

**WST** - Tell us about the Soweto Marimba Kidz Band.

**Kefilwe** - I started playing with Soweto Marimba Kids for 4 years and I moved to The Soweto Marimba youth League (SMYLE). The Soweto Marimba Youth League (SMYLE) project is a musical outreach programme that seeks to offer under-privileged children living in the Dobsonville area of Soweto an opportunity to overcome adversity, work towards a common goal, and to reach the pinnacle of the success they choose for themselves.

The initial intention of the project was to create a music programme in an area where schools are either ill-equipped or technically unable to provide learners with an opportunity to study music as part of their academic growth. Even today, the SMYLE project is one of very few music programmes for school learners in Dobsonville, with the SMYLE team representing 5 of the 7 area high schools, of which only P.J. Simelane has a music programme.

The hope has always been that the youth of Dobsonville to avoid the daily hazards of drugs, crime and teenage pregnancy, while acting as an assertive reminder that 'Education is the Only Solution.'

**WST** - Are there many steelbands in South Africa?

**Kefilwe** - Yes there are bands that play pans but you normally find that it's a marimba band featuring steel pans [playing] a few songs - unlike us; we are a steel pan band we feature marimbas and other instruments.

**WST** - You've made a remarkable journey from Soweto what role did the steelpan instrument play, if any, in you entering University?

**Kefilwe** - We went on a tour from Soweto to Canada in 2006 and I was in my matric year (*last year of high school*). I worked hard in school but I had no means to study further. While on our tour I had to study for my mid-term exams so every day after a performance I would study while everyone on tour had fun. A lady called Joanne Jones in Canada from Mind Recreations noticed. I went back home and after some few weeks they wrote me a letter asking if they sponsored me to study further would I like to, and I said yes "I would love to go to University." Steel pans have been my way of life, I have learned that if you work hard and most importantly doing what you love and just loving and enjoying music, you will reach your goals.

**WST** - And what University are you attending, and what is your field of study?

**Kefilwe** - University of South Africa, I am doing third year BCom Accounting with a dream of becoming a CA one day.

**WST** - Are there many female pan players in Johannesburg?

**Kefilwe** - Yes, there are, particularly in my band. We have had our numbers increase from the original four who started with me, to twelve females now playing pans.

**WST** - And what is next for Kefilwe Morutimang?

**Kefilwe** - Playing more pan and teaching as many as possible, and qualifying as a CA four years from now. We just recorded 2 CDs, and we have a tour to Canada in September this year.

## Starlift Junior Steel Orchestra

captures the hearts and minds of Montréal at the Montreal International Steelpan Festival

Montreal, Quebec, Canada - With the results of two competitions in hand, Starlift Junior Steel Orchestra closed out the 10th Annual Montreal International Steelpan Festival (F.I.S.M. - Festival International de Steelpan de Montréal) with a varied repertoire that showcased even more, their musical skill set and performance abilities.

The crowd was very pleased with their presentation which included classic hits like Thriller (Michael Jackson), La La (Lord Nelson) and Mo Wuk (Patrice Roberts), among many others. As steelpan music rang out through Place Émilie-Gamelin in downtown Montreal, Starlift Juniors were high on their accomplishments, and proud of their representation of their homeland of Trinidad and Tobago. Fresh from competing earlier in the afternoon both in the 'Adult Panorama' and placing second, while copping top honors in the 'Junior Panorama' - the results were the same in both 'tune categories.' The band played the identical songs in both groupings: for their "Tune of Choice" played in calypso tempo, Starlift Juniors chose the Beatles' classic Yesterday, while they went to "war" with Edwin Pouchet's Battle Zone for their current Calypso arranged "Panorama style." Both tunes were arranged by Barry Mannette. The Montreal crowd on hand was obviously totally enamored with the group. They were lustily cheered on because of the quality of their performance.



Beyond the music and great performances delivered by Starlift Junior steel orchestra, is the remarkable story behind the journey, including the financial challenges and hurdles overcome - to make it all the way to Montreal, Canada. Every single business organization and government official and Ministry approached in their country, Trinidad & Tobago, had turned them down in terms of assistance.



Musical Director and arranger for the orchestra **Barry Mannette** said that they essentially "received no help" from the government of Trinidad and Tobago - the home of pan and where the steelpan is the "national instrument."

This truly had been a 'solo act' for months with supporters, friends and family, and fundraising activities coming in to play, to 'drum up' the necessary funding to make the trip from Trinidad to Montreal even possible. "The whole experience was a monumental undertaking!" exclaimed Mannette to **When Steel Talks**. "But it was all worth it. Look at them," he said, pointing to the youngsters, "look how happy they are!" And he was also extremely pleased at the accomplishments of the thirty young steelpan musicians ranging in ages ten through eighteen years. Nine adults functioning in management and chaperone capacities accompanied the group from Trinidad.

Their story began almost one year ago after Mannette became aware of the Montreal International Steelpan Festival through When Steel Talks' coverage of the 2009 event on **PanOnTheNet.com**. He contacted the event organizers and expressed the band's desire to appear at the 2010 show. By September 2009 the band had in hand, their invitation letter from the organizers, upon which the reality of "how on earth were we going to pull this off" (funding for the trip) hit home!

What Starlift Juniors' management and supporters were able to achieve in the next few months could only be described as 'phenomenal.' The valuable lessons learned through this exercise allowed the music organization to call upon and develop extraordinary entrepreneurial skills, innovativeness and business savvy.



These will not soon be forgotten, if ever, and others may want to look into their model for what turned out to be a hard-won and successful venture. The management of the band not only dealt with the fundraising for travel and related appearance expenses; they also engaged and arranged their flights, lodging, and ground travel in Montreal. The young steelpan musicians moved like a small army - very efficient - and could be seen emerging from the Metro (subway) for their show. Due to the prohibitive costs of shipping steelpan basses up from Trinidad, it had turned out to be a 'godsend' that hosts Salah's Steelpan Academy utilized the same configuration of bass instruments. The young bassists happily 'jumped into the saddle' and played on.

Event organizer **Salah Wilson** was very impressed with Starlift Junior's commitment, crediting their leaders and the parents for their success. "Barry Mannette really took charge!" says Salah. Mrs. Wilson - wife of Salah - and assistant director of Salah's Steelpan Academy, was also quite taken with Barry Mannette's respect for his young charges, and his rapport with them. This is Starlift Junior Steel Orchestra's first international tour; and the experience gained and lessons learnt will have an extraordinary impact on the shaping of the lives of these young musicians for years to come.

The power of the pan was truly crystallized in this setting. It yet again showed that steel pan is far more than simply an instrument. In addition to the fertile ground to forge new friendships, the opportunities for travel to places normally unreachable for these young people, are priceless. **Trinidad and Tobago should be extremely proud of Starlift Junior Steel Orchestra, both in terms of their performance, and how they conducted themselves - they were truly skilled and gracious young ambassadors!**

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