

contrast

35 years on... 1974-2009

ABOUT CONTRAST

Contrast Steelband performed their first gig in Leicester Haymarket Shopping Centre for Christmas 1973 but the Band had their actual launch in 1974.

Their first set of pans purchased from Tony Charles, cost £265 and was housed in the Highfields Youth and Community Centre for children in the local area to use. George Fisher, the founder of the Band, named the Band "Contrast" because of the disparity of the children involved from around the surrounding area, boys, girls, ethnic origin and ages, the oldest member at that time being 13.

When George first approached the Educational Authority of Leicester he was initially faced with some opposition and had a difficult time explaining the benefits of spending £2000 on a piano that would only allow one child to be taught at a time whilst spending £265 on a set of Pans that facilitated instrumental lessons for 10 children at the same time. He then approached Clifton Robinson, head teacher of the Uplands Junior School, a man from a West Indian background, whom he thought would back him. George asked him to provide students for lessons with his newly appointed steel pan tutor, Cy Jean-Jacques, whom he had to employ, as the Educational authority were still opposing the Pan idea and now even more so as Cy was not a teacher. Clifton turned him down.

George and Cy continued their quest in finding local children themselves and finally encouraged the head teacher, now Sir Jim Rose, of Shenton Primary School, to send children to the Centre for Cy to teach, making them the first School in Leicester to have Steelpan lessons. Children were invited to attend other extra curricular practices along with students from the Charnwood Primary School. This action led to the birth of the Contrast steelband, interest grew after their first performance



and Clifton decided to promote the steelband culture in Leicestershire. As more and more schools signed up, Leicester School of Music, now known as Leicestershire Arts in Education, employed Cy as a steelpan tutor. Cy ensured that the art form progressed and expanded to most of the schools in Leicestershire. For many years Tony Charles, Gerald Forsyth and the late and Michael 'Natsy' Contant supplied and maintained the pans for Leicestershire. These are now supplied and maintained by Toussaint Clarke.

Cy Jean Jacques and Contrast Steelband got their debut exposure at the Commonwealth Institute annual steelband competition hosted by a group of people led by Terry Noel who set up a national steelband competition in 1973 which was held every December. George continued his mission of spreading the pan gospel by moving to Coventry where he started the whole process again appointing Victor Phillips and creating Phase 1 steelband.

PROGRESSION THROUGH THE YEARS

Some 500 children from varied backgrounds and racial groupings were instructed and guided under the ever watchful and innovative, Cy Jacques, the tutor of the band fondly referred to as 'Mr Contrast'. The band grew from strength to strength, toured Europe and represented the Leicester Caribbean Carnival on two occasions in the Netherlands at the Rotterdam Carnival with their wide repertoire. They even performed for the HRH Queen Elizabeth on her visit to Leicester.

Contrast is still very active; they are the only full professional steelband in Leicestershire and have progressed to the stage where its members are now steelpan tutors in schools throughout Leicestershire. They visit most of the Primary, Junior, Secondary/High Schools and Colleges throughout Leicestershire and further afield. They remain a voluntary community band, still touring, participating in exchange programmes, delivering workshops and performing at various venues including festivals, carnivals, fetes, weddings and parties.

The band currently consists of fifteen to twenty five players whose ages range between eleven and forty plus. Cy retired and immigrated to St Kitts and Nevis in July 2002, where he continues to teach the art form in