

Steel BANDITS

As far back as 1997, the Naparima Alumni Association of Canada provided steelpan classes for the community at Cedarbrae Collegiate where Mr. Randolph Karamath is a teacher. He was also given the role as tutor for the Naparima steelpan classes.



During this time, Cherlin McColman, one of the first individuals from the community came to learn to play the instrument under Mr. Karamath's direction. Meanwhile, Michael Jagdeo (affectionately referred to as Jagdeo) who was a high school student at Cedarbrae Collegiate began his journey with the steelpan in an extra-curricular setting, under the tutorship of Randolph Karamath. Randolph's daughter, Shelli Karamath, who began playing through Naparima's steelpan programme at West Humber Collegiate around 1991, also helped tutor her father's classes at Cedarbrae on a one-to-one level. In 1999, Mikey Captain, another student at Cedarbrae, signed up to take the Steel Pan music-credit course and fell in love with the instrument. Around the same time, Cherlin introduced her friend, Shari Ralph, who joined the Naparima classes. These were the first pioneer members who would later form the foundation of the Steel Bandits.

Cherlin, Shari, Michael, Mikey, Shelli and their leader Randolph, displayed not only the ability to perform well and interpret music exceptionally, they also enjoyed playing together and truly admired the sound they produced as an unofficial group, as they performed frequently for small gatherings and events. Around 2004, Kenwyn Kipenji, a talented student at Cedarbrae began playing the pans and later became their drummer. A self-taught, quiet but creative and versatile drummer, Kenwyn breathed rhythmic life into the Bandits. Gerry Williams, who joined the Naparima classes in 2002 to learn to play the bass pans, revealed that he was a bass guitarist. Now and again he would join the group with his bass guitar, which polished their sound.

Another important member is Janice 'Pan Jan' Ellis. 'Pan Jan' purchased her own pan in 1999 and was a devoted player in the Naparima classes. A few years later, she joined the soon-to-be "Bandits" where she displayed a keen ear for picking up songs quickly. In 2003, surgery interrupted her learning for two months. Despite this, her original determination to get back into the groove was still



visible. 'Pan Jan' has been a faithful enthusiast of the Bandits always providing guidance and constructive advice to the band.

Around 2003, they made a concerted decision to form a gigging band that would perform professionally for various events such as weddings, parties, fundraisers etc. They created an identity of their own with an official name and logo expertly designed by Gerry Williams and stepped away from the generous and nurturing care that the Naparima Alumni had provided for so long. It was in that year that the name "The Steel Bandits" was established. Even though these members have been playing together since 1999, "The Steel Bandits" was established in 2003.

Unfortunately, at the end of 2003, Mikey Captain moved away to begin a new life in Florida. Mikey's enthusiasm and commitment to the band was passionate and unrelenting. He will always be regarded as one of the pioneer members of this musical family, their "bass bwoy". The Steel Bandits extends their gratitude to Mikey for his continuous love and support.

Throughout the years, the band was very fortunate to have had many prominent personalities in the Pan/Calypso community lend a helping hand in their formation and development. Some of their biggest fans include gifted pannists Chris Copeland and Pat

"Pan Man" McNeilly, pan-maker/tuner/arranger/pioneer Tommy Crichlow as well as calypso researcher George Maharaj. The band has had the privilege of receiving performance coaching from Robby Charles, the former Captain of the Pamperi Steel Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago. Eminent local pannist and arranger, Mark Mosca, specially arranged the group's theme song, a classic calypso from the eighties, "Bandit" originally performed by Organiser. This is an incredibly meaningful and treasured gift to the Bandits.

Last but certainly not least remain the two most important figures within this group, Mr. Randolph Karamath and his wife, Marion, who have managed and fostered the talents of this band from its inception. The combination of Randolph's leadership and musical arrangements and Marion's organizational and promotional skills (and cooking), are the elements that have produced such a fervent, unwavering group of promising musicians. As Michael Jagdeo said, "We have all built close relationships with each other over the past few years. These relationships make the music that much more enjoyable!" This band is a family, a family that is rare and inimitable and Randolph and Marion are their beloved musical parents.