



EZIEKEL "BIGGS" YEARWOOD

"BIGGS"



You have heard the saying "Pan Tuners are born, not made". Heard it a thousand times. I was one of those pan men who never believed that this was an in-grained skill. So I bought a Strobe Peterson tuner and went about trying to blend my own pans. Then I would take the the un-tuned pans to ""Biggs"" to correct the damaged pans. I am not the only one; John "Scruff" Thomas could tell the same story stated Grafton Yearwood.

Mr Ezekiel Yearwood, known as "Biggs" to everyone, was born in St Vincent on 12th February 1935. He arrived in Britain in 1965, and soon after he decided on a pan tuning career after striking up a friendship with Gerald Forsyth. The Yearwood family were well known for their musical skills. Indeed, "Biggs's cousin was a top guitarist in St Vincent, and "Biggs" himself was a mean banjo and guitar player before immigrating to England. His brother, Claudius was a well known pan tuner in St Vincent, and was an inspiration to the young "Biggs" who learnt to play the steel pan.

When in England, and at that time employed by Fords in Dagenham, "Biggs" linked up with two Trinidadians, Speedy and Brown to form a steel band. They bought a set of pans from a well known pan tuner, Michael 'Natsy' Contant. Soon afterwards, the innovative 'Biggs', felt he needed to experiment. He bought some oil drums and decided to

copy the patterns of the pans he had. He was very passionate about pans and the self-taught skills he developed enabled him to grasp the finer points about sound and tuning. Very soon the news of the new pan tuner was spreading and – as people grew to like the sound of his pans, the request for new pans started flooding in. 'Biggs' became a full time pan tuner.

Raymond Joseph, a pan teacher from Leeds heard about 'Biggs' and visited him in London. He wanted to start a steel band in Leeds and decided to buy all the pans he needed from 'Biggs'. Later, Raymond Joseph decided to move to London to work there. 'Biggs' suggested that he contact Gerald Forsyth to obtain employment in schools as a pan teacher. 'Biggs' himself was a pan teacher at Nortwold Primary school, where his children and many of his grand children later attended.

Raymond stayed with 'Biggs' and his family for two years and worked as a

steel pan tutor in London schools. Soon afterwards 'Biggs' made a decision to form a steel band and with Raymond's help, Pantonic Steel Band was born. Pantonic is now one of Britain's oldest steel bands. They achieved second place, twice at the UK National Panorama, Champions of Steel competition and travelled to Switzerland, Malaysia, India, Ireland and many other places around Europe. Biggs's unselfish nature has seen him share his pan tuning skills with many others including Grafton, Kerry, Terrance, Roger and John Scruff (not always a raving success). Biggs is reputed for the quality of the steel pans he has produced coupled with his unique sound. Many have grown to love 'Biggs' the man and admire 'Biggs' the pan tuner.

By Donna and Lynette Yearwood