

interview...

Debi Gardner



PP: What was your initial involvement with music? / At what age did you get involved with playing the steel pan and with whom and which steelband?

DG: I've always enjoyed music and played violin and recorder in primary school. When I went to secondary school I took up guitar and tried unsuccessfully to learn to play the piano. I was lucky in that the school I went to encouraged students to follow their interests so when I ducked out of hockey because it was raining and went to the music block it wasn't a problem - particularly as I was getting ready to take my music exam. The steel band tutor at the school was Zack Herbert. He said 'play this', I did and that was it!

PP: What and why did you pick the steel pan as chosen musical instrument?

DG: I was extremely active in school, particularly sports and music. My PE Teacher was an Olympian and encouraged us to try everything from canoeing to horse riding. I was on the school netball team and played volley ball to county level. Playing pan came easy to me so allowed me to indulge my passion for music with little effort. I also enjoyed being part of a group - to me it was like being on another team.

PP: What did your family think about you getting involved in playing the steel pan?

DG: From school, I played briefly with Paddington Youth before joining Groovers Steel Orchestra. Great times - they were sponsored by British Airways! My dad made it really difficult for me when I started playing with Groovers, always giving me a long list of things to do before I could go to practice! He's my biggest fan now though I'm not sure he quite gets it. He's heard Sharpe and Two Lef in concert and describes them as "clever fellas". After Groovers I joined Ebony and was there for about five or six years during which time I also worked for the band organising gigs and fund raising. When I left I needed a complete break so didn't play on a stage side for two years. I did, however, play for Panorama with Glissando and Mangrove. It's rare in London for a player to play with two bands so it was a bit of a novelty besides which, I really enjoyed the challenge. Eventually however, I had to make a choice. I really admired Matthew's ambition and vision for Mangrove so stayed.

PP: Can you name some of the memorable places that you have been to play the steel pan? / Most memorable experience? / Worst experience?

DG: Playing pan has provided me with an amazing opportunity to travel the world, experience different cultures and to meet people from every walk of life - royalty to beggars. I've been Australia, Malaysia, India, Kenya, Canada, the Caribbean, Singapore, Dubai, Oman,

