

Oil drums to make music

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

The publicity material sent before it heralds the group as being "World Famous."

I cannot speak to that, but judging from the size of the crowd over the past couple of years, there can be no doubt that the Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band is certainly famous in Manhattan, Kansas, and returns again to Arts in the Park on Saturday evening at 8.

The group started in Part-of-Spain, Trinidad, and though the music it performs is taken from a wide range of sources — classical, calypso and contemporary reggae — it is all performed by an instrumentation that centers around tuned oil drums.

The use of the oil drums is of comparatively recent origin and arose from the time following World War II when it was not easy for the inhabitants of Trinidad to obtain the

more usual musical instruments. So, abandoned oil drums were pressed into a service which had a more peaceful end-product than the fueling of warships and aircraft.

From these beginnings there arose a large number of individuals and groups which performed on prepared oil drums that were tuned in sections.

The most recent performer that I heard playing an oil drum was a busker on the New York subway, three weeks ago.

The Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band has a little more class. Or, at least, an impressive pedigree.

The band was heard in its native country by Liberace who invited it to tour with him for two years...and the rest is, as they say, history.

The band now tours nine months of the year and has won a Grammy Award (for their gold album, *Liberace Presents*, and has appeared

on TV shows, in state fairs (40 of them), in colleges and universities throughout the country (325 of those) as well as having completed a six-month tour of Europe.

This is a loud, fast-paced, boisterous and fun-loving group that has entranced and entertained audiences here for several years, during which time the style of the band has undergone a change.

The traditional Caribbean sound has given way to a more reggae-based music. But what has not changed is the zest and high spirits of the performers, nor their skills and abilities as crowd pleasers.

The Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band has played in a number of well known arenas and auditoriums, including Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, The Royal Albert Hall (London), Rockefeller Plaza, Lincoln Center Mall in New York City and Manhattan City Park.