



## TRINIDAD IN THE 1960'S: TRANSFORMATION TO THE BIG BAND A PROFILE OF LENNOX 'BOBBY' MOHAMMED'S GUINNESS CAVALIERS STEEL ORCHESTRA



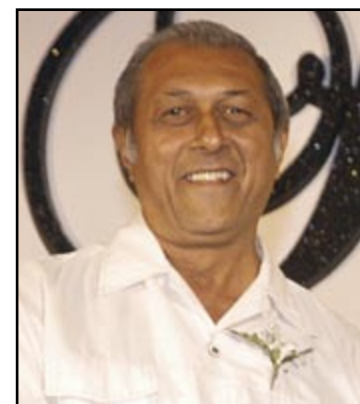
In stark contrast to the 1950's, in which Steelbands struggled to gain acceptance and social status, many writers refer to the 1960's as the "Golden Era of Steelband". Huge cultural changes were taking place and this was matched by the new sound of the steelbands as they challenged the boundaries of this incredible instrument.

Experimental diversification of the basic format such as Anthony Williams's (Pan Am North Stars) 'spider web pan', new tonal qualities (e.g. Alan Gervais steelbands) and the arrival of steelband sponsorship were

major driving forces. Nearly all these activities were taking place in Port of Spain and in the north of Trinidad; conversely little attention was paid to developments in San Fernando and the south. However, this was all about to change with

the arrival of 'The Cavaliers', which unlike any other band, had to earn its sponsorship in open competition in Port of Spain's Woodford Square in 1961 and then became known as 'Guinness Cavaliers'.

This new band led by the



young Lennox 'Bobby' Mohammed, then aged only 18 and still a student of 'Presentation College', made quantum leaps in the world of steelband in a remarkably short period and soon became a *tour de force* for the next two decades. Guinness Cavaliers transformed the steelband from a

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Bobby's arrangement of this piece shocked even the composer while San Fernando welcomed them back with the greatest accolade ever given to a steelband; onlookers climbing to every vantage point to applaud and cheer on their heroes on J'ouvert morning 1965. The following year Guinness Cavaliers placed second in the National Panorama but rose to take the top prize again in 1967.

The band then started looking for more challenging projects and entered the Music Festival of 1966, playing Acts I and IV of the opera Carmen for which they were awarded the prize for best arrangement and an overall place of third. Guinness Cavaliers entered the 1967 music festival with a classical composition written by Bobby called

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modest force into what soon became known as the 'Big Band' and Bobby's extraordinary talent began its musical cornucopia. By 1962/3 they were on the move and by 1964, Guinness Cavaliers took first place in the Southern Steelband competition and reached the All Trinidad Finals for the first time. A year on, they brushed aside the reigning champions of the two previous years, the inimitable Pan Am North Stars, taking the country by storm to win the National Panorama with a scintillating interpretation of Lord Melody's "Mass".

"Revelation from Beyond"; lifting the standards of steelband again to new heights. Crucially, he began taking steelband music out of Trinidad, first to its neighbour Venezuela in 1968, followed by several tours abroad to North America and Europe; helping to establish its presence at an international level.

Bobby terminated his activities with Guinness Cavaliers in 1972, but went on to arrange for 'The National Steelband of Trinidad and Tobago' and several other steelbands up until 1993. His

contribution was immeasurable and he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in New York for 'The Sunshine Awards' and received the 'Humming Bird Gold Medal' in 1992 for his immense contribution to the 'development and shaping of the destiny of this instrument of the 20<sup>th</sup> century'.



The lessons and achievements of this great band and leader can be seen as a paradigm for aspiring bands. Today, the music of Guinness Cavaliers resonates in steelband repertoires throughout Trinidad and around the globe. **David Rudder in his calypso 'Engine Room' poignantly pays tribute to him as "Bobby Mohammed with the Bell"; the percussion piece used to inspire the leadership qualities of this musical genius.** Bobby Mohammed and the vibrant Guinness Cavaliers live on in the hearts and souls of steelband musicians everywhere and it was fitting that the opening presentation of the first academic conference on Steelband, University of East London, 2006 was a presentation by Haroun Shah on the life and work of his dear cousin, Bobby Mohammed and Guinness Cavaliers.

By: Haroun N. Shah,  
Nostalgia Steelband, London.

