchestra was formed on 29th July 1975 by Merlin 'Mutt' Gill, Irvin Burgess and friends, the band was an offshoot of the Curepe Scherzando Steel Orchestra. The word sforzata is a musical term of Italian origin meaning reinforced or strongly accented, in reference to the way in which a note or chord can be played.



➤ In the wee hours of Carnival Sunday morning 2005, thirty years of hard toil, sweat and tears finally bore fruit. The Sforzata Steel Orchestra was declared the Panorama Champions in the medium category. Thus began the reign of this band from the east at the top of the competitive standings.

Early on, Sforzata gained financial support from the Trinidad National Brewery in the sum of TTD \$8,000.00. For this assistance, the band adopted the name Mackeson Sforzata for a short period of time. Sforzata also became quite popular in the community but failed to gain the mammoth following which Scherzando had once commanded. Part of the reason for this had to do with its location and composition. The panyard site was at the corner of Warren Street and the Eastern Main Road, St. Augustine. However, the band drew the majority of its membership and strength of its support from outside the area - as far as Arouca, Arima and Santa Cruz. For this reason, it was decided to remove the town name "Curepe" from the band's title, in contrast to its predecessor, which is still known as Curepe Scherzando.

In 1984, Sforzata was evicted from its panyard and forced to take up residence on a vacant lot near the Priority Bus Route. New support from the area at this time was encouraged not only by the band's success at national competitions, but also by the negative stigma attached to the high volume of drug related incidents in the area. In the 1976 Panorama competition, Sforzata placed third in the Eastern Zonal Finals and made it as far as the National Semi-Finals. In the same year, sixteen members of the band toured Miami and played at the bicentennial celebration of American Independence. The band managed to make it to the finals in 1978 but placed last with their rendition of Lord Kitchener's *Pan in the 21st Century*. Surrounded by a variety of musical styles, the band won the Bomb competition with the folk song *Mango*

and continued to be in winner's row for the next three years.

Sforzata's track record at Panorama prompted it being labelled by pan aficionados as the 'Sunshine Band'. The orchestra was continuously plagued by failure on the final night of the Panorama competition despite performing well in preliminary rounds. This affected the band's players, and the band gradually shrunk. In an attempt to reverse this trend, the band's arranger Merlin "Mutt" Gill sponsored the band in 1985, but even this had little effect. The waning of the orchestra's support indicated the fickle nature of its fans, demonstrating the way in which bands are valued on their competitive successes.

Buoyed by the late Russell Teshiera's vision and support, Sforzata has redefined its role in Curepe. The very successful Annual Kiddies Carnival has been a mainstay on the band's calendar. Started in 1990, it takes place every Carnival Sunday and is actually one of the biggest Carnival activities in East Trinidad. The panyard at Evans Street, Curepe has maintained its reputation as one of the safest in the country. It now holds regular inter-steelband activities along with hosting parties and even a wedding or two. The band maintains a very active social calendar.

With the establishment of the medium band category in 2004, Sforzata quickly reinvented itself as one of the giants in the steelpan world. In 2005, the band took a risk on an up and coming arranger, Yohan Popwell. With a fresh arranger, the band swept the preliminary, semifinal, and final rounds in 2005 for their first ever Panorama victory with Shadow's tune, *Dingolay*. They successfully defended their title in 2006 playing Baron's *This Melody Sweet*. In 2007 and 2008 the band placed 3rd in the panorama finals. The band is managed by Trevor Reid and Juslin Earle. Sforzata is indeed living up to its name; strong and powerful. by Mazzini Gill

TUNES AND PLACEMENT

➔ 2004 - War 2004 - Merlin "Mutt" Gill, 2005 - *Dingolay* - Yohan Popwell - 1st Place, 2006 - *This Melody Sweet* - Yohan Popwell - 1st Place, 2007 - *Calypto Music* - Yohan Popwell - 3rd Place, 2008 - *Thunder Coming* - Yohan Popwell - 3rd Place