



The Southern Marines Steel Orchestra

The Southern Marines Steel Orchestra is the oldest existing band in the greater San Fernando area of Trinidad. The band's longevity is testimony to the unbreakable bond between the band and its base – the community of Marabella.



In the early days, Southern Marines became famous for its sweet music, scintillating bass lines, its mas portrayals and its loyal and steadfast supporters. Southern Marines, under its legendary captain and tuner, Milton "Squeezer" Lyons, himself a national ping pong solo champion, won the first Panorama competition in 1963 at the Naparima Bowl.



Master tuner Bertrand Kellman was influenced (particularly in tuning bass drums) by Squeezer and is another of the distinguished Pan personalities produced by Southern Marines. Today, Marines is known as one of the best beating steelbands on the road for carnival and has revived an early steelband tradition in that its captain, Malomo Joseph, is also its music arranger and tuner.

Southern Marines has become more than a steelband. It has become an indispensable institution that makes Marabella what it is. It has become an integral element of the social glue that keeps the community stable. The band's activity is focused on youth empowerment through skills development, utilising traditional and non-traditional mechanisms and using the pan yard initially as a mustering point and ultimately as a centre of excellence.

Our band is made up largely of children, adolescents and young adults. They are exposed, according to their inclination, to a range of pan yard-centred activity. There are programmes teaching the instrument to those who have not played before. There are programmes of music literacy and programmes where members are exposed to pan tuning basics. The band engages in small scale pan manufacturing; the manufacture of pan accessories like pan cases, pan stands and pan sticks. It also imparts fabrication skills through the building of pan racks. Southern Marines owns a lorry and a music sound system.

The young band members have access to basic computer skills and can access the internet at the pan yard. Advanced musicians in the band also make use of sophisticated music software to develop their music skills and as an aide in arranging music for the steelband.

The Pan Theatre (Pan Palais), situated at Southern Main Road, Marabella, is used not only for

rehearsals and for imparting skills to the members, but is also used to host programmes for the public e.g. Southern Marines has hosted emancipation programmes, health fairs, photographic exhibitions, panel discussions, community drama, calypso shows, poetry readings, shows involving steelband and other musical forms, lectures and presentations on matters of interest to the community and the youth like, art, health, drug awareness, credit unionism, education, the impact of the 1970 revolution, Rastafarianism, women and emancipation, trade unionism, calypso and the development of the steelband movement.

The undertaking of which Southern Marines is the most proud is the staging of the Talent Expression Competition which has been on the calendar since 2001. This excellent quality show has improved markedly over the years and, today, enjoys unrivalled billing as the premier talent show in the South.

The band is a force for enhancing social integration in the community. It sees its role as providing a safe haven for social intercourse among the youth as well as the transmission of life skills, both musical and non-musical. It is an indispensable mechanism for the socialisation of our young people in a civilised, productive, constructive and expressive manner as we, in T&T, go through a phase of social break down which may very well signal the darkness before the dawn.

Southern Marines was among four steelbands receiving Pan Trinbago's first Anthony Williams awards on November 28th 2008 at the Centre of Excellence in Macoya, Tunapuna, Trinidad.

By Gerry Kangalee

