

EFT: A steel trio entertain at a Mayfair night-club

Attila the Hun or Lord Kitchener. Usually he is a primitive who knows little about music, but to qualify as a Calypsonian, he must be able to compose a story on any subject, whether it be commonplace or fantasy.

The commercial Calypso singer, on the other hand, is regarded merely as a parasite, for he is singing only what he has memorised. Some of the calypso "standards" began as impromptu songs by certain ranking Calypsonians, and were so well liked that they were picked up by other singers. "Hold 'em, Joe" and "Brown Skin Girl," both of which are sung by Harry Belafonte, who is no Calypsonian, are examples of such calypso "standards."

There are two forms to the Calypso song—the "bracket" form for bouncy ditties that are mostly nonsense, and the "ballade," which is the most common form for serious topics. No matter which form the calypso takes, however, the lyrics must have a humorous twist to them to qualify the song as a calypso.

Even more interesting than the music, however, are the instruments with which it is played. The "musicians" form themselves into what is known as a steel band consisting of 20 to 30 "players." Each man carries, by a strap round the back of the neck, the brightly-painted top of an oil drum or a dust-bin lid. One way of making these "instruments"—by beating out sections of the metal top—is shown in the

## THEY CALL IT CALYPSO



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The true calypso dates back to 18th century Trinidad. Slaves transported from Africa were not permitted to talk as they worked, but they were allowed to sing, and the calypso, sung in an almost incomprehensible dialect, was their way of complaining, conveying the local news or indulging in neighbourhood gossip.

It was natural in a race so primitively musical as the African, for the storyteller to put his words to music; and derived from slave-gatherings on the plantations, the cosmopolitan rhythm of Trinidad gave birth to its unique calypso.

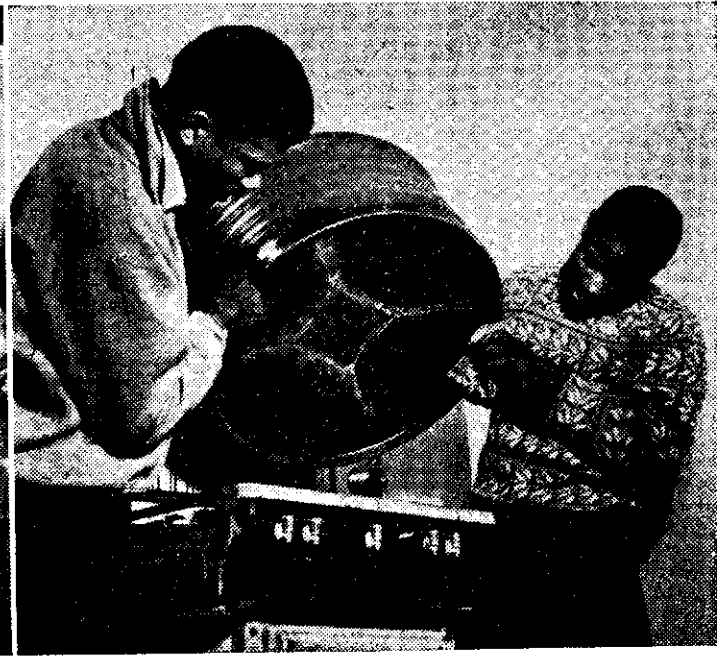
Like the flamenco songs of Andalusia, the calypso is a racy and delightful account of topics of current interest. It should be extempore, suddenly improvised to commemorate some occasion, as "We Want Ramadin on the Ball" celebrated the victory of the West Indies in the second test at Lord's in 1950.

The origin of the name "Calypso" is obscure. One school of thought believes it to be derived from a Greek myth about the goddess, Chariso, who was released from imprisonment because of her ability to sing extemporaneously. Usage changed the word from "Chariso"

into "Calypso." Another school believes it to have come from the African word "Kai-so," which means "Bravo," and which gradually became anglicised to "Calypso." Performers of the songs were encouraged by their audiences who expressed approval to particular versions by shouting "Kai-so."

Whatever the origin, calypso is the voice of the people of Trinidad, and in Trinidad the highest ranking per-

former is the Calypsonian, a singer who composes his lyrics and melodies extemporaneously. He has little respect for rank or station; he'll sing against the governor or anybody at all if he has something to say. An element of humour holds the listener while the Calypsonian drives across his deeper purpose. He is noted for the strange name he adopts, tending strongly to that of a historical character such as



RIGHT: First the drum is cut to the size required—the high-toned "Ping Pong" for melody, the "Strum Pan" for chords, or the "Tune Boom," steel band equivalent of the double bass. To make tuning easier, and give the notes more "ring," the surface is then stretched by pounding, and after that is heated to temper the steel to the right pitch

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