

interview...

Debi Gardner

Doha, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Thailand, Saudi Arabia and, of course, all over Europe. A trip to Egypt was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. To see the pyramids, sphinx, and other great wonders really puts into perspective how small my part is in this world. Conversely, my worst experience is being served sheep's eyes which, apparently, are a delicacy in some part of the world (just not on my plate!!!).

PP: What is your favourite piece of music?

DG: Oh my gosh that's a difficult question! I don't think I could pick a favourite piece of music. I've been truly blessed and played music arranged by some amazing people - Len 'Boogsie' Sharpe, Anise 'Halfers' Hadeed, Rudy 'Two Lef' Smith, Andre White, Kyron Akal, Robert Clarke, Tamla Batra, Junior Gill, Dexter Joseph - I could go on.

PP: How long have you been Secretary for BAS/ LBS? / As a BAS Director on the LNCL board, how long did you serve and in what capacity?

DG: I got involved with the wider steel band movement through my involvement with Pepe and Ebony. I used to work in the City but gave that up when Pepe offered me a job working for the National Steelband Music Company ... another decision that was not too popular with my dad. The project was funded by Arts Council England for two years and was set up to organise a steel band music festival. When the funding came to an end I started working with Ebony and

took up the administration for the London Brotherhood of Steel in a voluntary capacity. Sometime prior there had been a split in the organisation and another association, Pan Players Academy, had been set up. I worked with Pepe and the late Randolph Baptiste to bring the two organisations together under the umbrella of the British Association of Steelbands which was set up in 1995. I was elected a Trustee of the Notting Hill Carnival Trust (now London Notting Hill Carnival Ltd) in about 1998 and served until 2006 when I stood down. I wanted to concentrate my energies and efforts on what was important to me – supporting the bands.

PP: What progress has BAS made over the years? / What would you like BAS to achieve in the next ten years?

DG: I think BAS has made great progress over the years. Like many people I think much more could have been done but slow progress is better than no progress. We're hampered by the usual challenges in securing public finance or private sector sponsorship but what we have achieved is excellence in whatever we do. That said, BAS has much to be proud of. We commission new music every year written and arranged especially for pan; we've developed a succession planning programme for our future leaders; we co-produce the national panorama competition; we issue a publication that is circulated worldwide; our annual awards presentation is the blue print for similar events; and we have initiated and developed networks and partnerships throughout Europe, and indeed worldwide. BAS is built on strong foundations



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and I believe the next ten years will see the Association build on its success as the next generation move up and take over the reigns.

PP: What inspires you?

DG: I'm inspired by people. You can't help but feel inspired by the creativity and energy of pan people. I admire and respect everyone involved in carnival arts but playing pan is different. People have to come together and work together to achieve anything. They can't order the tune on line and roll up on the day. It's an all year thing. Something you have to dedicate yourself and your time to doing. As Eversley Mills once said, "pan is my religion and the pan yard my church".

PP: If you had to give advice to young pannists what would it be?

DG: My advice to pannists is simply to enjoy it - from the playing and being part of something creative through to the long hours of travelling to gigs in all sorts of random vehicles. Find the pan that 'speaks' to you, learn it, love it, respect it. It will never lie to you. It will expose you to new experiences, introduce you to new people and give you life opportunities you would not otherwise have.

PP: What is your vision for the future of steel pan?

DG: Wherever you go in the world, pan has a long way to go. We all hear about the things various administrations are

supposedly not doing but the reality is that, as a movement, **we** need to start by doing it for ourselves. The steel band community has this idea that because it's "*we ting*" then "*we*" don't have to pay but someone does and that's usually the people at the end of the line, the pan players. If we want steel pan and pan musicians to have the same level of respect as conventional instruments and musicians we need to change our mindsets. We need to be in the line to pay to watch Panorama rather than lime and catch the bands on the drag. We need to pay to go to concerts and shows rather than find a fella who can get us in for free. People running the shows need to pay bands a fair fee for their services, but equally bands need to be run as businesses. We're all caught in a vicious circle of looking for government handouts to support what we're doing but the worldwide economic downturn means that if we found it difficult before, it's going to be worse. I don't think there's a 'one size fits all' approach that can be taken but we need to take control and we need to start now.

PP: Where do you see yourself in the next ten years?

DG: Pan has been a part of my life for so long I can't imagine what I would do without it. I'd like to think that I'll still be playing although maybe not in competitions. I'd certainly like to continue to be involved in stage side performances, working with new players, helping develop their skills and knowledge.