This PIE is not in the Sky:
Review of Pan in Education (PIE) Business Model --
Developed by Simeon L. Sandiford and Mark Loquan

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In the twenty years that I have worked and occasionally lived in Trinidad and Tobago, I have developed a category I call “Is it worth crossing the ocean for”. In a society rich with unique cultural traditions, the answer is often a resounding yes -- and never more so than in matters concerning Pan. To have given the world the only family of definite-pitch acoustic instruments invented in the twentieth century, and to build them out of discarded industrial debris, is in itself a testimonial to the resistant creativity of the citizens of this twin-island Republic (Trinis.) However, despite Trinidad's undeniable Pan legacy to the world, a burning question has remained since the mid to late 1980s about who would ultimately reap the benefits for the continued development of Pan. Most of the actual degrees in Pan Studies are abroad (at places like Northern Illinois University, USA, where Liam Teague is on the faculty). And despite the continued role of Panland Trinidad and Tobago LTD (formerly Trinidad and Tobago Instruments LTD) and other more individual entrepreneurs, even Pan production is often located abroad. Nevertheless, Trinidad sustains its impregnable position both as the inventor of Pan and as the unique culture that best showcases the instrument. There is nothing anywhere in the world like Trinidad Panorama. Moreover, Sanch Electronix, under the direction of Simeon L. Sandiford, has established the world standard for recording Pan, an instrument that because of its acoustic nature has presented huge challenges for those who wish to record, as well as amplify, it. Even with these achievements and advantages, it remains to be asked how Trinidad can establish its leadership in the multiple areas of Pan development, education, and distribution.

It is in this context that we must welcome -- after eight years of development -- the finally unveiled project known as PIE, or Pan in Education. Produced by Simeon L. Sandiford and engineer, composer and arranger Mark Loquan, PIE is a hybrid educational and marketing programme.

While its components -- to which I shall return -- largely speak for themselves, marketing requires a word of explanation. As an Emancipation festival, Trinidad Carnival originally sprang not only from the “people,” but directly from the belly of those whose enslavement led them to mask, to carry their flambeaux, to create their own instruments largely as an expression of resistance to oppression. The
quintessential enemy of indigenous, bottom-up celebrations that express both folk solidarity and subversion is often marketing.

Once you begin to market a festival, you threaten its lifeblood, which is drawn from the heart of the people. How, then, can I as a passionate devotee of cultural expressions, be praising and urging the adoption of a marketing programme?

The answer lies both in the nature of marketing and of the programme itself. When one attempts to market a culture for foreign consumption, the effort leads often to the emasculation of the cultural product. Clean it up; sanitize it; make it safe. These impulses create an almost unbridgeable tension between the basic cultural expression and creativity of the event and the desire to make it attractive to outsiders. However, there is another form of marketing: one that empowers the culture producers. It is a little like the old parable about whether you give a man a fish and so feed him for a day, or teach him to fish and so prepare him to feed himself for life. PIE teaches him to fish. Quite simply, this programme is designed not only to educate youths musically, but to empower musical education by linking it to a set of marketing strategies that enhance, rather than destroy, the underlying cultural product.

But, first, what exactly is PIE? It is an indigenous ICT-derived innovative product, soon to be available on interactive CDs fully compatible with both PC and Mac operating systems. The double CD set contains thirteen music arrangements (disc1) with scores, curriculum, a National Occupational Standard (NOS) for creating Music Producers, tasks, assignments, and associated materials (disc2) that work to educate students, not only in music literacy, but also in much broader areas of literacy and skill. The overall programme covers the areas of music, business, technical English, ICT, audio engineering and social studies. Each area provides a curriculum in itself. There are, for example, forty curriculum modules presented in PowerPoint format to support the forty-four unit NOS. The newly upgraded second CD provides backward linkages to an already existing, self-instructional interactive software developed by Sandiford and produced by Sanch Electronix, in which an animated instructor called Pete the Panstick (“PETE”) walks students through introductions to the Steelpan-- replete with musical examples, scores, definitions and other aids -- to a large number of musical genres, including of course Calypso and Soca. Much credit is due to Trinidadians Martin Haynes, who created the dual Mac/PC compatibility as well as the PIE interface and to animator Camille Selvon Abrahams who created PETE.

In addition to basic music instruction, one of the key features of PIE is the way it links music and business, an important bridge in a nation that sometimes does better at inventing than at developing and protecting its own interests. The Business of Music curriculum is divided into Music Literacy and Entrepreneurial Development. In keeping with the Trinidad base and electronic sophistication of PIE, the acoustic Steelpan and the Percussive Harmonic Instrument (P.H.I.) are the preferred instruments for use in the Music Literacy component of the curriculum.
While students are learning music, they are also honing the skills that enable them to sustain ownership of and develop the national musical instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. Following the Business of Music curriculum, they will learn and nurture the entrepreneurial skills that will enable them to play the Global Music Industry with a wide range of Caribbean rhythms. But the aim of this educational venture is broader than simply learning to understand and create music. The Technical English component of the curriculum has been developed specifically to improve English literacy across the board in all other curricular areas. And the business skills emphasized are also those that can be used in many different contexts and situations, not just the development of Pan. In this sense, while PIE is training students particularly in music education and marketing, it is also offering them skills that are transferable to other areas of interest, creating the next generation of entrepreneurs from the classroom while simultaneously developing a knowledge-based society.

