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MEDIA RELEASE

THE NATIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT BILL, 2024 PASSED IN PARLIAMENT WITH UNANIMOUS SUPPORT.

The Steelpan has long been considered as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago but, the passage of law to officially award this title only took place between July 3rd and July 4th, 2024 in the House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively. Senator the Honourable Randall Mitchell, Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, piloted the debate on The National Musical Instrument Bill, 2024 in both Houses, gaining unanimous support from all members of Parliament present.

The Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the designation of the Steelpan as the National Musical Instrument of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and for related matters” was first introduced in Parliament on June 7th, 2024. In his Lower House contribution Minister Mitchell stated, “We have listened and responded to the repeated entreaties of our Steelpan producers and tuners, our jurists and legal luminaries, our historians, other stakeholders and most importantly, our citizens, in heeding the call toward the legislative declaration of the Steelpan as the National Musical Instrument of our twin-island Republic.”

Additionally, he passionately affirmed that this legislation would protect against international infringement of our Steelpan rights and proprietorship, as it will “statutorily codify the universally accepted fact that the Steelpan is a product of our own people's innovation and a significant element of our cultural heritage.” He also emphasized the significant role that this legislation will play in enhancing international marketing strategies for the Steelpan, the Steelpan Fraternity, and other related cultural assets like Carnival.

Following the parliamentary debate and passage in the Upper House on July 4, 2024, The National Musical Instrument Bill, 2024 will now be submitted for Presidential Assent. Hereafter, it will become an Act, thus giving the legislation the status of Law.

History of the Steelpan

The Steelpan proudly traces its roots back to Trinidad and Tobago, having been invented in the 1930s and 1940s in the Hills of Laventille. Its origins are closely linked to Carnival festivities, having been birthed out of the energy, innovation and cultural expression of the Trinbagonian people.

What has often been heralded as the only musical instrument to be invented in the 20th Century has seen many innovations including the most recent introduction of the Genesis Pan.

The Steelpan's Journey to National Recognition and International Acclaim

It has long been the policy of Governments past and present, to designate the Steelpan as the National Musical Instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1992, the then Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs recommended to Cabinet that the Steelpan be declared the National Instrument of our nation. Later, in 1999, the then Government enacted the Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Orchestra Act, Chap. 40:55, making further provisions for the development and promotion of culture; calling for additional efforts to be made towards declaring the Steelpan as the National Musical Instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. However, the formal declaration of the Steelpan as our National Musical Instrument has remained unrealized until now.

This therefore marks a significant milestone for the Steelpan movement, cementing the Steelpan's central place in our nation's history, culture and future. It honours the indigenous roots of the Steelpan and pays homage to pan pioneers.

Senator the Honourable Randall Mitchell has prioritized the promotion and preservation of Steelpan as Minister with remit for culture and arts. As such, in 2023 Minister Mitchell successfully made a petition at the 77th United Nations General Assembly for the adoption of the resolution to declare August 11th World Steelpan Day. This declaration was a significant step in securing international recognition for our indigenous instrument.

Looking Ahead

The passage of The National Musical Instrument Bill, 2024 solidifies Minister Mitchell's vision for us, Trinidad and Tobago, to embrace and propel Steelpan as our own. And so, the movement continues with tangible efforts toward diversifying and expanding the Steelpan as well as protecting its Intellectual Property.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts assumes the responsibility as the guardian of Trinidad and Tobago's cultural assets. As such, the Ministry takes pride in the passage of The National Musical Instrument Bill, 2024 and reaffirms its unwavering dedication toward the fulfillment of its mandate to promote cultural confidence.

Congratulations Trinidad and Tobago.

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