

THE HAMMER THAT MADE MUSIC

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Malik came from a family of pan tuners and players. When he was a young boy the grown-ups told him the history of the musical steel pan, which had evolved from a drum.



“Long, long ago, playing the African drum was banned,” they said, so his people worked to create a new kind of drum. They used what they could find and the oil drum became the beautiful steel pan.

His ancestors had taken the big, empty, oil drums, cut off one end and shaped the other end of the drum until it could produce many different sounds. They used hammers and heat to get the notes and the tones they wanted. To play the pan, they used two sticks, each wrapped with bicycle rubber tubing around the end.

Malik’s father had taught him how to play the pan, and now at twelve years old Malik loved nothing better. He became a skilled pan player. He liked the pans that were tuned to sound like all the instruments of an old-fashioned orchestra.

One day while exploring the area where his family lived, he came upon an old tenor pan in an abandoned garage. Malik excitedly took it home and cleaned it. He polished it until it was shiny. Then he took it to the elders of his community to show them his discovery.

He knew the legend of a lost pan called “Hummingbird” that had beautiful tones. For years villagers had searched for it. They were not sure that the pan Malik found was the Hummingbird because after many years it would need re-tuning.

Unfortunately, the man who made it sound so good was no longer around, but one of the older men said that they still had the hammer the ace pan tuner had used. The man gave the hammer to Malik. In honour of his elders and his history, Malik told himself, “I’m, going to be the best pan tuner I can be.”

Although he was only twelve he was tall and strong, with muscular arms. He began pounding out the notes like he had been told the great pan tuner had done.

He also got more pans and tuned them. With practice and dedication he became very good at getting perfect sounds. People near and far wanted to know just how he could make the pan sound so sweet, and Malik became known as the best pan tuner of all time.

His secret was in the hammer that made the notes on the pan.

As time went on, other pan-lovers from the village came to learn, and together with Malik they formed a band.

With Malik’s gift of using the hammer to tune the pans, the band soon became the best steel pan band in Trinidad and Tobago. They made sweet pan music for all to hear and everybody loved to hear them play.

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