At a time when global economic cutbacks have been systematically removing studies of music and other art forms from international curricula, this Trinidad option to imbed Pan more deeply in the schools boldly seizes an initiative badly needed throughout the world. In doing so, it echoes the dream of late cultural visionary Lloyd Best literally not only to put Pan in the schools but to put school in Pan. It provides the twin island Republic with a chance to assume international leadership in a vital area. The Mission of PIE and PETE is to create a brand called One Caribbean Voice (OCV) “that unifies the region by transcending cultural, economic, ethnic, political, religious and social barriers.” Its objectives are to empower the people of the region by creating new sustainable avenues of self-employment that allow Caribbean people to earn foreign exchange through cultural innovation. By building on those aspects of local culture that define and distinguish it, One Caribbean Voice -- of which both PIE and PETE are subsets -- offers musical literacy and entrepreneurship as a way to develop a sustainable catalogue of indigenous cultural products and services for promoting and marketing the Caribbean in the global arena.

In addition to subsuming the two CD PIE programme, One Caribbean Voice has an additional set of strategies to reinforce its aims and goals. One strategy is to bring final music products up to minimal international standards by developing high-end music studios, the cost of which may be amortized over five years. Such studios (and one prototype has already been commissioned at Sanch) can be used to facilitate the programme during the day for music students and then rented out after hours to industry. The main objective here is to raise the bar of final music offerings going onto the international market. A second strategy is to gain recognition by getting one category of Trinidad music into the GRAMMYS. As a voting member of the National Academy for the Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), Sandiford has already submitted a proposal to get Calypso accepted into this prestigious competition. Since too much of the world still associates Calypso with American crooner Harry Belafonte, actually putting contemporary artists into the GRAMMYS is an instant key to recognition.
Strategy three takes us more directly into finance, piggybacking on global entities that are literally in the business of innovation. Celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, IBM is looking to highlight innovations. An approach to IBM through a subsidiary SANCH UK company has already initiated very promising conversations. In addition to possible underwriting by such foreign companies, OCV looks to establish partnerships with local banks, businesses and industries that already work in the global market.

A final set of strategies will highlight technology: first, to amplify Pan in order to bring the instrument back on the road for Carnival, in fetes and other places, along with P.H.I.; then, taking advantage of the advent of 'laptops for all' to offer PIE as a programme that utilises those laptops not only to teach music and marketing, but also for the fully expanded literacy and social education aspects of this complex programme; and, finally, to explore how technology (for example the Internet) can assist PIE in developing niche marketing strategies such as distance-education, webinars, and other related initiatives.

PIE is not an overnight burning wonder. It has taken eight years of painstaking labours of love for Sandiford and Loquan to ready this product for release and distribution. The final hurdle -- at last almost cleared -- has been to create a secure Digital Rights Management System to reduce the risk of pirating the Intellectual Property content of the curriculum teaching modules and the music scores on the PIE Interface contained on disc 2 of the dual CD.

Even in their anticipatory stage, PETE and PIE have received not only recognition but some initial funding support by grants from the Centre for Development of Enterprise (CDE), the Caribbean Export Development Agency (CEDA), Trinidad and Tobago Film Company, and the Ministry of Trade. Endorsements have come from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Union (EU), The University of the West Indies (UWI), The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), Inter American Development Bank (IADB), the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

Poised for flight, PIE not only offers the obvious advantages of developing sustainable foreign exchange in the Caribbean through education and the culturally sensitive and significant marketing of Pan, there are other more immediately tangible benefits. For instance, by putting the music scores of Mark Loquan's compositions in digital format, it has become possible to reduce their cost, making the material more universally available and easier to archive.
The originators of PIE are aiming high. In sequential order, they are targeting T&T, CARICOM (Caribbean Community), the Diaspora, and the rest of the world. In this goal, the Caribbean Diaspora is not to be under-valued. It is often through the Diaspora that the larger international public can be reached. And, luckily, Caribbean peoples have moved to and settled across the globe. Reaching through them to their new neighbours, Trinidad and Tobago can influence that world. T&T and the larger Caribbean region have a distributed world-wide people power that is as yet largely untapped. PIE provides an opportunity to do so, while simultaneously diversifying the local economy. Win. Win. Win.

Thinking a bit nostalgically, one harks back to the early days of Pan when one of the functions of the panyards was to take youths off the street, to take the cutlasses out of their hands, and empower them through this magical new instrument. Now in a completely new century, there is an opportunity once more to repeat history-- to rid them now not so much of their cutlasses as their more dangerous guns. Unempowered, disenfranchised youth is a danger to its own culture. To give youth a mission -- whether to play Pan in the panyards of the 1940s or 50s or to reinvent it through education and technology in the 2010s -- is to empower them. PIE will, no doubt, not reach all its aims. It is aiming high. But if it reaches fifty percent of them, if it takes 1,000 youths off the street, returning to Trinidad and Tobago the power of sustained local development that reaches the world, it will have accomplished an unimaginable goal. The aim is high -- it reaches for the sky. But, luckily, the planning, development, and implementation of this programme are in the hands of developers with their feet on the ground. This PIE is not in the sky. It is yours for the taking, and I urge you to take it to your heart.

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